

The Albert Barrow Memorial All India Inter School

CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION 2015



Council For The Indian School
Certificate Examinations



The **Changing Shape**
of **Human**
Relationships



Albert Barrow
1918-1990



FOREWORD

The Albert Barrow All India Inter School Creative Writing Competition is yet another endeavour of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations to provide a platform for our young students to express themselves through the written word. In the increasing rush to become technologically proficient, simple communication through the written and spoken word is often being ignored or left out. This competition reveals the wealth of talent existing in the schools affiliated to the Council. It is heartening to note that our young students can express themselves freely and with great felicity of expression.

This year's topic was chosen with great thought. The topic, '**The Changing Shape of Human Relationships**' sought to explore whether the rat race and the technological change all around us has had any effect on human relationships. Are the old ties and relationships changing, or are they evolving in tune with the changing times? It was interesting to go through the essays, stories and poems written by students in both the categories 1 & 2. The maturity of thought and expression revealed in the writing was impressive. After reading the essays printed in this volume, I am sure you will agree with me that the hearts of our young minds are in the right place and that we are entrusting our world and our society into safe hands.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate and express my deep gratitude to all the principals and teachers of the affiliated schools for their encouragement to their students and their cooperation with the Council which has made this volume possible. I congratulate all the students who participated in this competition and gave off their best. Finally, I wish to commend the efforts of the team at the Council's Office for their hard work and dedication which has made the timely publication of this compilation possible.




(Gerry Arathoon)

Chief Executive & Secretary

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**In human relationships, distance is not
measured in miles but in affection.
Two people can be right next to
each other, yet miles apart.**



EKATA LAHIRI

Class XII

Julien Day School

Elgin Road

Kolkata

West Bengal



JULIEN DAY SCHOOL, KOLKATA

Established initially as a Nursery School by Mrs. Grace Julien in 1969, Julien Day School, Elgin Road, now nurtures over 1500 young minds and guides them towards success. Under the guidance of Mrs. S.E. Broughton, the school aims at all-round development of students, encouraging a variety of sports and other extra-curricular activities.

The constant help and support of the teachers and the establishment of a friendly relation between them and the students has turned the school into a second home for all Julienites.

PARENTS TODAY - OBJECTS OF ADMIRATION OR EMBARRASSMENT?

"I knew it was a wrong decision to bring you to this mall!" I screamed at my mother, my voice a mixture of rage, shame and disgust.

She looked at me; she did not utter a word but walked to our car and opened the door. I got in, still simmering with anger, plugged in my earphones and soon the loud music from my iPod drowned out her words, those annoying words which never failed to upset me.

Dad is never around, yet he is marginally better than my mother. He gets me new books and

branded jeans. He bought me my Smartphone and recharges the internet connection every month. Mostly, I like him because when he is not busy with his conferences and business meetings he is really fun to have around. Even my friends like him. But even he makes me want to curl up in shame sometimes. Why does he try to be "cool" and talk about things he knows nothing of?

And then there's my mother. Clumsy with escalators, awkward at multiplexes, and a complete embarrassment when we go out to dinner and she looks at the prices in the menu card and makes

loud comments about the "astronomical" prices. Of course the fact that she never gets the accent right when she speaks English further adds to my misery.

At the mall today, I bumped into a group of friends who were window shopping. I was mortified imagining their sniggers as my mother in her usual inimitable fashion looked at the designer bags on display and exclaimed loudly at the prices. It was so clear that she had never heard of that particular brand in her life.

God! I'm just disgusted!

Upon returning home I vented my frustration on my room deciding to clean it up once and for all. Old question papers, all the way back to Class IV, faded greeting cards, tattered friendship bands, passes for the school concert eight years ago- the shelves were packed with memorabilia of the years which had gone by. My hands fell on a big hardbound notebook covered with yellow chart paper on which was written "DO NOT TOUCH" in big bold letters. Surprised, I chuckled softly at stumbling across this old treasure - my first diaries. I am a compulsive writer of journals and this is what I had started with.

Curious and interested, I began flipping the pages. What were the things which had interested me all those years ago?

ENTRY 1

Mom bought me an exercise book. I can write my thoughts in it everyday. I asked her to cover it in my favourite colour but I did not specify the colour. She just knew that it was yellow! How like Mom!

ENTRY 6

I was playing downstairs and fell down. I was very badly hurt and bawled like a baby. Mummy was not scared. She told me she knew magic and would make the pain go away. She put some medicine and there was very little pain after that. How did she do

that? I didn't want to go back and play. Suppose I fell again? Mummy told me that if I backed out every time I got hurt, I would never be able to overcome my fears. I went back to play and all my fears went away. How did mummy know this?

ENTRY 11

I shall never speak to Aditi again! She says she is my best friend but she is always speaking behind my back. She did not help me with my project and stole my colour pencils. She is not my best friend anymore.

Mom told me not to judge Aditi harshly. Probably even she was having a bad day. Meanwhile Mom would try to be my friend. Even though she had fever, we watched cartoons and played a board game. Her hug is the best thing ever.

Reading this entry, a lump formed in my throat. When was the last time I hugged Mom?

ENTRY 20

I have the best Mom in the world! It was my birthday today and Mom and I went shopping together. She bought me a wonderful cake and arranged a grand surprise party! She quietly rang up my friends and planned the whole party for me. She even quarreled with Dad and got me the bike I have been asking for.

I love Mom the most. And I'll never make her cry because I don't like it when she is sad or hurt.

2005 - I had loved my mother the most.

2015 - I can't stand her. She is a huge embarrassment in my life.

What went wrong?

Then it struck me- I went wrong. I changed and grew away from her. I admit that she has changed too. But everyone changes. She matured and grew. I became immature and crass.

I can't pinpoint when or how we drifted apart. I began having a life of my own. A life in which the opinion of my friends mattered more than that of my parents. The more my mother tried to talk to me, the more I shut her out in irritation and in annoyance. A pang went through me as I recalled the bewildered look on her face as she would look at me. She must have wondered whether this was the same child who announced loudly to the world, "My mommy bestest!"

She had given me all her time and energy when I needed her the most. I gifted her impatience, criticism and loneliness in return. Immersed in Facebook and Whatsapp, my parents started occupying less and less of my time. Now I realized that I had hurt them more and more each day as they tried very hard to keep up with my interests, with my world. They didn't understand much of it but they tried nevertheless. All through this their love for me did not diminish. It remained unconditional. My mother still knows what makes me smile. When I am not mad at her, that is.

But when was the last time that I had made her smile?

Today, at the mall, I had felt that she was an embarrassment. But I must have embarrassed her too with my rudeness and bad behavior. Would I be able to give of myself as selflessly as my parents have all these years? Suddenly I felt a surge of pride. I had wonderful parents, only I realized it a little late.

With moist eyes, I ran out of the room, searching for Mom. She deserves a hug. And I? I need one.

TO MOTHER



Mother ♥ Daughter

*Our lives were brought
together for a reason. Your
love is what I needed to grow
to my fullest potential.*

*Thank you for the person
you are and for your love
and caring over the years.*

*The bond we have is
everlasting. I love you.*

2ND RANK



KEERTHANA SRIKANTH

Class XI

Scottish High International School
Gurgaon
Haryana



SCOTTISH HIGH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, GURGAON

Nestled in the cosmopolitan city of Gurgaon 'Scottish High International School' espouses the mission of the Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations, which is committed to serving the nation's children, through high quality educational endeavours, empowering them to contribute towards a humane, just and pluralistic society, promoting introspective living, by creating exciting learning opportunities, with a commitment of excellence.

In the eleventh year of this humanistic endeavour to providing quality education and contributing to build a truly humane society Scottish High International School is also recognised as a centre for excellence in scholastic as well as co-scholastic development of the young students' persona.

STUDENT -TEACHER BOND - THE CHANGING PARADIGM.

Sometime in the Future:-

Vardhan walked into the resource room and flopped into a chair beside his teacher, Jai. Jai laughed at the dramatic sigh he let out.

"Traffic that bad, eh?"

"Unbelievably bad, Jai. You would think licensed drivers would know to keep their hovercraft four feet above the ground at all times, wouldn't you? It took the authorities more than four hours to bring things back to normal after the accident."

"Doesn't matter. Let's start our research on a new topic today. Any suggestions?"

"All my ideas got bored and left while I was stuck in traffic. I'll do whatever you suggest."

"Very well. I have a good topic in mind. Let's look at student- teacher bonds and how they have evolved over the years. What say?"

Vardhan opened his hand held computer and they began their research. They decided to focus on India for that day. Jai and Vardhan began reading about the student teacher relationship in ancient India.

'The teacher or guru was like a father to his students. He was almost Godlike in his stature. Unquestioning obedience to the commands of the teacher was demanded and given. Teachers were treated with deferential respect. The bond between the teacher and his student was like that between a father and his child.'

Vardhan took a moment to imagine what it would

be like if he and Jai had lived in those ancient times. Just the thought of having to bow to Jai and obey his every command made him want to laugh. He could not imagine himself chopping wood for Jai or tending to the holy fire for him. Moreover what was this about a teacher being like a father to his student? Jai, like a father to him? Jai was barely ten years older than Vardhan. Both of them had spent several afternoons working out at the gym or binging on pizza. Vardhan could not think of Jai as "fatherly"!

Catching his thoughts wandering, Vardhan brought himself back to the task at hand. Jai was now reading out the bit about "Gurudakshina". Apparently, a student was honour bound to give his "guru" anything he demanded as a sign of his gratitude at receiving the gift of knowledge. A guru could demand your kingdom, your wealth and even in one instance had demanded the thumb of his student who was a renowned archer! Vardhan couldn't even imagine Jai demanding anything from him. Of course they often shared their music collection or their gizmos but "gurudakshina"?!!!

As if he had read Vardhan's thoughts, Jai said humorously, "You should be grateful you don't live in those times. Otherwise you would have to bow every time you met me." He seemed tickled at the idea.

Jai bowed dramatically and exclaimed, "As you command, teacher! Thou hast commanded that I should be grateful and grateful I will be. Oh, the outpouring of gratitude from my grateful heart! Oh the...."

"Cut it out will you?" Jai snapped uneasily.

Vardhan was amused that Jai was not comfortable with the idea of a student bowing down to him. Jai gestured to the chair from which Vardhan had flung himself to the floor. "Let's find out what teachers did to cheeky and insolent students in the medieval period."

"From a father- figure, teachers evolved into disciplinarians. Look into your handheld, and find out the kind of punishments meted out to students."

Reading through database after database of information, Vardhan came to the conclusion that teachers were the arbiters of knowledge and discipline. The teacher's word was law and corporal punishment was common. Vardhan tried to imagine Jai in such a role and failed miserably. Jai taking a stick to him? The idea was inconceivable. He could not think of a better friend than Jai.

As he read on he realized that by the twenty-first century the teacher- student bond had become symbiotic. Both learnt from each other and helped each other learn. Vardhan thought that this was rather like the easy going dynamic that he shared with Jai. Jai never claimed that he knew everything. In fact, his favourite words were, "Let's find out, Var..."8/10/2015

Reading his mind Jai elaborated, "It wasn't like what we have now Var. Students still had to give respect and address teachers as 'Sir' or 'Ma'am"

As Vardhan mulled over the difference, Jai told him, "I'll be back in ten minutes. Why don't you give the matter some more thought? Think about how much the teacher-student bond has changed."

When Jai returned, Vardhan was still deep in thought. When questioned, he slowly replied, " You know what Jai? I don't think the bond has changed at all. Sure the paradigms have, but the bonds remain as strong as ever. The teacher still commands love and respect and the student still looks up to him regardless of whether the teacher is a parent or friend."

He paused to look Jai straight in the eye. "A teacher is special because he can be both and more. He can reprimand you but at the same time understand your innermost hopes and fears. He will still show you the right path though it may not necessarily be through corporal punishment. A teacher is like a chameleon, changing and adjusting to what the student needs and requires."

"A student- teacher bond is indescribable and priceless. It is unique and special and will always be the same, unchanged and unchanging."

3RD RANK



APARAJITA DAS

Class XII

Hill Top School

Jamshedpur

Jharkhand



HILL TOP SCHOOL, JAMSHEDPUR

Hill Top School is situated on a little hillock in Telco Colony, Jamshedpur.

The school, as part of its collaborative ventures, successfully participated in UKIERI & GSP programmes, under the British Council banner and was awarded the ISA Award for 2013-16. Hill Top School has utilised some innovative techniques for enhancing the creative skills of the students. The initiative, the Clash of the Titans - LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE, an inter school competition conducted in and around Jamshedpur is a regular, thundering success. The school's unique Value Education programme has been acknowledged by the community it serves for its eco friendly ambience, Hill Top has earned the epithet of being a 'Green School'. The vibrant activity oriented atmosphere, the caring and friendly ethos, distinguishes the school from its competitors.

PARENTS TODAY - OBJECTS OF ADMIRATION OR EMBARRASSMENT?

My mother was dying.

She said, no matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried, I would not be able to save her. She said it would be wise if I would let her go. She said time would heal every wound. She said - though she was dying, I would survive.

But she forgot to mention - how?

When I was a child I had a rather strange fascination for everything that was infinite. I would lie on my bed long after everyone had gone to sleep, and stare at the high ceiling of my room,

hoping that it would somehow stretch and engulf the whole world. Infinity sounded strange, and soon I realized that in this infinite world that we lived in, I was insignificant.

I was insignificant and that terrified me.

It had been a rather warm December evening when a chunk of my mother's hair fell on our dinner table, right beside my sister's dinner plate. There it was - dark, loose, scattered strands of hair - a contrast against the bright yellow tablecloth. I looked numbly at the chunk of hair and then at the empty place at the table where my father used to

sit when he was alive. I tried to imagine how he would have dealt with the situation. Perhaps he would have used one of his famous quips to lighten the situation. He used to have a one- liner for every occasion. But he was not there and the only word that came to my mind was - ill.

My mother was ill.

With a quick word my mother excused herself, retreating to her room, away from us.

My sister looked at me and said, "She is dying."

I could say nothing at all. An eternity of waiting passed. When my mother returned to the room, she had a bottle of wine in one hand and an electric razor in the other.

"Give me a haircut. Anything you wish," she said.

When my sister and I just stared back at her, she handed us each a pair of scissors and declared, "I am shaving my head tonight. Might as well have some fun while we are about it."

So we did as she asked. We gave her a lop sided bob and she laughed at the funny picture it made. If there was a hint of strain behind that laugh she tried to mask it from us. As her hair fell to the ground, I wondered whether this was the last time that I would touch her beautiful long hair. She gave us the razor; I guided her hand as she got rid of the last bits of hair. After each slide, each move, my sister and I would tell her that she was looking very smart; that she would set a new trend and my mother pretended that she believed every word.

As the days passed by, the cancer took a toll on her. Her bones jutted out, we could see the veins running down her arms, her shining tresses were a thing of the past. She would wear caps to hide the loss of her hair and long sleeved sweaters to cover

all the marks that the needle left in her arms. She was deteriorating. I kept telling her that she was still beautiful and she would laugh and reply, "Look at me!"

I did look at her. Even without her hair, with her thin emaciated body, with only one breast, in fact without all the things that society considered necessary for beauty, she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

In fact somehow she was going beyond beauty, she was growing in stature. She looked beautiful when she laughed, she looked strong in her vibrantly coloured wigs, and she looked perfect when she held us close to her heart. To me she was not an embarrassment; she was an object of admiration. She was a fighter, a woman who could look death in the eye and flaunt her red and purple wigs as her flags of victory.

She was, and is, everything that I wasn't and can never be.

Today, when I sit beside her holding her hand , she smiles at me and urges me to take the test to see whether the cancer had passed down to me.

"I cannot do it." I reply

Could I wake up every morning with a cancer racked body? Could I drive to the Chemo centre every alternate day wearing a red wig and a smile? Could I be a source of courage to my children? Could I fight as hard as she did?

I couldn't.

I could never become half the person that my mother is. All parents yesterday, today or tomorrow, bear this badge of courage. For this they will always be our source of admiration, never our embarrassment. For me, my mother will always be the only infinite that I will ever know.



DISHA GUPTA

Class XII

St. Joseph's High School
Matigara, Darjeeling
West Bengal



ST. JOSEPH'S HIGH SCHOOL, MATIGARA

Set in the foothills of the Himalayas, amongst the vast stretches of lush green tea gardens, St. Joseph's School, Matigara has been catering quality education to students from all over North Bengal for the last 54 years. It aims at the holistic development of every student as a future citizen of the world community.

Keeping in tandem with the motto, "Success crowns effort", the school presents an enriching and challenging environment for enabling a true learning experience. Apart from academic excellence, much emphasis is laid on co-curricular activities as well.

PARENTS TODAY - OBJECTS OF ADMIRATION OR EMBARRASSMENT?

Three snoozes, fifteen eye rubs, a scratch and three rolls across my bed - my day begins. I sleepwalk like a zombie through my room, making my way across the scattered books, pillows scattered on the floor, Chinese take-out boxes and empty boxes of Café Cuba. The pungent smell of my father's after shave burns my nose, competing with the aroma of my mother's strong "tadka". The din of the news in the background is like the white noise, which disperses the silence in my counsellor's room. My father moves aside as I go to the wash basin to brush my teeth. No words are exchanged. I know he has an important presentation to deliver today. I let the

water run in a steady flow. There is a chill in the air and he has remembered to leave the geyser on for me. However I can see his dirty pajamas draped carelessly across the laundry box. It is embarrassing.
7.11 A.M.

Ma is running behind my school bus in her nightclothes and her slippers. She shouts for the bus to stop and I try in vain to stop her. I am late and have missed the school bus. But I am grown up now and can take the public transport to school. She doesn't have to make such a spectacle of herself! It is embarrassing!

11.20 a.m.

My parents are in the school's visitor's room- with my lunch box- a Barbie lunch box! "I am seventeen!" I want to yell but my ears are red-hot with embarrassment. My classmates are sniggering behind my back I know. Even the school peon looks at me oddly. What do I tell my parents? They will never listen!

6.57 p.m.

It is raining heavily outside. My tuition class will be over in a few minutes. I feel excited as I plan a walk in the rain with my friends. We have all decided to walk back home together. Just as I come out, I find Ma standing near the gate with an umbrella. She could not bear the thought of my trudging home in the rain. With a sigh, I bid my friends goodbye. They leave giggling and stealing glances at me. I get under Ma's umbrella. It is embarrassing.

11.45 p.m.

The Mathematics problems were particularly difficult to solve. I have been slaving over them for hours. My eyes are bleary and my shoulders ache. I stretch out my hand unconsciously and my fingers encounter the hot mug of coffee. When did Ma bring it in and leave it on my table? That was sweet of her!

01.07a.m.

I don't know when I managed to stagger to my bed. The lights are still switched on. I forgot to switch them off. I was too tired or too lazy, I don't know which. Drifting between sleep and wakefulness, I watch my father tiptoe into the room. He adjusts the pillows under my head, he tucks me in.... I can feel the tentative touch of his hand on my head. Switching off the lights, he goes out..... A little later, Ma comes in. She runs her fingers through my hair and kisses me on my forehead.

03.01 a.m.

My parents are not embarrassing. My father had an important presentation, one he was worried about. Yet he remembered to leave the bath water hot for

me. He came all the way to school so that I could have proper food to sustain myself through the gruelling day. Ma got wet in the rain herself, in spite of her asthma, so that I do not fall ill. My parents cared. I did not.

As every other average teenager, I too am often embarrassed by my parents. They are possessive and a bit too concerned. However this does not change the fact that they are my parents. So, as I lay on my bed that night, I contemplated exactly why their well meaning actions embarrassed me so much. Why was it that their love and care made me feel ashamed and belittled? Where was the problem? The answer, of course, was that the problem was with me!

I am a product of the "modern" age. I feel that I am in total control of my life and therefore should be left to my own devices. But can I disregard the fact that I have been born of my parents? I am the product of their love and nurturing. We have got too much without even asking for it and so we have become rude and discourteous in our behaviour. We judge our parents according to our standards and find them wanting. "Why can't they do this? Why can't they dress like that? Why can't they leave us alone?" is our cry.

But what about those countless nights when they went without sleep so that I could sleep? What about those panicky trips to the doctor when I was ill? What about those long queues in the rain so that I could get into a "good" school? What about the patience on their faces as I insisted on going on every ride at the fun fair, those surprise birthday parties, the strong shoulder on which I could lean or the comforting arms so that I could weep my heart out? What about just being there- without expectations, without conditions?

My parents are certainly not objects. They are my parents. Certainly, at times they do embarrass me. I must be embarrassing them too, on occasions. But I do know that I admire them....for all that they are, for all that they do and for all that they made me.



OLANA MARIE PETERS

Class XI

La Martiniere For Girls

Kolkata

West Bengal



LA MARTINIERE FOR GIRLS, KOLKATA

La Martiniere for Girls was established in 1836 by the compassionate vision of a Frenchman, Major General Claude Martin.

The Girls' School is rated as one of the top five schools in the country with more than 2,500 students.

While pursuing excellence in academics, students devote time for sports and games and other co-curricular activities to develop into women of character. Students learn to think internationally while upholding their rich cultural heritage.

The Government of India recognised the school's contribution to education by the release of a commemorative stamp on the 175th Founder's Day of the School, 13th September, 2010.

NOSTALGIA- AS A TEENAGER LOOK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN YOUR FAMILY WAS YOUR WORLD.

My name is Olana, and I am sixteen years old. At this point in my life, like many other adolescents, I find myself trapped in a vortex of demanding coursework, imposing extra-curricular activities, intimidating college applications and an insurmountable level of pressure.

A typical day in my life entails numerous commitments ranging from school to tuitions to basketball practice. In the midst of this deluge, I find it a struggle to stay afloat, and I often find myself spending very little quality time with my family.

Ironically though, at one point my entire life used to revolve around my family; the limits of my world

used to be enclosed within the walls of my house. As I look back now, all these years later, I feel overwhelmed by the mixture of emotions that pulverize my soul. Each member of my family has been special to me, and through the years I have learned lessons that are invaluable to my existence. I have learned lessons in life that have truly shaped and moulded me into the person that I am today.

My father, Olaf, works on a cruise ship based in the United States. His job demands that he stay away from our family for nine months in a year, and the only reason he makes this sacrifice is because he loves me, and he wants to go out of his way to

give me the opportunities that he never had when he was a child. I remember that whenever he returned from his trips, it would be Christmas at our home. I would go around with a broad smile on my face because Dad was home. Laughter would ring out through the day and it seemed that the sun was always shining during those days.

My father taught me the meaning of sacrifice and the importance of attitude. He would always say, "Where you reach in life depends not on your altitude, but on your attitude."

My mother, Ann, is a school teacher. She lives away from her husband for nine months in a year and she is the bravest person I know. My mother has taught me to believe, to love and to simply give of myself completely for the ones I love. I learnt my alphabet at her knee. Her stories would outdo any writer's. As a child, my mother's presence in the house would mean impromptu picnics, song and cuddles with loving discipline thrown in.

From both my parents, I have both learnt and experienced an unconditional love, a love that is selfless, and a love that has stood the test of time. I find a manifestation of this love in my name, Olana, which happens to be a combination of both their names. From them, I have learnt faith, I have learnt trust and I have learnt courage. All these traits were not picked up in a day or a year. They have seeped in through the years as my parents have held me and my sister Angelina and brother Joshua, together, and tied us with their bonds of love.

My siblings are years younger than I am. But my fondest memories are those of watching them grow up, squealing and chasing after each other and demanding that I should be the arbiter of their everyday quarrels. They have given me wonderful memories which nothing else can replace. They taught me that we really don't need all that much in life to keep us happy. They have been the sunshine and the laughter of my growing up years. With them I was always able to forget my doubts and fears that I may not be able to achieve my goals. My parents and my siblings have always mattered the most to

me in the world.

Lastly, I have learnt life's greatest lessons from my grandfather, Naaman, who, despite being seventy eight years old, is one of the most committed and avid bakers that I have met. From him I have learnt the importance of discovering the passion that is within each one of us, and of possessing the courage to pursue our dreams. Through his lifelong struggle with diabetes, my grandfather has taught me both the value of acceptance and the indestructibility of hope.

He taught me to accept circumstances around me, the different kinds of people and even myself. He would always tell me to be grateful that I didn't have everything I wanted in life. It meant that I still had a chance - even if it was the slightest one- of being a happier person the next day. My grandfather taught me patience; he taught me that if I walked down the right path, and kept walking, I would eventually reach my goal. From him I learnt not to wait for good things to happen to me, but to go ahead and make them happen instead. Then only would I fill the world with hope. He taught me to keep moving forward, to keep reaching and to keep fighting.

Now, from the standpoint of my sixteen years, I can look back over the years and understand and appreciate the golden bond that has tied me to my loved ones, my family. I have taken them for granted most of the time. It is only now that I realize that I have been and always will be defined by them. They have been my world, my special corner, to which I have kept coming back in happiness and sorrow, in success and in defeat. They have taught me lessons which cannot be found in books. I have learnt things that come only from loving and being loved, from hoping and believing together.

Despite not always being able to spend as much time with my family as I want to, I know that they are my world, permanent, indestructible. Passing fancies may grip my attention for short moments but they are there for the long haul. Truly, they are as much God's gift to me as I am to them.



AKANKSHYA SUBUDHI

Class XII

St. Joseph's Academy

Dehra Dun

Uttarakhand



ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, DEHRA DUN

ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, DEHRA DUN, founded in 1934, is managed by the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Patrick. The school has around 3,750 students, 150 teachers and 50 ancillary staff on roll.

The Brothers consider the formation of character the first essential requisite of any sound educational system and so great stress is laid on the inculcation of high ideals, refined behaviour and moral rectitude. The vision of the school is to impart total education in a sincere, dedicated and self-confident manner to bring about qualitative progress in all spheres of life.

Our School motto is Laborare est Orare, i.e. 'Work is Worship' - a beautiful tribute to St. Joseph, the Patron Saint of our school.

NOSTALGIA- AS A TEENAGER LOOK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN YOUR FAMILY WAS YOUR WORLD.

Dear Past (Mine),

The thing is, they haven't invented time- machines yet.

I remember how you used to wish for a device that could help you to travel back and forth through time. Oh! All those missed 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' episodes you could watch again! All those tests which you could redo! I in fact came across this vivid wish of yours when I was cleaning up my study table and found an old notebook of yours. You found a way to speak to me, I guess, but I can't until I find a way to cross the boundaries of the

fourth dimension....

Anyhow, it is 3.00 a. m. right now. I am tired but sleepless and I can think of nothing better to do than write a letter to my past self.

That's going to surprise you, I bet. I can practically see your eyebrows disappearing into your hairline... 3.00 a.m.? Am I serious? What about my bedtime? Well, you grow up, dear; you'll learn that staying up way past midnight is the only way that you can get anything done. You think that doing ten sums for homework every day is a Herculean task? You should see my Physics and Chemistry books now.

'Gargantuan' doesn't even begin to describe them.

There are other things too. There is the fact that my sister is no longer my best friend. That's right. You thought sharing your toys would ensure eternal friendship? We still see each other in the school corridors and across the dining table at home, but a friendship stretched too thin is no friendship at all. I am just an older sister to her now, not her keeper of secrets, her bedtime confidante, her playmate and her protector. She has her life now and I have mine.

Life is busy, love, I have tuitions. I have after school tasks. I stay out of the house at least twelve hours a day for five days a week. You used to come home from school and follow mom around until you gave her a full account of your school day and she would patiently listen, comment and advise. These days, she has a hard time getting a single word out of me, seeing how I remain shut up in my room for the brief periods that I am at home. Before you ask, no, I'm not anti social or depressed - it's just that there is too much to do, and no time for conversation. Even Dad- in those days- you used to hate the fact that he had to be out of the house for long periods of time. The minute he returned, you would run to him and he would swing you up in his arms. These days, he is out for weeks at a time- tours, training, work related affairs, and I barely notice.

Look at me, becoming all nostalgic! Really, I have no right to complain. I am a normal sixteen year old, living a stable, secure life and doing well in academics and extra - curricular activities. What reason do I have to moan and gripe to an entity that is literally in the past? None, I know. However, you know what they say-"When the pain becomes too much, poetry is your only escape." This is not poetry. This is my raw, sorrowful heart. This is my loneliness and regret, staring me in the face as I finally choose to accept the fact that I am alone.

These- my reminiscences of the time when my family was the centre of my world- your life, is not meant to scare or disappoint you. No- what I want to tell you is- well, people grow up, and they drift apart. Their circle of friends expand, family life takes a back seat, as the need to become someone in life, the search for one's identity, becomes the most important thing in the world.

Teenagers are considered to be rebellious and self centered, overconfident and insouciant- really, they are just children transitioning into adults who have left their childhood behind and are looking to find a new identity. This is why I am using this pen, this sheet of paper to lay bare my heart to you. You know better, love. You are still a child, and you are wiser than I am, for you know where you want to go and what you want to be- you are so sure! You also know that when you stumble and fall and scrape your knee, Dad will pick you up and Mom will kiss the wound better. Anukshya will make you laugh through your tears. It is not the same for me.

Or perhaps it is, and maybe I have forgotten. Perhaps I have no reasons and so I make excuses. God, I'm being so dysfunctional-spouting nostalgic bittersweet nonsense to my past self- when my present self could easily go to my parent's room right now, wake them up and tell them that I love them, that I want to talk to them and want them to hold me and sing a lullaby to me so that I can drift off to sleep.

This started as a silly bit of midnight madness. As it ends, I recognize it for what it really is- an epiphany. Nostalgia is just a way to say you wish you could have your past come back. Well, I could wish for it- or I could make it happen.

Thank you for showing me the way dear.

-Your Teenage Self



ANCHITA PARNA

CLASS XI

GULMOHUR HIGH SCHOOL

JAMSHEDPUR

JHARKHAND



GULMOHUR HIGH SCHOOL, JAMSHEDPUR

Gulmohur High School with its motto "*Stop not till the goal is reached*" was founded by the All India Women's Conference in 1954. Having recently concluded sixty years of imparting knowledge, Gulmohur aims to prepare individuals to be the leaders of tomorrow and to inculcate in them values of love, compassion and concern for the environment. It has also partnered with schools in the UK to add to the global dimension in teaching. The school is a proud recipient of EQUIP (6 Thinking Hats) and Best Practices (Mind mapping) by Tata Education in Excellence Programme and the International School Award by British Council.

NOSTALGIA- AS A TEENAGER LOOK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN YOUR FAMILY WAS YOUR WORLD.

NOSTALGIA- MY OLD SELF

I stamp my feet and bang the door
Crying, I slide down on the floor,
"Nobody understands me"
A line common among teenagers you see,
My father refused to let me 'hang out' with friends
My mother does not let me follow the new trends.
My grandmother shakes her head sighing
Every time I choose friends over a family gathering.
As for my sister, she pulls a face!
When I shoo her away to discuss with friends the
latest fashion craze.

Nobody understands me you see,

I love you, my family, but my friends are waiting,
set me free!

I am a teenager; my world is not limited by you
Is really my attitude new?

Was I not always like this?

But then I see a photograph clicked in a previous
moment of bliss.

That's the three year old me

I am in my mummy's lap smiling in glee

Is it really me? The girl in there?

Why, she looks as if she is without a care!
I shut my eyes and recall the days when life was bliss
Nostalgia envelops me when I realize that I was not always like this.

It is my first birthday,
My mother fusses over me as always
"Oh what is this all about?
Come on mummy, lift me up," I pout.
I see people all around me pulling my cheeks
I can barely understand what they speak.
I want my mother; I want to sit on her lap,
Maybe even take a small nap.
"Granny! Daddy! Where are you?
Who are all these people? I have no clue."
Oh I see gifts and a cake
These are the things that I love to take.
And I see some friend from school
Back then, they did not seem so cool.
They all sing the birthday song

"Can't you be a bit quicker, it's taking so long?"
Finally the people, - my relatives, neighbours and friends kiss me goodbye
I can at last on my mother's lap lie,
I slip into the world of fairies.
My father tucks me into bed, I have no worries.
It's my first day at school.
My parents are leaving me alone but I am no fool.
I cling to them as hard as I can,
"Don't go, please," I begged as tears down my cheeks ran.
"You are my world, remember?"
Every minute, everything seems to grow number.

My father caresses my cheeks lovingly,
"You are our world too," he says soothingly.
"We are always there for you
But you have to face the world every day anew."
He kisses me and leads me inside,
He winks and says, "It's a new roller coaster ride."

I am a six year old girl now,
Time flies so fast and how!
I have many friends for sure,
But my Granny's sweet tales still the best were.
I have been pestering her to let me help in the kitchen for long
She finally relents, ducking her tongue and smiling every time I do something wrong.
I am a big girl now, she should know that.
After all I no longer scream when I see a rat.
However, still I snuggle into her bed for a bedtime story.
She knows loads about great men and their glory.
I feel so safe, so calm,
With her around, I know I can never come to any harm.

This is the eight year old me.
I am a big sister now, you see.
In my small world, there is a new member,
The prettiest girl ever, oh yes, she is my sister.
She is my life, my joy,
With her I can share anything, even my toys.
A small smile from her brightens my day,
I have never been so cheerful and gay.
I am on a family outing.
The mobile phone has not yet crept in to disturb me with its ring.

Nothing can be better.

I want to capture this moment in my heart forever,
My father ruffles my hair saying, "You have grown
so tall."

"Of course, father," I say, "I'm no longer a girl
small."

The world is such a happy place,
Of sorrow there is no trace.

Can't time stand still, forever?

I wish this happiness does not leave me, never.

I am thirteen and this is my first argument with my
parents.

Why are they behaving like tyrants?

All I ask is a new phone,

"You are too young," says my father in a rough
tone.

"No ifs and buts, you cannot argue with us."

I don't understand all this fuss,

I want to be at par with my friends, they are my
world too.

Why my family was so upset I had no clue.

But now I know what went wrong.

As I look back at the time when my sense of
injustice was so strong.

Nostalgia creeps into me,

As I realize that I am no longer the girl who laughed
with her family in glee.

My family is no longer my world, you see

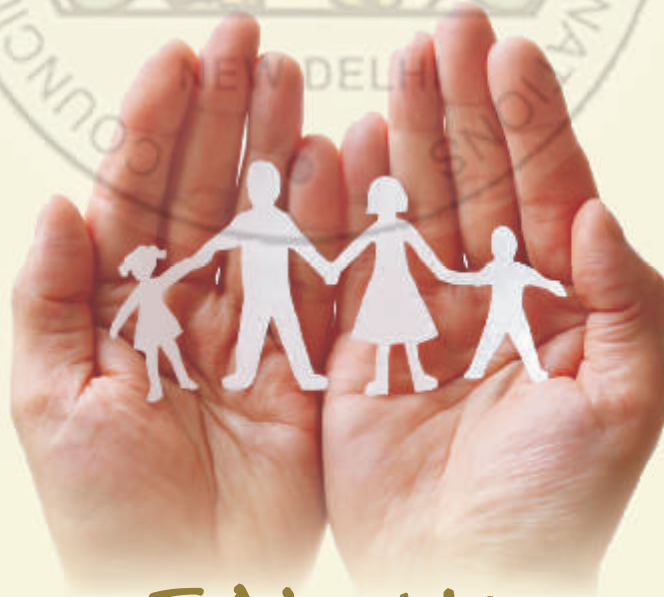
I don't regret the new people in my life, but

I don't really understand everything about the new
me.

I wipe my tears, resolving to change myself,

If I unite my family and my new friends,

Maybe I will discover my real self.



FAMILY

We may not have it all together, but together we have it all



SUDEETI G.M.

Class XII

Jamnabai Narsee School

Mumbai

Maharashtra



JAMNABAI NARSEE SCHOOL, MUMBAI

Jamnabai Narsee School is a secular co-educational private minority school managed by the public charitable trust that was established by Sarvashree Chatrabhuj Narsee in 1970. The school motto "Vidya Param Balam" has proved to be the guiding statement and beacon for all. The guiding principle of the school is "Let learning be a joy and teaching a pleasure".

The school seeks to inculcate in its students a desire to achieve excellence in all areas of endeavour. While providing a positive learning environment to our students, the school prepares the students for the Examinations conducted by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations, New Delhi.

PARENTS TODAY - OBJECTS OF ADMIRATION OR EMBARRASSMENT?

It is one of the great tragedies of the modern world that children do not receive meticulous handbooks as to how to deal with the volatile creatures who are their parents. We emerge into this complex world with no disclaimers or warnings as to what our parents, unarguably the two most important people in our lives, will be like. There are no footnotes to refer to when a parent lets slip an excruciatingly embarrassing story in front of your friends. There is no appendix to glance at when you slowly find out what the core of a parent is, and who parents truly are. Life shoves us out into the wilderness and gives us an entire lifetime to analyse these two strange specimens.

The specimens in question are the two that I have

had the utmost pleasure analyzing under a microscope in the laboratory of our house. My parents married late in their lives, almost directly after vowing that they would never marry or have children. During my early years something as superficial as their age bothered me intensely. Grey hair and wrinkles appeared on my father almost a decade before my friends' young, robust-looking fathers showed any signs of aging. My embarrassment would intensify every time a friend's eyes would widen when I revealed to them the age of my parents or when people asked me how my grandfather was, when it was actually my father's hand that I was holding.

Both my parents were rebellious non-conformists before I could even spell the word 'conformity', much less understand what it meant. They dressed differently from the rest- Mother in Fabindia clothes, organic earthy reds and yellows, her neck and ears drooping under the weight of heavy tribal jewellery. My father would walk into a room blissfully comfortable in baggy shorts and double-pocket floral T-shirts. A far cry from the sober sensible clothes that parents were supposed to wear, my parents stood out like sunflowers against a dull background. Whereas the clothes of other parents seemed to speak of their successful corporate careers, my parents looked as if they spent all their time on some beach in Goa. You can understand a child's constant need to fit in and be 'just like everybody else'. My parents mortified me.

Sometimes in rare moments of sentimentality, my exasperatingly frank and outspoken father would recall an incident which never failed to create a pang in my heart. "Every day," he would say, "Everyday, I would pick you up from school and you would happily abandon the group of children you were chatting with, and run and leap into my arms. You were always a smart child with small podgy legs, but you always raced into my arms and held me with such ferocity and love." Of course, I was only six years old and immune to how the world despised public displays of affection. My father was gloriously unaware of how rare incidents like these would be in a few years.

I do not know whom to point fingers at. I could blame myself, society or even my parents. I could blame life, as we often do, for things we cannot understand. I search desperately for a scapegoat to criticize for making teenagers the way they are. There comes in our lives a time, when we are quick to wipe away the love dripping in abundance from our parents' hearts. Their constant phone calls, their need to know every mundane detail of our lives- "how was school? How was the test? Where are you? Who are you with? How are you getting home? Have you studied?" We teenagers are buried under the thousands of intrusive questions that keep coming our way at speeds that would alarm particle

physicists engaged in very complicated research at NASA. Our parents slowly morph into objects of annoyance and embarrassment. The pedestal we put them on in our childhood melts away. They move from being the centre of our lives to a speck on the edge of our existence as we keep pushing them away from us.

I am achingly ashamed of the reason my parents embarrassed me. They were different. Their behavior, their clothes, their names, their professions, nothing conformed. Now however as I near adulthood, I do not feel the pressing need to conform or seek the acceptance of my peer group. I have begun to appreciate my parents as I have begun to interact with them at a deeper, more mature and intellectual level. In a recent discussion on leadership, I was asked to name one person in the country I would like to be led by. No politician's name popped into my mind, no social worker, teacher, film star or celebrity. One clear, coherent thought emerged - my father.

Sometimes a child can examine her parents' life and realize what she wants to do, which aspects she would like to imbibe, which decisions of her parents she disagrees with. I sit here and think of my parents' life and give a great sigh of relief. To echo a line from Robert Frost, they have not only chosen the road not taken but have had the courage to forge an entirely new path for themselves. Details which once haunted me like my father's big sunglasses reminiscent of the Italian mafia, my mother's grey hair which she refused to colour, these do not matter at all now. What matters is the fact that I have begun to admire them for daring to be different, for the courage of their convictions.

The end to this guide to disciplining one's parents and developing strategies to contend with their volatile natures would be as follows: Your parents are human. They will make terrible mistakes which will make you want to curl up and disappear. However do not forget that they have also achieved things which demand your awe and reverence. Your parents are infinite treasure houses of wisdom and knowledge. Embrace this gift of god and do not toss it back into the sea of life. The loss will be yours.



VEEHA VERMA

Class XII

The Shri Ram School
Aravali, Gurgaon
Haryana



THE SHRI RAM SCHOOL, ARAVALI, GURGAON

The Shri Ram School-Aravali was born out of the ideology that children must be given an environment that makes them want to come to school every day. It is a progressive, secular, child centered, co-educational private school, committed to providing quality education to its students. The philosophy rests on the interpretation of 'education' as drawing forth what already exists. The school imparts education that results in well-formed minds and the impetus and environment to think.

The cornerstone of the philosophy of the school is the belief in each and every child, manifested in a school calendar encompassing the academic and the co-curricular, offering opportunities for fostering diverse interests.

NOSTALGIA- AS A TEENAGER LOOK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN YOUR FAMILY WAS YOUR WORLD.

Three months and two weeks, I mused, since the last time that the entire family had gathered together for a meal. Perhaps it had been longer still, but that was the largest figure my brain was willing to accept. The atmosphere around the dinner table was thick and heavy and lay upon us like an old, musty blanket, the kind that my grandmother used at night, which made me feel uneasy and made my eyes water.

The conversation was no better. It was stale and dull; words were spoken for the mere sake of filling up the vacuum of silence, which was threatening to drown us all. It left a bad taste in my mouth, not because it was bitter, but more so because it was

absolutely pointless. Agni kicked me under the table, a prompt for me to agree with whatever Father had just said about taking down the government, or suing some company, which in some minor, insignificant way, had offended him.

It hadn't always been like this. There was a time when every moment, I had spent with my family was golden and pristine. Not because we never used to fight earlier, but simply because everyone was much more interested in everyone else. I closed my eyes and let the memories seep into my consciousness. I remembered those sun-kissed and rain washed days, when Daddy had taken us fishing in the small

wooden boat which his father had built him. The wave of excitement I had felt when I had hooked something only to have it dashed against the hard rock of disappointment when that 'something' turned out to be an old boot, is still fresh in my memory.

Agni kicked me again, because clearly, I was failing to keep track of the conversation.

"Papa," I said loudly, causing everyone at the table to start violently, "remember the time you took us to that fishing camp at Kaveri?"

"The time that Agni fell into the water because he was weaker than a three pound trout? Yes I do!" exclaimed my father in indignation. "That was before you children became too busy to spend time with your old man."

Ah! There it had begun- the blame game. Whose fault was it that we no longer ate together? Whose, that we no longer drove up to our house in Shimla? The accusations were endless, and each left me feeling sorrier than the last. I could still remember a time when I was no older than five years old and had spent countless days climbing plum trees and stealing mangoes from the neighbours. Often, we would get caught and have to sweep the neighbour's porch as an act of repentance which of course did not deter us from returning the following day with a new and devious plan. Mummy would frown and Daddy pretends to scold, but we could see the twinkle in his eyes as he apologized to our neighbor for his "horrible" children!

My all time favourite memory is of the time when Agni, Mother and I had gone trekking with Father on an expedition to find some new exotic bird species, the 'Blue Pigeon' if I remember correctly. Upon reaching the area in the forest where they nested, we were surrounded by about twenty giant winged beasts which had been hiding in the bushes. The experience had been both frightening and thrilling. Strangely enough we stood together, determined to face the danger as one strong unit.

I tuned back into the conversation. I had apparently triggered off a spate of memories about Agni's many misadventures. He wasn't very well coordinated, and that had had a severe impact on his daily activities. Father was recalling the time we had visited Manas and he had filmed the O new Horned Rhino. Everyone had been utterly still so as not to frighten the creatures away when there had been a blood curdling howl from Agni who had stubbed his toe. That had put paid to filming for the day!

Over the years these trips had become fewer and rarer, with someone always cancelling at the last moment. Just the words, 'family holiday', would evoke feelings of resentment and irritation. The old excitement and sense of fun had disappeared. We teenagers wanted holidays of our own with our own friends, certainly not parents and elders! Slowly this attitude affected any family meetings, occasions, events and even meals.

I was probably at fault, more than anyone else, I thought. My school life and the social life of my teenage years had taken precedence over my family time, friends replaced siblings and work replaced leisure time with family. But could I be blamed totally? The fun and freedom of my childhood had turned into a constant fear and anxiety regarding my career and admission to a proper college. Just the previous week I had refused to travel to Ladhak with my family because I had to start studying for my SATs. Thinking about this, I made an instantaneous decision-

"Mum, is it okay if I come with you to Ladhak as well?" I asked. "After all, I can carry some books along to study during the journey."

I could see the startled pleasure in her eyes as she replied, "Why not!"

I felt that just because I had lost several years of time with my family, did not mean that I could not rebuild from what was left. I would replace those nostalgic emotions of yesterday with the happiness and joy of tomorrow.



STUTI RAO TELIDEVARA

Class XII

Mallya Aditi International School
Bangalore
Karnataka



MALLYA ADITI INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, BANGALORE

Mallya Aditi International School, which was founded in 1984 by Anne Warrior, Geetha Narayanan, and a pioneering group of committed teachers and parents, remains true to its values and to the continuous development of its core competence: teaching and learning. The school strives to create a learning environment that is child-centred, international in perspective, engaging, active and critical. The school celebrates student and teacher - led initiatives and values creativity, excellence and a social conscience. Aditi graduates attend some of the best colleges and universities in India and around the world. Recent accolades won by Aditi students include the India A-Level Prize and awards for outstanding performance worldwide and nationwide in CIE examinations.

NOSTALGIA- AS A TEENAGER LOOK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN YOUR FAMILY WAS YOUR WORLD.

NOSTALGIA

The dregs of that time, those days
Are just not restricted to
Some soft, warm corner
Of childhood memory.
Still, my brother is the only one
Who remembers
My favourite ice-cream flavours,
My favourite chips flavours.
He never has to ask.
Still, my grandparents laugh as

They remember

The cartoons I used to watch with them-
Cat chases mouse, mouse outwits cat -
And the vernacular serials I understood then
Far better than I can now.
Still, this state of mind envelops us
On some rainy days, while playing cards at a table,
We look at each other half smiling,
Saying, "Do you remember?"
I do, I do remember.
Crying near my father's armchair,
Crying at meals, crying after school, for days,

Crying even as they wiped my tears away.
 I remember a far - off country, another home,
 With white walls, a grey shingled roof,
 And the crunch, snap, crackle of autumn leaves.

I do not remember the pain of my first ear -
 piercing,
 I do remember the studs in all the colours of the
 rainbow,
 Which I had badgered mother for.
 They would vanish into the bed sheets every night
 To my mother's immense chagrin.
 She scolded me
 For being so careless and irresponsible.
 But we searched through the bed sheets
 Together.

Distinctly, as if it were only yesterday,
 I remember the spinning rides at carnivals,
 My father insisting worriedly,
 "Stop, you'll be sick if you go one more time!"
 I won him over, every time,
 And we sat in the same whirling, pink and blue
 teacup,
 Laughing and shouting
 As the trees around us faded to green blurs.
 All that was left was
 A light - headed joy,
 And the comfort of his hand holding mine.

I remember believing so wholeheartedly,
 Childishly,
 Faithfully,
 In every single thing my mother told me.
 "Don't swallow chewing gum, or
 A tree will grow in your stomach!"
 I believed her so fiercely,
 That I howled for hours
 When the traitorous mint slid down my throat!

I remember the safe cocoon
 Of my grandfather's arms,
 Back when he could carry me.
 (These days I dare not let him try)
 I do remember,
 The two of us crashing down a flight of stairs,
 Him, bruised and dazed,
 I, absolutely unfazed.
 He was with me; what could go wrong?
 I do not remember the car accident,
 But I vaguely remember
 Afterwards.
 My mother, shaken but unhurt,
 Her lime - green car, my favourite car,
 Once gleaming, a brave little warrior,
 Now slightly dented, battered, as if
 It had emerged victorious, after a fight.
 My father told her to be more careful.
 I, on the other hand,
 Refused to admit that it had even happened.
 It seemed impossible to me
 That my mother, my careful,
 Loving,
 Laughing mother could ever make such a mistake.

Days on end, my parents were at the hospital,
 Awaiting a new life.
 We had already named him after hundreds of
 Bollywood heroes.
 I, excited and four years old,
 Was convinced that he was the next SRK.
 I remember the small, squealing, red thing.
 "This is your brother!"
 I was rather disappointed, I confess,
 By this strange, pink, being.
 He fell asleep often, everywhere,
 Could not even speak a word I understood,

And he occupied "my" spot,
Nestled between my parents on the big bed.
I, meanwhile was relegated to the guest room,
My soft, powdery grandmother by my side.
But I remember,
Never, not once,
Feeling any dark speck of jealousy
I did not love him yet, that was true,
But I did not mind him.

I remember biting back tears at my first injection.
At the burst of pain,
The air, sterile, sharp and forbidding.
My doctor gave me a lollipop when it was over,
Telling me, I had been a brave girl.
For I had not cried a single tear.
My mother, by my side, had smiled proudly,
I think I had been clutching her hand
All along.
I still remember the first time my father let me go.

I remember the tall slide,
As high as the clouds to me.
And my father anxiously asking the attendant,
If I was old enough.
But when he turned to ask me,
I was already halfway down the slide,
Laughing and shouting.
When we reminisce today,
That blanket of warm nostalgia,
Soft on our minds,
We always come to that story.
My father looks at me, smiling,
His drawn, lined face
Joyous,
And almost bittersweet.
He asks,
"Do you remember?"
"I do," I say
"I do."



**Cherish your
human connections:
your relationships
with friends and family.**

Category II





SIDDHANT BHARDWAJ

Class X

South City International School
Kolkata
West Bengal

1ST RANK



SOUTH CITY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, KOLKATA

South City International School provides a world-class educational facility - a modern school with world-class infrastructure. We prepare students as global citizens, with Indian values and multicultural diversity. We deliver the ICSE curriculum in a high-tech, learning environment with the help of highly skilled faculty.

It is situated at a prime location in Kolkata and is housed in a 5 storied building; comprising a built-up area of 127000 sq.ft. (approx) within a campus area of 3.6 acres, with the provision of abundant playing opportunities. It is an English Medium, co-educational day school open to all, free from discrimination on grounds of caste, community or gender.

MAN IS LONELY IN THE CROWD.

Beads of sweat trickled down his dolorous countenance. He was one among the many, a frog among the fish, an atom in a polyatomic molecule, and a loner in a deluge of sea of apathy. Shivam was just a pseudonym. Men of arts and those aspiring to be men of arts, look at their birth-name, so effusive of the love of their parents, with disdain and detest before they fully discard it in a fervour of artistic nihilism. He was one of them, an aspiring man of art. His ambition - he had a plethora of possibilities, an array of ambitions. He had a pleasant face to look at, with hazel eyes (uncommon among Indians, but quite common to his patrician Kashmiri genes), light

brown hair, a lean figure with rippling muscles, and a deep, baritone. He looked down upon the audition paperwork, now slightly stained by the sweat from his palms mingling with the omnipresent dirt. His eyes looked at the mahogany door towards the stage - the dais of dreams, an omniscient ocean of opportunities. It had to be his opening into his world of dreams and an escape from this labyrinth of despondency.

He buried his face in his palms. The day smoked of past experiences - that first drama, the first prize at the St. Homer's Drama fest and the beginning of his

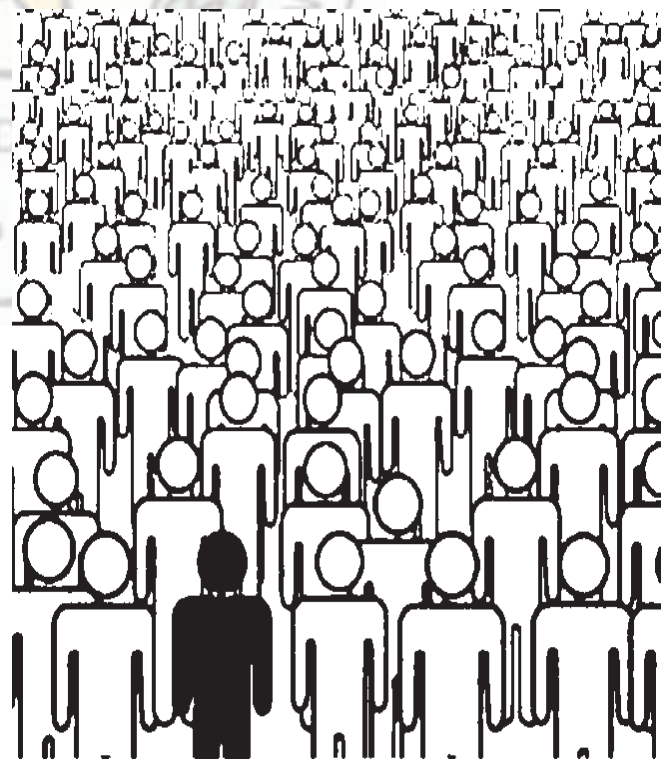
tryst with acting. The going had been good, fine as long as one enjoyed the praise and pat of family elders - the patronizing pat on the back of the 'hero' of the elite family. Then, the board examinations, the engineering entrance tests mingled with the distaste on his father's face so much smacking of hypocrisy that one feels at pursuing one's aspiration. Wasn't it this very father, who had uttered the golden words, "Aspire to inspire, before you expire".

"Salim Baig, Number 242, come inside". A burly, bearded, dark man with a shaggy beard and unkempt hair, announced the name. Shivam looked at the obese fellow, his rotund figure, his features flushed under the fat with what seemed to him, an air of finality. He gazed at his own sheet. Number 243, that is; just a few minutes and it would be his chance at being a part of the game. Either enjoy the glamour of fame or despair in the abyss of shame. He sneezed with a fury that would only have offended Zeus of mythical Hellenic paradise. Despite this, silence, descended on the congregation like the chador on the bride. Shivam looked around. He found his solitude offensive.

Another memory dawned upon him, lacerating away at his soul and away at his swagger. "Out of my house you; you are a disgrace on my family," and out flew his suitcase. He looked star-struck and teary-eyed at his father. His father's equally handsome face was now bloated by virulent rage and venomous villainy. The door slammed upon him. The invectives, rung in his ears like Phantom's talk. His mother standing by the door side, not comprehending his mistake, had tears streaming down her apple-red cheeks as she looked down on him helplessly. The sound of the door slamming closed upon him forever, had been a loud noise, screaming and violent.

A dull and rapid pain shook him out of his sublime reverie. He looked around. All those in his vicinity were busy reading and re-reading their dialogues. He

remembered a quote from Father Joseph, "Always remember; acting is not a profession but a passion." A curious smile revved up his dimpled cheeks. "Shivam, Number 243. Come quickly." Shivam looked at the burly bearded man and rose to his full six feet divinely ordained height. The ceiling fan was humming ceaselessly and remarkably slowly. He looked at the room one last time before he strode into the palace of possibilities. Here he had been for four hours, anticipating his 'moment' and now looked back at the petite span of time with absolutely no nostalgia. It was a desolate place for him, although full of hope, it was just another desert he had had to traverse in his voyages in search of the oasis of opportunity. They, the remaining participants, were indifferent. He ambulated his way to the mahogany door. It was then that his precociously percipient mind finally dissected his dilemma. He was left with nothing but an abiding sense of loneliness. Man is, indeed lonely, in a crowd.





NILANJANA THAKUR

Class X

Adamas International School

Kolkata

West Bengal

2ND RANK



ADAMAS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, KOLKATA

Adamas International School is a co-educational day boarding school established by Sachis Kiran Roy Memorial Trust. The school strives to create an environment for the pursuit of excellence so that every student can reach his or her full potential. Moreover the school aims essentially to create awareness in the students about the society they live in, the environment and their cultural diversity.

The school has a sprawling campus with state-of-the-art facilities. A wide range of extra curricular activities are offered to the students along with quality classroom transactions by hand picked faculty.

The true strength of Adamas lies in the vision of the founders who dreamt of an education system that would germinate the seedlings, nurture the saplings to see them reap rich fruits in the future.

I DO NOT KNOW MY NEIGHBOURS.

I do not know my neighbours and never will. She was the first one whom I called a 'friend'. Her family moved into the elegant cobble stoned house next to ours. I was just a child, restless and mischievous whereas she was timid and composed. In spite of the difference we quickly became friends.

She exuded a different aura. To me she was an enigma. The bombings began when we were merely eight- year old. It was a dark age for Japan. There was no trust, no unity. 'Bombs', 'terrorists', 'death', were words splashed on the newspapers every day. Amidst it all we were still children. Devoid of suspicion and worry we were in our own world.

I had engaged her in an intense game of checkers in my bedroom. It was late evening but our parents were not at home yet. A heavy sound on the door!

We had been taught to check the eyehole. We did.

Men in Black! They were not the ones we see in movies.

My face lost its colour. I stood paralysed. For a moment I missed my heart beat. I was the boastful 'Savior of the World', or that was what I pretended to be. Why were my reflexes betraying me now? "Nao.....", I whispered, "Terrorists!"

I wondered why these feelings of the past returned to me, lying on the little patch of grass just outside the Base Camp. Beside me, I could see her sitting up, sighing involuntarily.

It was the edge of devastation. What remained was the charred residue of the post- apocalyptic land- we used to call 'home'.

Two nuclear missiles had razed Japan to the ground. The evacuation was efficiently done. But Captain Nakono's Unit refused to leave their Motherland until all their countrymen who were clamouring for aid were extricated and dispatched safely to the headquarters in Philippines.

Nao was the Chief of the Rescue Squad. I was her Vice- chief. I looked at her stern expression and instantly knew that she was trying to hold back those tears. I pulled her close and buried her warm face in my shoulders. "You're not alone in this, Nao," I whispered.

She had saved my life that day. She had been the hero in my eyes, not the delicate, petite entity I assumed her to be. She had hidden us in the closet while they were rampaging through my house. I realized that I did not know her. The sun light was blurred with the radiance barely reaching our eyes. I entered the room to see another "Motivation Session" in progress. The cynosure of the heart-broken crowd was of course Nao.

"Rescue Squad, don't lose heart. Don't you know that the soil you tread on belongs to your motherland? Don't you hear the muffled cries of a million of your neighbours, buried under the debris? You say you are homesick. Home is not a place- home is people. Would you turn your back to all those people waiting for you? Can you be so selfish? Come on, get up. We have to salvage the lives of those who are waiting for our rescue!" she had the magic to light the faces with smiles and kindle the fire that inspires them to serve relentlessly and selflessly.

At the tender age of fifteen, she was the heart and soul of the Rescue Squad.

I was waiting for her outside, waiting for that smile that gives me a skipped beat. I wanted to talk to her about the afternoon expedition.

We set out along with a team of five senior Commander for the Tokyo Tower- the critical region of contamination. We divided ourselves into groups and began our search for any lucky survivor of the hell-hole.

A sudden scream took me aback. We rushed to the spot. We fixed our eyes on the man. His hands were trembling. Among the convulsive pools of innocent blood and piles of corpses, we saw a sign of life.

"Don't you see the armband on his uniform? He is from the U.S. Bomb Squad! He did this to us! Kill him", a comrade of ours shouted hoarsely.

Nao approached him steadily, giving him a shot of ether- to cure all. The other five had their fingers fixed deftly on their triggers.

As soon as he gained consciousness, the man held a shotgun to his head. "It's over for me, eh? I won't surrender. I'll die before I do. I'll be true to-"

To everyone's horror, Nao shot her rifle. The bullet pierced the air, silent and unstirred. It hit the shotgun and threw it at a protracted distance.

Our mouths were gaping open as she approached her hostile enemy. "Nao....., I whispered, almost seeing her in a new light.

The U.S. soldier broke down. "They said they would kill my family." He couldn't speak anymore as a flush of tears inhibited his tongue. Nao held out her hand. "Come on, get up, I understand that what you have done is beyond forgiveness. But you're human and in your eyes I can still see humanity left. It is not the time to shed tears."

Dusk had set in the old capital. The bleared sky was once again dyed with shades of dirty crimson. "An angel in disguise," they whispered, but Nao didn't hear a word.

She turned to me, almost speaking to herself. "Shin, isn't this our home? Just the air is not as fresh as it used to be. Can't you still visualize the Tokyo Tower, when you stare at that vacancy?"

It brought tears to both our eyes. "The U.S.- weren't they just our neighbours? But we didn't know our neighbours well. We'll never do. The world is going to end soon in another apocalypse. Shin, will these people ever change? Will they, just for the sake of Mother Earth and their universal neighbours, endeavour their fullest- to stay human, and humane?"



DIVISHA BISWAS

Class X

St. Agnes School

Kharagpur

West Bengal



ST. AGNES SCHOOL, KHARAGPUR

St. Agnes School, Kharagpur, established by the Apostolic Carmel Education Society is administered by the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel since 1951. Set in a sprawling green campus, St. Agnes caters to more than 2600 students through quality school education and well equipped infrastructure facilities and amenities supported by the commitment and experience of the management. Appreciated over the years by numerous parents and well wishers owing to their commitment to excellence, the institution creates an exemplary ambiance to foster an all round development in a child empowered with a strong moral fibre, to bring about a conducive foundation.

3RD RANK

I DO NOT KNOW MY NEIGHBOURS.

I do not know my neighbours. It is a month since they have moved in, yet I have not been able to have any acquaintance with them. My servant David informed me that they are a family of two- a thin, lanky man with unkempt looks and an old lady with a perennially haggard expression, supposedly his mother. Introvert in nature my neighbours prefer to stay by themselves. The interesting part of it was the man and I shared the same profession- both of us were painters.

Presently I'm working on a portrait which is to occupy a place in an exhibition in the most renowned CIMA Art Gallery. I'm determined to win the first prize, at any cost.

Surprisingly, David informed me this morning that my neighbour is working on a portrait which is supposed to be put up in the same exhibition. Evidently, his portrait was taking a wonderful shape. It was spectacular and undoubtedly far better than mine.

Anger coursed through my veins. I did not want any competition this year. That prize of a whopping amount had to be mine. An evil idea sprang in my mind. In the dead of the night, I walked stealthily to my neighbour's bedside window with a giant basket in hand. I opened the lid and a reptile, most vicious in nature slithered inside the room with its scales shining in the silvery moonlight. Seeing the easel close at hand, I stretched my arm and with

immense care tore the picture which was placed on it. Only the moon behind the veil of dark clouds remained a witness to the hideous deed.

The next morning, I was aroused from my slumber by piercing plaintive cries of deep sorrow. My plan had worked. The cobra had killed him. A furtive glance from me revealed an old lady sitting beside the painter's corpse. The noise of her wail was faint but did not fail to reach my ears.

I stood in front of the masterpiece. The anticipation of success chased me. Each stroke of the paintbrush filled me with a sense of triumph. Even the tiniest brush stroke of colour made me ecstatic. My portrait was that of a snake charmer showing his tricks in the midst of a busy market place. As I stood admiring the masterpiece, my pet dog Toby came running to me. His luxuriant gold fur lay in rich swathes over his well fleshed ribs. His tail, which was beautifully fringed, fanned the air gently. I said, "Stay here Toby, while I go out for a walk. Let no one come near the easel. I walked out after giving instructions.

Within seconds, a loud cry of excruciating pain and agony reached my ears, as if someone was dying. I stormed inside my workroom and was filled with horror. Toby lay still on the ground. A bluish tinge shrouded his dying face. He cast a pathetic look at me, whimpered a bit and breathed his last. Dazed, I looked up at the easel. My painting had vanished into thin air. Shocked, I squatted on the ground. It was then that I encountered a ghastly scene.

A thick black snake slithered past me, making a hissing sound. As I watched, it crept into a roll of paper lying beside Toby's dead body. So it was the culprit. My dog had died of snakebite. In a flash, I remembered that roll of paper - my neighbour's unfinished portrait that I had stolen from his house. Gingerly, I opened the roll, half expecting the snake to come out. But to my utter surprise, it didn't. As I opened the picture in the rays of the resplendent sunlight, I could hardly believe what I saw. The

portrait was of a man sitting beside a stream. The figures were all made of stone. The snake that I had seen a moment ago lay at the man's feet. Scared, I threw the picture away. Realization dawned on me. "Medusa", I whispered. My neighbour was painting a portrait of this mythological character, who, had snakes for her hair and whose gaze turned men into stone. As I looked at the portrait, I saw that the snakes were slowly coming to life. They slithered out of the picture and clambered onto my limbs. I screamed. I shut my eyes in fear and collapsed.

On regaining my consciousness, I found that I was standing in front of my easel. The portrait stood there, staring at me. I could not bear it any longer. I tore my portrait away from the easel and then tore it again with all my might into tiny bits of paper. My neighbour deserved the prize, not I. I certainly do not know my neighbours. Are they really humans or have they emerged from the pages of Mythology and ancient folklore? Are they painters of the highest order? My mind was shrouded in mystery. What do you think?





SHAREEN RAI

Class IX

St. Joseph's Convent
Kalimpong, Darjeeling
West Bengal



ST. JOSEPH'S CONVENT, KALIMPONG

St. Joseph's Convent, Kalimpong is a Private Unaided Minority English Medium Catholic Institution, belonging to the Registered Society of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. The School was established by the Cluny Sisters in 1926.

The aim of the School is the all round development of students. Care is taken to help each one grow spiritually and aesthetically, morally, physically and academically in a homely atmosphere and in close collaboration with parents.

Pupils are expected to do their best to attain that harmonious development which will make them worthy citizens of a great nation sincerely committed to God, home and country.

MAN IS LONELY IN THE CROWD.

"We are born alone and we die alone. Everything in between is just an illusion. Even amidst a sea of people, man is alone. Man stands alone even in a crowd". The monotonous tone in which these words were uttered, threatened to put many hot-blooded, vigorous and robust youths to sleep. As I looked around, I could see many of my classmates, who were a few moments ago brimming with enthusiasm, drifting off to sleep. These words seem to be so captivating to me that it was as if it had woken me up from this deep slumber I didn't realize I'd fallen into. A question arose within me which I had failed to understand. Are all these panoramic moments simply a wild and crazy dream? Am I really alone, even in the midst of so many around me?

School was as usual, with the girls screaming at the top of their lungs, eruptions of laughter here and there and a lot of chaos. I stood there, alone, in the midst of this kaleidoscopic scene and wondered if I truly knew these people, I'd seen since kindergarten. Did I really completely understand them? Did I know them, inside out? No, I didn't know these people at all. "Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, only they know their sorrows, and only they know their story. They lived their story alone, we were just accessories, we were just 'there'."

I failed to comprehend earlier that I was alone too. I wasn't the genuinely open book I claimed to be.

Moreover, the people, who like me, prided in being 'open books', were equally false as well. I realized that there never was a time when I completely poured out my secrets. I'd never actually shared my innermost secrets with anyone, never poured out my deepest thoughts to anyone, so much so that I'd be left with this abysmal void within my heart.

Yes, I was quite alone. Even though the bonds of our family were intricately woven together and as strong as the mighty Hercules, I'd failed to let my guard down, failed to express myself even to the people I trusted with my life. I alone, knew my true story and this story, I could never pen down. Little episodes of my life were known to a large number of people, but these little moments were but a drop in the mighty ocean. I was a lonely little girl in a sea of people, who knew nothing of the deep desires buried deep inside my heart.

A painful, unfathomable question was gnawing at me. These demons threatened to devour my entire soul, threatening to crush my conscience and to take away my identity. Yes, I was alone, and I made peace with that. Even in a crowd of people, I would always be alone. But why was this grotesque picture coming to my mind over and over? Why was I clad in monochrome while the entire world around me, had all the colours of the rainbow? Why was I, a mere black and white statue, cold and expressionless, while the whole world was surrounded by, prismatic ornaments? Was this supposed to be my life? A blatant, lonely, isolated life, while the others around me acquired the wrinkles in their senescence with laughter lines? Was this what the divine cosmic force had written in the stars for me? Was I really star crossed, this ill-favoured by nature?

I realized that it wasn't me that felt this way. There were millions who felt exactly like me, a mere mortal lost in the divine crowd. The noise of massacre and pain had finally waned and I realized that my isolation and loneliness arose not from

being cast aside, but rather by the fear of not being understood by others.

It was because of this fear that I failed to be an open book and I knew now that it was impossible for anyone else to be one. There would always be pages torn, ripped out of their very existence, there would always be chapters left unread and more chapters to be inked. This invisible wall that I had put up would take millennia to break down. I would be this duck, who looked calm and serene on the outside, but had a lot going on under the surface. No one would see my paddling and striving to stay afloat underneath.

Even in this vibrant world, I felt alone, and I can make a pretty good guess that others did too. Unless we were all willing to bring down this invisible fence and put our guards down, we would always be lonely in a vast crowd. We could go from pillar to post and search the seven seas, but we could never find the magical formula to set us free from our loneliness.

We all, young and old, would just be mere men, lonely in a crowd.





SALEHA MARIAM

Class VIII

Florence Public School

Bangalore

Karnataka



FLORENCE PUBLIC SCHOOL, BANGALORE

Florence Public School, Bangalore made its humble beginning 3 decades ago following the 3D policy - dedication, devotion and discipline.

State-of-the art infrastructure and facilities are provided to the children. The team of sincere, efficient and dedicated teaching faculty has created excellent, interactive learning experience.

A healthy and friendly atmosphere is created with a different learning experience and also to prepare the children to be sensitive and responsible citizens of tomorrow.

Our school has always been striving hard to bring out the inherent talent of the children and inculcate leadership qualities in preparing them for global challenges in academics, sports and cultural activities.

MY MOTHER AND I - AT SIX AND AT SIXTEEN.

A small smile danced across my lips as I walked down the familiar road where I had once played, laughed and cherished the memorable years of my childhood. I saw a little girl dressed in a uniform, her hair neatly plaited, skipping along the road. A woman, who looked in her early thirties walked beside the little girl. I assumed they were mother and daughter by the protective manner in which the lady held the girl's hand and the way her eyes adored the little girl. The sight brought back memories of my own childhood. As a child, I always had trouble socializing with people. Being bold and boisterous was never in my nature. On the contrary, I was a quiet and shy girl who loved to stay in my own world. The only person I ever socialized with and shared my feelings had always been my mother. Even after three years of schooling, I was afraid of

leaving my house. It was always the same routine. I'd wake up in a cheerful mood, dress up and hurry off to school with my mom. But when we reached the school gates every ounce of courage would leave my body and fear would quickly replace it. I would wrap my arms around my mom and hide my face in her dress. "Sammy, for the millionth time, quit being a coward," my mother would say. Annoyance was clear in her voice. "But mommy," I would begin in a meek voice and her face would quickly take up a concerned expression "Sammy, child, I can't always be there with you. Can I?" she would say softly. But looking at my uncertain expression she would say "You are my brave tigress who doesn't fear anyone, right?" I would nod.

"Good, now prove me right. Off you go

sweetheart". She kissed my forehead and pushed me gently towards the gate. That was how my day began.

It was a long time ago when I was probably 6 years old. Things had changed a lot since then. When I was 13, I had clearly broken out of the cocoon of shyness and become very sociable and bold. I didn't shy away from others as I used to. But I wasn't the only one who had changed. My sweet mom had now become overly protective about me. She didn't let me go for field trips or for movies with my friends. She'd restricted my clothing to traditional Indian dress and sometimes formal dresses. Jeans were never found in my closet nor fancy tank tops and short skirts. I'd frequently argue with her and she would always ignore my choices and preferences. Our relationship had taken a very bad turn.

A few more years and everything changed again. I was 16 and our relationship had gone far beyond better. My mom had become my best friend. How? It is the most interesting part. I had become a teenager now. I experienced many changes both physical and mental. And through all those changes my mother had become my support, my shield and my confidante. She guided me when I felt helpless. She held me close when I felt shattered.

'A mother is a girl's best friend', it was now when I was 16 that I truly comprehended the meaning of that phrase. When I lost in the storytelling-competition, the one I had worked so hard for, I felt that the world had come to an end. But my mother held me in her arms, gently wiping away my tears. She whispered in my ear, "Sammy, you lost the battle not the war. Didn't I tell you the story of Napoleon?"

"Mom, not now". I said between sobs, clearly not understanding why my mother would want to tell me about Napoleon's life history right then.

"Sammy, you remember the story?"

"Yes".

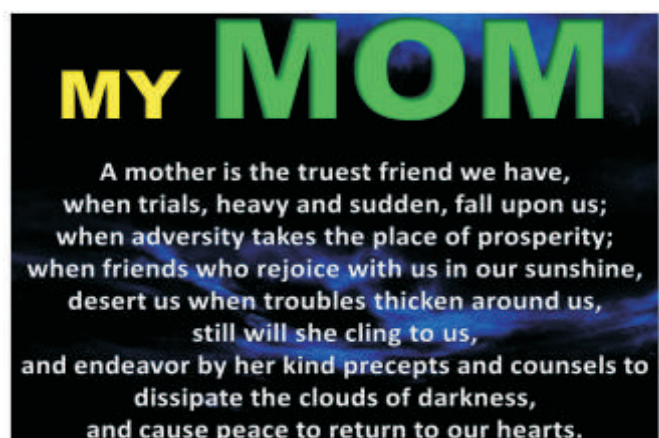
"Then why are you crying?"

"I am not Napoleon, the Great. I am a loser who has no wish to live. I am different."

"You are right and wrong my little tigress. You were right when you said you were different. But you were wrong when you said that you were a loser."

This was how she encouraged me when I felt low.... The sound of a honking startled me. I looked up realizing that I had been thinking for about twenty minutes. I began to walk waiting for the familiar voice to call my name and ask me to walk straight. I waited but no sound came. I suddenly tripped over a stone and fell down. 'Ouch,' I groaned and waited for warm hands to lift me up and a sweet, concerned voice to ask if I was all right. But when no sound came, I looked up only to find that my mother wasn't there behind me. I stood up and searched frantically. My eyes landed on the wind shield of a car and I stood motionless as I looked at the image. I didn't see a girl with braces and spectacles instead I saw a young lady staring back at me. Realization began to kick in. I was no longer a kid but now am an adult. I hadn't exactly come out of my little train of thought. I sighed and dusted my dress. "Mom" a small voice called, I turned around and saw a little girl staring at me.

"Are you okay?" she asked softly. I recognized her instantly. She had my brown eyes and creamy skin. She was my daughter.





CAMELLIA CHOUDHURI

Class X

Calcutta Girls' High School

Kolkata

West Bengal



CALCUTTA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL, KOLKATA

The stately pink-white buildings enclose much more than an educational institution. Founded in 1856, Calcutta Girls' High School has a rich history in instilling in young minds the virtues of life, apart from preparing them to tackle any obstacle head-on. The brilliant Board results and the numerous trophies that the school secures year after year prove that academics and extra-curricular activities are equally encouraged. From singing to calligraphy, from science camps to karate, the school offers a plethora of subjects and activities to suit individual needs and facilitate creative thinking which is highly valued in today's competitive world.

I DO NOT KNOW MY NEIGHBOURS.

I lie here on my bed, with a convulsive spasm, trying to clear my memory and figure out what a fool I have been. I cannot breathe. My hands feel numb and my throat is parched. I have nothing left, but a few seconds of my life. I can only think and reflect upon the bygone days and admonish my foolish self. I can only wish that I was in a position to comprehend the complex enigma of the human mind. I wish my consciousness and my ability to delve deeper into the brains of human beings and warn me about my end. I wish I could see right through the opaque mask of goodness that people adorn their faces with, to conceal their gruesome and murky selves.

1940- The year was a turning point in my life. Whether it was good or bad- I do not know. Before that, I was Mathew Carter, just a boy of sixteen, living amidst the lakes and mountains of the Scottish Highlands. My pre-occupations spanned from grazing sheep, riding horses, looking after the farm and school. This year changed it all when the world was shaken by the outcries of the Second World War.

It was compulsory for me to serve the army. In spite of being a reluctant sixteen year old, I had no option left.

I lived the hard and tiring life of a soldier, living in different places like trenches, tents or even atop a

giant Torpedo Missile without the slightest moan. I suffered battle wounds, made friends, gathered bizarre experiences and finally retired from this laborious task when the war ceased.

Although I didn't get a chance to go home, I had no one there. My parents were dead. I was alone in the big bad world, left to fend for myself. I looked around for employment desperately for I needed a way to silence my gnawing stomach.

I had read of men who said writing down one's thoughts was almost like confiding in one's loved one. I wanted to experiment and began penning down my feelings. As I chronicled the incidents that had occurred in my life on paper, a story of my life began taking shape.

In 1960, I published my work. The little blue leather bound diary saw the light of the day. Strangely the saga of the highland boy became a bestseller.

For years my works were bestsellers and I became a man of repute. People would flock around me for autographs and I loved to oblige.

One such day I came across a little boy named Zach. The eleven year old was crying behind a bush when I was sauntering in the park. I asked him what was the matter and he poured out his heart,

breaking into sobs. He had lost his entire family in a fire and had no place to live. I felt pity for him and asked him to move in with me. Wouldn't it be nice for a septuagenarian to have a child at home? Besides, he reminded me how I had to endure the loneliness of being a lone soldier at the tender age of sixteen.

It was I who schooled Zach. I was his mentor in everything, Algebra as well as hockey.

Zach is now in my study to assemble the papers that proclaim him to be the sole legatee of my estate. I see a faint beam of light entering my room. Zach is at the doorway. He clutches the papers as if they were an elixir of his life. He smiles a cryptic smile that is so unlike the innocent smile of the time he beamed for the first time.

I do not know this man. He is alien. I had lived next to that man's room for such a long time.

We completed our last meal two hours ago. He has infused some toxic element in my food so that I would be wiped away from the face of the Earth. This is my end. I see darkness. I have again mistaken dark for light and lies for truth. I must repent for all that I have done. I know I am a fool. I do not know my neighbour.



*When one
neighbour helps
another, we strengthen
our communities.*

**CHITRA ALSE**

CLASS X

MITRA ACADEMY

BANGALORE

KARNATAKA

**MITRA ACADEMY, BANGALORE**

Mitra Academy is a private unaided co-education English medium school established in the year 2003 situated in Bangalore. The school is affiliated to the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations, New Delhi. Six batches of standard X students have passed out securing 100% results.

The school nurtures a warm, friendly and supportive learning environment. It has a compassionate staff taking care of the holistic development of students. Moral values are instilled into the children keeping in mind, the motto 'MITRATVA' friendship for eternity.

The school represents tradition, while seeking innovatory solutions to contemporary problems. It prepares students to face the complexities of a fast evolving world.

MAN IS LONELY IN THE CROWD.

I waded through the crowd, all the while keeping my eyes locked on the figure on stage. The crowd seemed to be rebelling against me, keeping me away from the stage. I had returned from the Iraq war just two days ago, and my aggressive nature had not subsided yet. After 15 years of service, I was returning home (of was left of home). After my parents were murdered, I had joined the army while my brother had joined a political party. Today, I was finally going to see what 15 years had made of my brother, the senator of this city.

The rigid army service had made me emotionally numb. After the initial shock of my parents' gruesome murder wore off, I disciplined myself not to let myself care for anyone else. What other job

sued this insane drive of mine to be detached? Though I was emotionally detached, memories of my brother brought a smile to my face and a painful ache in my heart. Today this agony would turn into elation, I was sure.

Finally, I reached the optimum spot in the crowd from which I had a panoramic view of the stage. I scrutinized the leaders, hoping to locate my small brother's spiky hair and wide grin. I shook myself and felt embarrassed. It was quite idiotic of me to think that my brother had not changed a bit.

While I was immersed in my thoughts, I did not hear the leader's commands, and the crowd going silent. Only when I heard my ragged breathing did I realize the unusual silence.

"Here is the Senator, Mr. Howard", said one of the leaders I stared at the stage, and examined my brother from head to toe. He looked more solemn and grave than I had ever seen him. Instantly, a formidable, sullen man replaced the illusion of a puny, grinning boy. A whirl wind of emotions overcame me, and I staggered. All the while, my brother too was examining the crowd.

He glanced at everybody like a tiger choosing its next prey. Finally his eyes landed on me. They say that silence is the most deafening sound, and in that moment, I couldn't agree more. Our eyes bored into each other's, and he seemed to be waiting for more. Like two alpha wolves meeting each other, I cautiously gave him a hint of a smile. His face instantly hardened, and his lips grew close to form a thin line. There seemed to be a sort of vindictive fire in his eyes, which replaced his usual warmth. I was mystified. I wondered what could have happened, which mutated my brother into a hard man.

I realized that the crowd was silent, not due to admiration or gratitude, but out of fear. I was undoubtedly worried for my brother, my mind brimming with the endless possibilities of psychological harm which my brother had faced.

The leader asked, "Such a great man like you, how do you manage your family life?"

"I don't have a family" came the curt reply.

"What about your brother in Iraq?"

"I certainly don't have a brother, and if I did there is no connection between him and I". This heart-cutting statement wrenched my heart and anguish filled me. The worst part was that he stated this while staring at me, in the eye.

Selling my life to the army gave me two things after I returned. One, a world full of opportunities dearly bought and two, a loving, caring brother, lost.

In that moment, surrounded by hundreds whose hearts were full of hope and joy, I never felt more alone. A maniacal urge to laugh overcame me. I ran away from the crowd, and the laughter flowed out of my body without my command. The laughter turned into nerve-wracking sobs. So much hope, shattered in one moment. A sudden stillness overcame me, and I felt completely detached. A sudden sensation of floating filled my body and mind. A song which my mother used to sing about my brother and I, flowed into my head.

Two naughty heads are certainly better than one
You two brothers will make the world come undone
Partners in crime, and united by blood.
You'll stick together, even during floods.
Family by blood, friends by choice,
You're perfect brothers, my two boys.
No pains, no fights shall separate you two
Looking for a best friend? The other will do
The world is profited by such a pair,
To both of you, shall come no agony or despair.

A wry smile twisted my lips. I shook my head at the memories and left my brother to the awe and adulation of the crowd. Too much separated us now. He was surrounded by a crowd. And I? I was in a crowd, but alone.





NAZNEEN SAMEER

Class X

St. Hilda's School

Ootacamund

The Nilgiris

Tamil Nadu



ST HILDA'S SCHOOL, OOTACAMUND

St. Hilda's School was founded in 1892 by the Sisters of the Church, Kilburn, UK. It is now a minority institution of the Coimbatore Diocese of the Church of South India, with students drawn from all over the country. At St. Hilda's, our vision for education has been:

- To enable a child to discover, explore and nurture her individual interests and talents
- To provide opportunities for a child to think freely and express their ideas and opinions.
- To enable children to reflect and take wise and independent decisions.

The School endeavours to fulfill this vision through a rigorous academic programme and a range of co-curricular activities.

MY MOTHER AND I - AT SIX AND SIXTEEN.

I woke up in the morning with the sunlight falling
on my face,
Oh! The first day of school was just a haze...
The alarm ringing, the cooker whistling, the iron box
pressing,
My mother sweeping, my father sleeping and I
crying.

In spite of all the daily chores at the school gate my
mother is,
Dirty, soot-covered and panting, still waiting to give
me that goodbye kiss.

In school, some of the lessons I could not
comprehend,
Little differences here and there, not a soul in the
world could mend.

The sound of the bell at three was the most
beautiful sound,
I would have not have given it away even for a
million pounds.
For at three I could get away from that wretched
place,
A run- down scary God-forsaken maze.

My ravenous stomach, angry mind and broken heart
grumbled,
But when I looked at the door, not even a word I
could mumble.
The utter delight and pleasure of seeing my mother,
Was that irreplaceable, irrevocable feeling like none
other.
I adored my mother for the various roles she could
portray,

From balancing mugs to jugs, teaching and preaching;
the fact that she was around to play.
The Bubble Bath time was awesome because of our strong bond,
But one bath time to me it dawned-
That she would not be here forever,
Who would I go to when I'm not a winner?

She made my favourite pastas, pizzas and chicken and dessert,
Took care of my daily needs and when sick remained the entire night alert.
These questions I never found answers to,
My fickle little heart and worries few.
That night I loved her so much more,
Never before was I so emotional and had eyes and throat so sore.
I hugged my mother and she held me tight,
And I silently prayed to God that she should never leave me out of sight.

Ten years went like ten days,
Faster than light was their pace.
Ten years down the lane, life took a dark and serious turn,
Tattoos and cars, bikes and parties and all acts of fun.
Shady haunts, bars and forsaken maze,
Was now our official late night party place.
I was no longer around the house much
With my mother, I never really kept in touch.
I scorned her every word
And I did not even bother if she heard.

I never cared for my mother because I had friends,
All of them impressed with my Mercedes Benz.
For some reason they thought I wasn't good enough,
I wasn't the coolest or the most beautiful or on the field tough.
Tired of life I started to draw,
But my drawings no one ever saw.
They never required canvas or pen,
But needed a few bandages now and then.
At six my mother I needed to sleep with,
But now I was no longer interested in her stories or myths.

All I wanted was money, fans, name and fame,
Whether my mother was there or not it was pretty much the same.

Gadgets, clothes and shoes filled my land,
If I didn't get them or anything my drawings would get out of hand.
I never spared her a glance even when she was ill,
Instead of attending upon her I never took care for her to heal.

I started becoming more of a rebel,
But even my erratic behavior she bore well.
My mother took hold of my hand one day,
And the look on her face was one of sadness, shock and dismay.
I withdrew my hand at once -
Have we spoken to each other, in may be months?

Her face that day I would never forget,
For the first time in years, I felt shame, remorse, guilt and regret.

I hugged her and tears rolled down my cheeks
I realized that mothers are always there - a treasure you never need to seek!
My mother too was happy to see the innocent girl she had left behind,
All she had to do was look lovingly and sure enough her daughter she could find.
As the day ended it was again like old times
The jokes, the stories, except without the nursery rhymes.

As the world's best mother, my mother I would elect,
She may not have the best looks or voice - but to me she is perfect.
Every mother has that love, you just need to look
And understand the care that all through her life she took.

Leave my mother again - I will never.
Dear Mother, I love you today, tomorrow and forever.



ZAEHEN GHANSHANI

Class X

Jamnabai Narsee School

Mumbai

Maharashtra



JAMNABAI NARSEE SCHOOL, MUMBAI

Jamnabai Narsee School is a secular co-educational private minority school managed by the public charitable trust that was established by Sarvashree Chatrabhuj Narsee in 1970. The school motto "Vidya Param Balam" has proved to be the guiding statement and beacon for all. The guiding principle of the school is "Let learning be a joy and teaching a pleasure".

The school seeks to inculcate in its students a desire to achieve excellence in all areas of endeavour. While providing a positive learning environment to our students, the school prepares the students for the Examinations conducted by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations, New Delhi.

I DO NOT KNOW MY NEIGHBOURS.

Seated in the compartment of a filthy and noisy local train, on my way to my workplace at Dadar, my thoughts wandered like they usually do. After four years of this new life, it still amazes me that I actually own a house, though small, and have a job at Akash Industries, a small scale crate manufacturing company, based in Dadar.

Four years may seem like a long time to you, but for me it was only yesterday when I was sprinting through the narrow gullies of old Dhawar with my friends in an attempt to reach school on time. Not a day goes by when I don't think about my old life. This is always a trigger that makes my memories long forgotten, resurface. Today, the trigger is the young boys running around the station, shouting

euphorically because they found a twenty-rupee note on the ground.

I see a plump woman with a big basket of food, with a very strong resemblance to Babli Aunty, a woman who lives on the third floor of my apartment building. It then suddenly hits me, that Babli Aunty and everybody else in my building has no idea about my life as I child.

There is no particular reason that I haven't told them about my past. Do not think for a moment that I am ashamed of it, because that is not true. In my own eyes, I am still that boy whose idea of fun was rolling hoops with sticks and chasing dogs, and whose idea of home was a tiny room with one light

bulb in Asia's largest slum. When I look at myself in the mirror, I am not embarrassed to see a boy from Dharavi, but I'm proud that I see a boy from Dharavi, who has made something of himself and has a career.

It bothers me as I wipe the perspiration from my brow and face with a handkerchief, that none of my neighbours knew the real me. It then dawns on me, how little that I know about them.

In Dharavi, it was different. In spite of it being home to thousands, we all knew everything about everyone in close proximity to ourselves, the good and bad and every bit that was so ... 'out there'.

Everyone knew that Mishra was an alcoholic, who, in his drunken state staggered home at three in the morning and assaulted his wife. We knew that Reshma went on walks with Salim, and that was a big deal back then especially because Reshma's father was the priest and her family was very conservative.

Everyone knew by the morning that Shankar had been arrested the previous night for possessing a gun without a license. That was funny because we knew that Dubey Bhai and Bhatia Bhai had guns as well.

We knew that Deepti Tai stole money from her memshahib's house on a regular basis. We knew that Raj sold movie tickets in black outside the nearby cinema. We knew when 'Aayi' was making ladoos, and all assembled outside her little room for her share. Everyone knew about me too, though there was not much to know.

Here, however, it was different. What I know of Mr. and Mrs. Sharma living in the first floor apartment is that they have noisy parties with guests singing the wrong lyrics to songs, even with a karaoke machine. I do not know the reason behind their

loneliness, or what void they are trying to fill by inviting people over all the time.

I know that the Mehta family has many businesses and their children study at a private school. I do not know whose picture is in that frame on their living room wall.

I know Babli Auntie makes the best parathas. I do not know why she enjoys sending them to everybody in the building.

There are so many more things about my neighbours that I don't know especially the things that I want to know. I want to know why Halwaniji is always so serious. I want to know why the Mehtas barely get out of their house. I want to know why the Gandhis are so lively and enthusiastic about everything. I want to know it all.

The answers to them may not be some serious secret at all. It might be a little thing that I want to know about my neighbours, and want them to know about me. It might never happen, though. We are so close, yet so far.

We are so close



Yet so far...



ANUSKA JAJOO

Class X

Our Lady Queen of The Missions
School
Kolkata
West Bengal



OUR LADY QUEEN OF THE MISSIONS SCHOOL, KOLKATA

Our Lady Queen of the Missions School, Park Circus, Kolkata was founded on 01st August 1946. It is administered by Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, a missionary congregation founded by Euphrase Barbier. The motto of our school is "Virtue and Knowledge."

We believe that teaching is not a profession, it's a mission. While preparing the students for ICSE, we endeavour to develop their intellectual, moral and spiritual potentiality, helping them to grow into integrated persons with self-esteem and positive values in life.

MY MOTHER AND I - AT SIX AND SIXTEEN.

I woke up every morning only to her soft and warm touch. Her cascading hair on my face would smell of my favourite jasmine oil. She hugged me and pressed me close to her bosom as I imbibed in her scent. I thought that I could never be this comfortable.

I was always a naughty child. When I cut my finger, a single call of 'Ma!' would make her drop all her work and run to me. Her love for me was undoubtedly beyond measure.

I was a non-stop talker. My mother thus found a striking similarity between me and Rabindranath Tagore's literary character - Mini. So, she called me 'Mini'. I couldn't have been any prouder, being named after Tagore's character.

The evenings with Ma were always blissful. She, being trained in Tagore songs would sing to me all his songs. On the terrace we sat, with me on her lap, and she sang. Her melodious voice pierced the atmosphere. The freckles on her face gleamed in the sun, as I tried to imitate her with my attempts to sing.

One day I stormed into my house. My friends had been teasing me about my surname. They made up ridiculous stories and were in splits every time one of them called me - "Jajoo". My mother lovingly picked me up and instantly made up humorous rhymes with the surnames of my friends. When she saw me emerging from my school bus the next day with a mischievous smile, she knew that I had been

victorious. Wherever I went, I would clasp her little finger in my hand and walk. Sometimes, she would pick me up and throw me into the sky as I giggled playfully. We loved each other so much and simply couldn't be separated.

Her home-made food was my ideal escape from the problems of life. As she fed me, occasionally wiping my mouth with her sari, I felt so blessed and complete. However, slowly our relationship started changing and both my mother and I knew it. The priorities changed, the evenings changed, my likes and dislikes changed and I changed. Surprisingly she was still the same.

Every time while crossing the road, sub-consciously she slips her hand around my arm. I nervously shove her hand away. Her cry of "Mini!" seems annoying now.

I do not wake up to her warm touch anymore - I have forgotten how it even feels. I wake up to my alarm clock now. I do not feel like having her home-made lunch anymore. Pizzas and coke are much better.

Her advice is secondary to me now. It's more important what strangers tell me on social media. I blame her for my freckles. Everyone has a boyfriend. I don't. They still tease me about my surname, Ma. These jokes are much cruder.

"Don't touch my phone, Ma. It's mine."

"Your cooking is getting worse each day."

"Don't hug me, Ma. It is embarrassing."

These were repeated almost daily. That adamant lady would never listen.

I am glad, she didn't.

"Had you not have picked up the call Ma, they would have bullied me."

"I don't like the canteen food, Ma. Yesterday I found a cockroach larva in my food."

"Please hug me, Ma. I am scared to let you go. Never let go."

"I don't want a boyfriend, Ma. He molested me."

"Thank you Ma. I am proud of my surname today."

"Could you wake me up every day Ma? Again, please?"

"Ma? Don't you hear me?"

Sadly she didn't hear me.

The radiant face of the picture on the wall would just smile back. The light reflected on her concave dimples and her freckles which were so apparent.

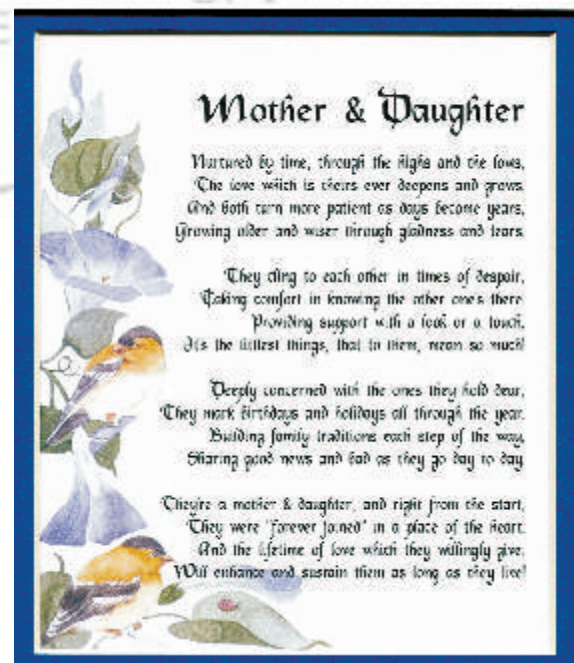
I knew the call of 'Ma!' would go unanswered from now on.

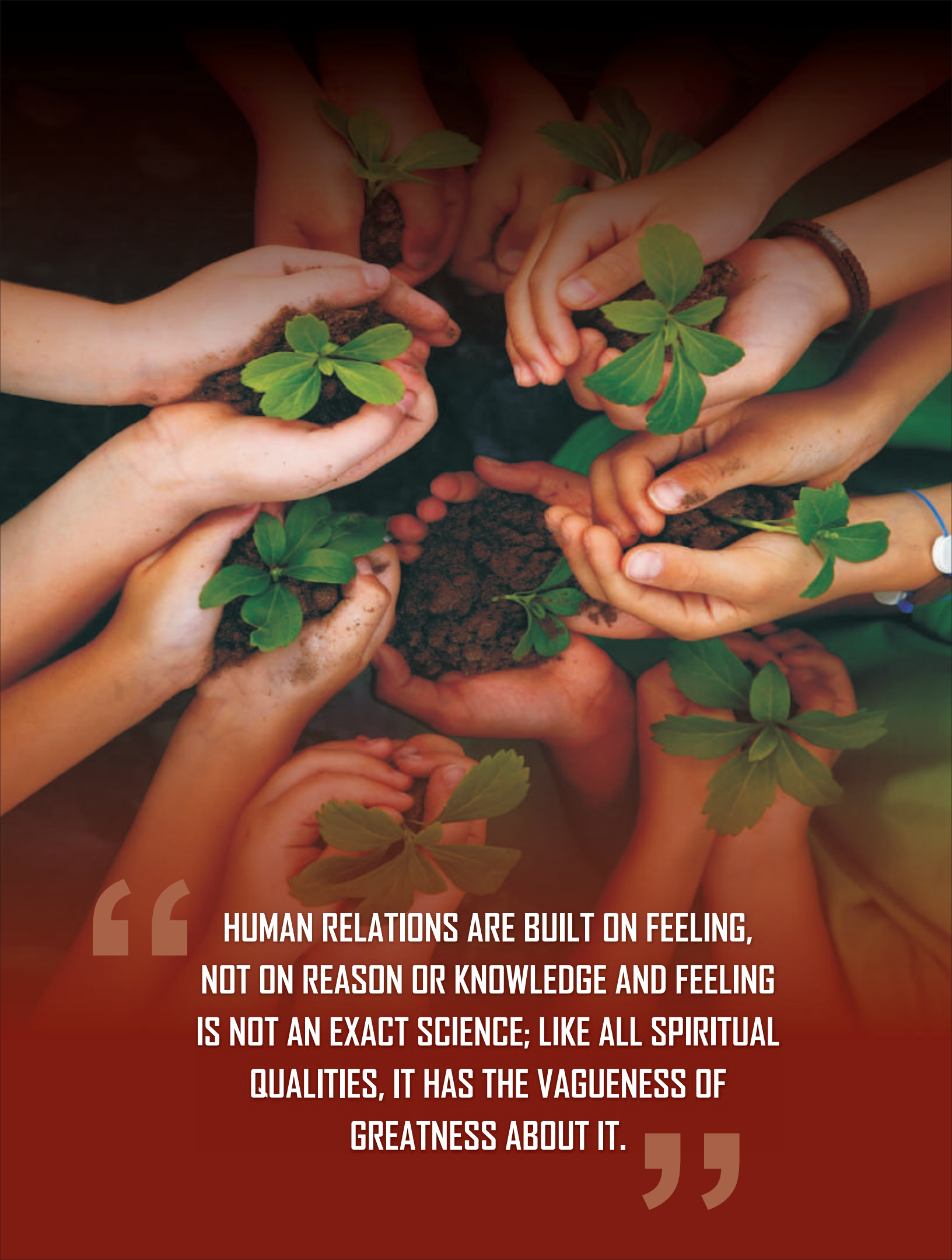
"I threw away the Green Day and Linkin Park collection Ma. Please sing a Tagore song Ma."

"I miss you, Ma."

"I love you, Ma."

I know she loves me. I feel her presence everywhere. She's now the brightest star in the sky.





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**HUMAN RELATIONS ARE BUILT ON FEELING,
NOT ON REASON OR KNOWLEDGE AND FEELING
IS NOT AN EXACT SCIENCE; LIKE ALL SPIRITUAL
QUALITIES, IT HAS THE VAGUENESS OF
GREATNESS ABOUT IT.**

”

*A human being
can have nothing closer
and dearer than
another human*



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