

Vignettes



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St. Mary's School OGA Newsletter - March 2010

A Year of Reunions

The year has flown by and we are already into a new decade in the third millennium.

Needless to say we will miss Mrs. Matthew, and her help and direction in planning our alumni meets.

In 2009 there were many informal reunions of various batches; in the following pages we provide you with some photographs and reminiscences from those who met.

For my class of 1959 it was a milestone year - fifty years since we left school! A few of us spent a couple of days together and had a great time sharing memories.

In 2010 we are planning an alumni meet in December. We will keep you posted on the date. Please do attend in large numbers. These meets allow us to interact with each other, and not just our own batch mates.

Veena Vora
President - OGA

Fifty Years Later!

Golden Jubilee Celebration of the 1959 Batch

It was 50 years ago that our batch of 13 girls bade farewell to St. Mary's School where we had spent memorable years imbibing useful knowledge and the right values of life from the devoted nuns and from the innumerable teachers who gave of their best.

To celebrate this Golden Jubilee, Veena (Motee) Vora, our batch mate and the present President of the OGA, very kindly organised a weekend get together (November 21-22, 2009) at Malavli, near Lonavala, at the Guest House of another batch mate, Dilnavaz (Sidhwa) Variava of Mumbai. Our sincere thanks to Dilnavaz for making us so comfortable.

Laxmi (Bendre) Bhagwat came from Mumbai; Nin (Benegal) Rao all the way from Bengaluru; and I, Roshan (Jagos) Ginwalla from Pune. Unfortunately Usha (Patwardhan) Dravid of Pune could not make it at the last minute as her mother had to

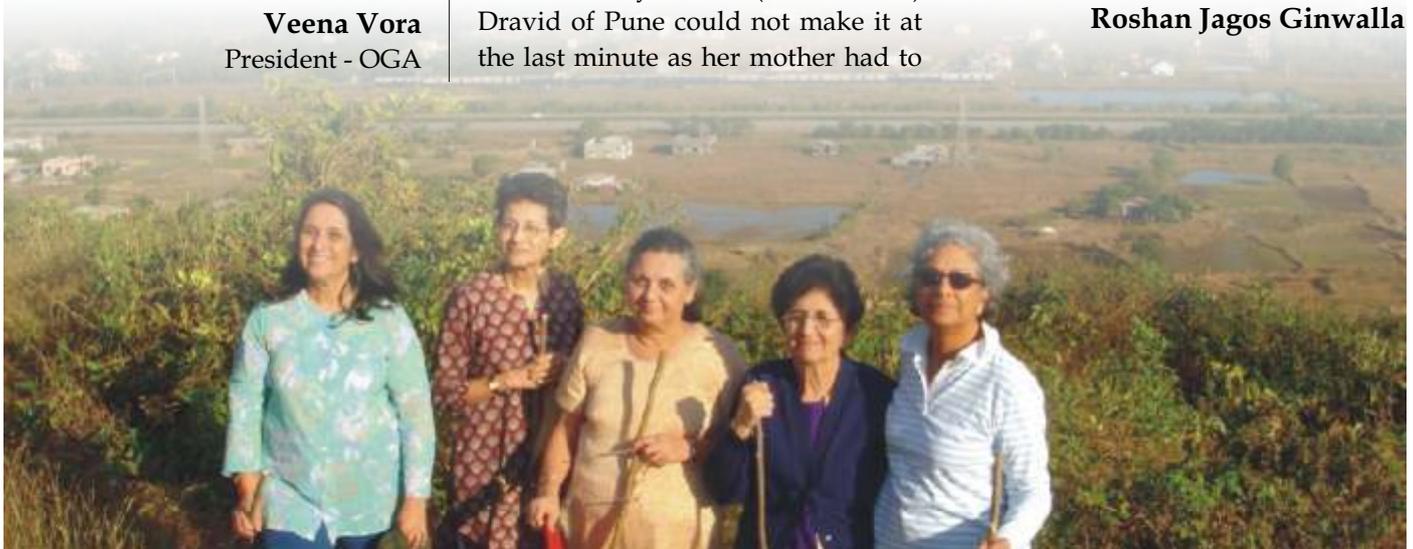
undergo surgery that day.

The hours flew as we sat around together and recounted incidents of our student life in St. Mary's and thought fondly of all the nuns and teachers who had so generously shared their knowledge with us, facts that we can recollect even today. We updated each other about our children and grandchildren and showed photographs. And of course, we gorged on all the goodies that each one of us had brought along.

Believe it or not, at our ripe age of 66 years we even did a little hill climbing and admired the view from the top.

What was gratifying to see was that even though we were 50 years older and a little greyed, our spirits were still the same. Our sincere thanks to Veena and Dilnavaz for making this reunion possible. Long live St Mary's, the teachers and the students!

Roshan Jagos Ginwalla



Catching Up in Pune

It was a year when SMSites from all over the world met and reconnected. Thanks to the World Wide Web finding old friends has become so much easier. And SMSites all over showed that no matter what age, they are making the best of the latest technology.

Facebook was the main source for all to reconnect but meeting in cyberspace was never going to be enough. Sure enough 'girls' began readjusting travel plans, making new ones in an effort to meet long lost friends. Pune saw several such meets. Some batch wise, some with boarders, and some just girls of the same era.

In September 2009 Smite Bhide (batch of 1977) came to Pune from UK. She was visiting the city after 22 years! Batchmates from Pune, former boarders and even out of town classmates Patricia Newnes from Bangalore and Yasmin from Mumbai got together at the Poona Club for an afternoon of fun.

The fun of course began with Meher Patel requesting two gentlemen to vacate a large table for us. With six women glaring at them from behind they didn't stand a chance and beat a hasty retreat!

Smita had brought along her old school tie, her hymn book and pictures from her autograph book when she left school. Quite naturally there was much excitement and the afternoon flew by with all of us reminiscing about old times.

In December 2009 Louella Mathias (Fernandes) was visiting Pune from Canada. Frantic mails and phone calls

flew back and forth and a lunch meeting was organised at a local restaurant. Unsure of how many would finally turn up the reservations were kept open to 8 to 10 people. Of course, more turned up! Kavita Singh (Edwards) and Cheryl Hendricks (Newnes) had specially flown down from Bangalore and Monaz Deo (Nariman) who was visiting from the UK also joined.

Louella was from the batch of 1975, a boarder and a prefect. While in school even a girl two to three years senior felt so much older than us but things have changed! Now she was no longer a 'senior' - just one of us! It's amazing how the years melted away and everyone was baring their hearts to like minded souls.

Tentative 'hellos' and some excited squeals gave way to "Oh you haven't changed at all!" and "Gosh, you look lovely!" to a surprised "What you're a grandmother?!" The decibel level slowly went up. Everyone decided they didn't want to be seated at a long table where interaction was difficult and the manager of the hotel just gave in gracefully after being told that the tables had to be rearranged to suit our needs! The poor waiters in the restaurant didn't know what had hit them!

The food was good but who really noticed it! Everyone was busy catching up on 30+ years, not easy to do in one afternoon. Finally the working women among the group made an exit and the rest moved on to the Residency Club for a continued tea session!

Shubha Gadkari

Class of 1976

I landed in Lohegaon airport after thirty years - oddly in all my years in Pune, I had never used the airport before. I was excited at the thought of returning to Pune but a little uncertain what the mini reunion of the 1976 ICSE batch would hold for me.

I had been in touch with only one of the eight girls that were to meet at Pune Club that sunny winter's afternoon in December. There was such a wave of emotion when I saw Radhika Vakil, Usha Kamble, Phiroza Vachcha, Vinita Gehani, Sadhana Joshi, Charmaine Lobo, Uma Nerurkar (I have deliberately refrained from using their married names) - lots of hugs and 'my gosh you haven't changed.'

We talked about classmates still in contact with each other and others who were sadly no more - of successes and of children and husbands (in that order).

We reminisced about Ratty and the Art Block, Mrs Edwards, Sr Mary Fried rice, Chuppa Rustum, Mademoiselle Irani, Miss Coshan, and Mrs John in the Chemistry Labs; of ringing school bells, of Cama's green buses, of Bishops boys, NDA cadets and cringey song requests at summer fetes.

We were far away in the past - our grey hair, double chins, pot bellies all invisible and our world was for the space of an afternoon those happy days together in

SMS.

Thanks to mobile phones we even managed to connect with two friends, Urvilla and Rukshaan Faramarzi while we were together.

I was overcome with emotion as I said good bye but happy in knowing that nothing had changed - the bond that held us girls together will hold us together for the next 30 years and more.

Sarah (Mathen) Dey



Straight Out of a Story Book!

I joined SMS during the time of the Koyna Earthquake in 1967 - a turbulent time. Even though I joined midterm in standard 4 of the primary school I was 'embedded' in the class as though I had always been there by a teacher so unparalleled in her vocation that I have found none to match her - Ms. Carol Castellino (her mother was our never-say-die gym teacher for years till she got an assistant in the shape of Ms. Patankar).

I remember a school so unlike any other, sprawling over acres...rambling Mangalore-tiled green-sided buildings or basalt-rock buildings dotted our school grounds. Everything looked makeshift but had the patina of age, well-worn thanks to the hundreds of girls who had studied there and I know most of them must have loved it.

Primary school included the level from Mrs Newnes' tots to standard 6, and then one crossed the road towards the boarding and donned ties representing four houses and became a senior. We left some teachers behind like our headmistress Ms. Hyams who taught us handwriting and all sentences had a favourite heroine Selena! Ms. Lawrence our art teacher remained common and she taught us writing patterns! And ART as it has never been taught again and I know it as.

Mrs. Edwards, who rode to school on a Lambretta scooter with one of her daughters riding pillion, taught us many subjects and even told us of how she had used powdered eggs to make omelettes during World War II. She was my all time favourite and once she had taught a chapter it needed no further elucidation.

Mrs. Ninan taught us maths in the primary section and since I hated the subject so much I have forgotten who taught us later! But Mrs. Ninan, who lived behind the church used the idiom of a cake and its slices to make solving fractions easier. She was in her own league because I managed to pass in maths! We began needlework in the primary classes by making gym shoe-kits with blue-and-white matty cloth with a bit of cross-stitch - these bags holding gym shoes used to lie all over the school reminding us of what was almost a SMS tradition!

There were fetes and fairs and socials and the Eisteddfod. There was the turnstile creaking gate connecting SMS to Bishops and often Sr. Mary Anselm used to be seen charging at top speed to shepherd back some errant girls who had wandered there giggling during the lunch-

break! I remember the science blocks near the art-room (in solitary splendour with its grand piano for the Royal School practical exams and its treasure-trove storeroom guarded zealously by Ms. Lawrence) and the Geography Room (Ms. Coshan's domain); in the Bio lab were these jars of preserved human organs, most of which had a single label that read Christine Mendonca.

I also remember my piano teacher Ms. Perin Mistry whose floral swirling dresses and colourful parasols come rain or sunshine made a familiar figure. She wore bright make-up to complete the picture, and was the kindest, most understanding piano teacher to have tolerated and actually taught a klutz like me. There were a series of music rooms from where emanated sounds of scales, musical pieces played with aplomb and with jarring inaccuracy even as exams and classes continued alongside.

The primary section had the vast sports field, also the venue of all the fairs and fetes, and the huge wooden-floored assembly hall with Mrs. Castellino's gym apparatus towards the end; and swings, jungle-gym, an arcade of connecting banyan trees and a field from the gate to the nursery section which can best be described as solidified lava flow - rocks after rocks on which we fell and scraped our knees but ran on nonetheless.

It was the senior school that had the picturesque gardens and greenery and the newer and oldest buildings too. Those venues formed subjects of many of the artworks done during art classes! I know renowned artist Nalini Malani studied here too. Her younger grey-eyed sister Bharati Malani was my classmate. A super model emerged from SMS in the shape of Shymolie Verma who naturally had her department badge pinned as an acknowledgement of her straight posture. Those of us who didn't make the grade as prefects got the red department badge or so it seemed. I remember the statuesque Sujata Deane wearing this badge from my class.

Somehow, even though I might be prejudiced by sentimentality, I don't remember groups or coteries in the school at any level - not the kind one finds commonplace in schools today, where you run the risk of being labelled autistic should you find yourself on the outskirts. And that is what made SMS unforgettable!

Amita Nayyar Bajaj



Meeting Down Under

St. Mary's School – my home away from home. I treasure the precious memories and moments from those years! Life for me with this beautiful family started when I turned seven in 1973, through to 1982! I loved school and the boarding especially – that was my home for nine years. The nuns, matrons, girls, ayahs, teachers, the old buildings, the ghosts, the beautiful gardens ...all were a part of my growing up and are now treasured memories.

Last year however all my precious friends reappeared and the memories came flooding back! I felt like it was only yesterday I was in boarding. The distant past was now not so distant. I was in touch with a few of my schoolmates and always wondered where the others were. After school life took a different turn. I got married, had two beautiful babies and forgot the world in bringing them up. Now 27 years or more later the urge to be in touch with my old mates got really strong. Internet made it easy to connect with a few but Facebook put a lot of my friends back into my life. This was and is so incredible. Living in Canberra, Australia, so far from the rest of the world, I was overjoyed to find that I had four friends living not far from me in the next city - Sydney!

I couldn't contain my joy on finding Michi (Sunita Michigan), one of my favourite seniors in Sydney. I was nervous when I called, and wondered what her reaction would be. Gosh, at 43 I felt like a 10-year-old again! We chatted and enjoyed recollecting all the old and bygone memories and there was so much to talk about, we could have gone on forever!! It was very emotional for me, a feeling very hard to explain! To get back in touch after so many years and still feel the connection was amazing.

My heart broke to find out that Sangeeta Sodhi was no more. She was a very precious friend. I discovered that Khushnuma Ankhlesaria (Bharucha), Rashne Nariman and Poonam Gidwani (Chandiramani) all live in Sydney too. This was just too much for me. I had to see all of them and really meet them to believe this was true and actually happening.

Sunita and I finally got down to planning and decided to meet in Sydney. The day, time and place were finally fixed. I was going to meet my friends, my sisters after 30 long years. I was exploding with excitement and curiosity to meet all these lovely people from my childhood. My family was a tremendous support in all of this. My children had never seen me behave so school girlish - ? Tarana, my 15-year-old was very amused. My 10-year-old son, Tanveer, thought that there was definitely something wrong with his mum!

June 7th. The day arrived. We arrived in Sydney the day before. All I could think of was that in a few hours I would be meeting all my lovely friends. We drove down to the very popular restaurant Billu's in Harris Park. "Is that

Sunita?" We almost walked past each other! What followed was one of the best hugs of my life. It was not just the joy of meeting one another; it was the added joy of getting to meet the families too. Such a beautiful family the Horas are! It was such a relaxed meeting - the husbands were chatting and busy like they were meeting after years too and the kids behaved liked they had known each other all their lives.

When Khush and Rashna walked in it was all hugs again and Khush hadn't changed at all! They came alone as their families were busy with other commitments. This was definitely the highlight of my year! Our lunch went on from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm. We just ate and talked and laughed and relaxed and then moved across the road for a coffee. I was pinching myself all afternoon, hoping it wasn't a dream! Poonam couldn't make it as she was working. It would have been wonderful to catch up with her too

The year 2009 was one of reunions. I also met up with Preeti Mohindra (Bakshi). This was another exciting reunion – Preeti and I were classmates, friends and very naughty! We got in touch by phone and that is when I realised that Preeti visited Australia very often for business! This happened in early April and suddenly it felt like I had never been out of touch! On May 9 Preeti arrived at Canberra Airport. My family was wondering if I would recognise her and I did! Preeti Mohindra was the same girl I knew in school. She is as naughty now as she was then! We spent the most delightful weekend together catching up. She is adorable. My family thought the same too.

My year has been so satisfying and happy – lots of reunions, lots of friends back in my life and lots of love. I wish every one of my SMS sisters the same joy.?

Erica Peters Anand

