



The Book

‘That Bata bomb as soon as it landed on his head, made him jump with fright. Looking up he saw Dev and...’

Even before I could finish, the car was shaking with their uproarious laughter. Thumping the seats, the head rest and wherever their hands fell, they could only laugh and laugh. Gradually, as the noise began to cease, Debojo increased the air conditioning to a point just short of the maximum.

Cruising at a comfortable speed, we soon arrived at an H. P. T. D. C restaurant. Quickly filling ourselves with some snacks while washing them down with strong cups of tea, we were on the roll again.

Before long, I was soon shifting gears while negotiating those hairpin bends on our way to Junga in the Shimla Hills. While I tried to hold

myself back by deciding not to disturb them from their hypnotic state of staring at the greenery, the urge to tell them about my plans kept coming to me like the cars. And finally, like a Honda Civic which suddenly appeared at a turn and zoomed past, my voice raced past my hesitation and I spoke out.

“Well, you see,” and no sooner did I open my mouth, I saw them all attentive and ready.

“For long, I have been considering writing a book. A book, which would be a tribute to those years spent at Birla Public School and to the entire boarding school fraternity. A book, which would tell the world about my talented friends Tithar, Dev, Billi and all.”

On hearing this, Debojo spoke, “Why did you not say this earlier? In fact, I would say that, this

would be the best tribute to your school and friends.”

“Well,” I spoke again while cutting into his speech, “more than a tribute to all my friends, I would like to dedicate this book to my teachers. Moreover, I think this book would also help in shedding all those myths which engulf boarding schools. So what do you guys think?”

So engrossed were we into this conversation that we almost missed the turn leading to our destination, The Flaghouse Resort, in Junga. Negotiating that final slope and turn, we finally arrived there. Perched on top of a hill like an eagle’s nest, the resort is a luxury in the lap of nature. With pine and deodar giving the air an ethereal fragrance, we got out of the car and stood on the lawn staring at the twinkling lights of Shimla. As we stood staring, we were greeted by the receptionist with a warm smile and a courteous “Hello”. She quickly handed us the keys to our rooms. Taking the keys we headed for our rooms. Hurriedly unpacking my bag, I soon went for a shower to refresh myself and then headed off to meet the guys in the dining hall, where a warm and sumptuous meal awaited us.

The sweet chirping of the birds and the warm sunlight peeping at me from the corner of a curtain awoke me to a new day. Thinking that I was late, I hurried towards the bath and let the warm water from the shower wash my sleepiness away. Refreshed, I took out fresh clothing for the day and prepared myself a cup of tea. As I took the last sip from the cup, I heard a gentle knock on the door and saw Debojo along with Sandeep stepping into the room. I could tell that they too had had a

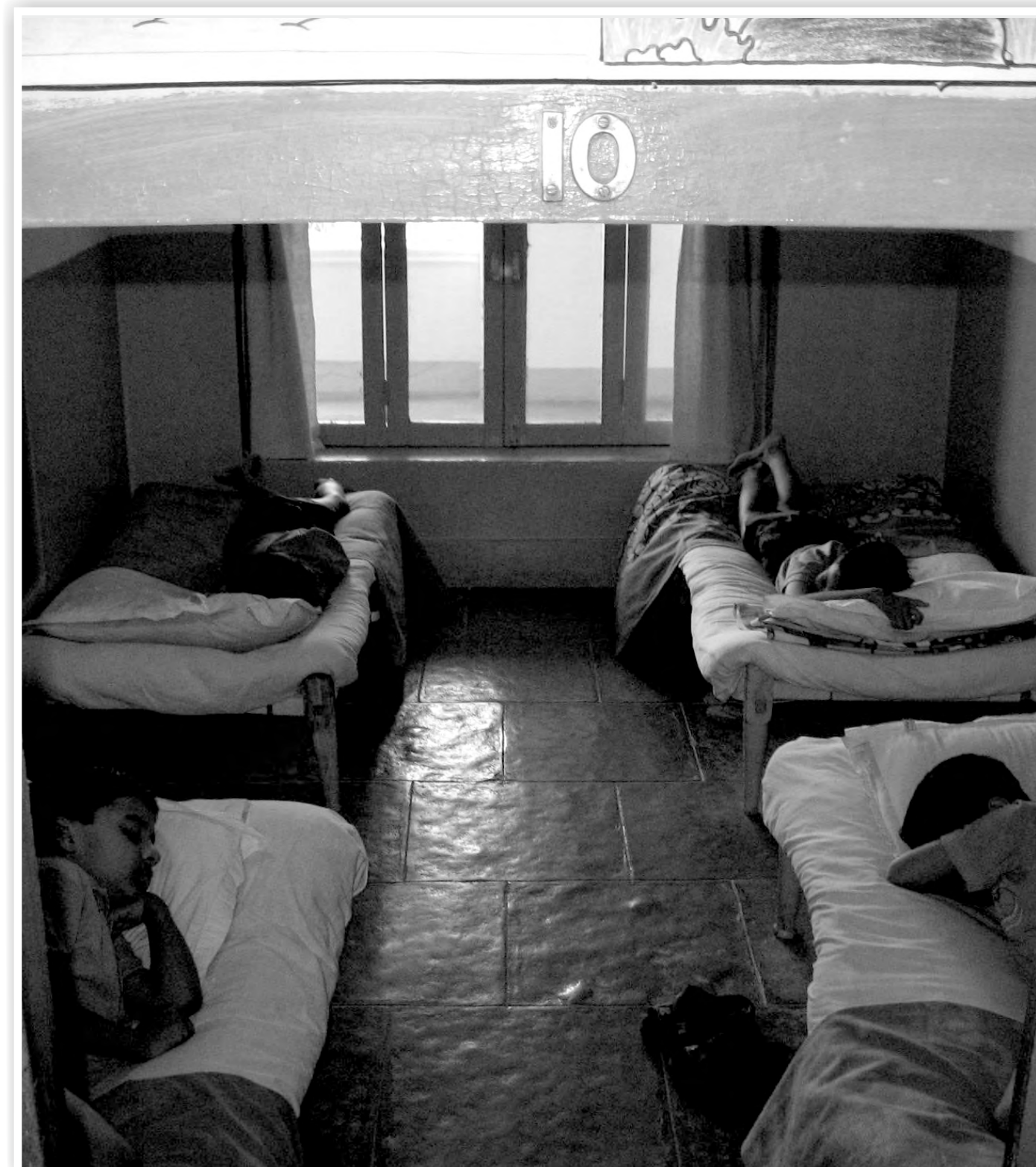
good night’s sleep and were now fully ready to leave their shoe prints in the hills of Junga. Bidding me to get dressed hurriedly, they made their way towards the dining hall. Soon I joined them for a sumptuous breakfast. Ready with cameras and trekking gear, we started our trek to the forests of Junga.

On the way, I spoke of my determination to write the book. “Guys, I have finally decided. I have decided that I am going to write the book.”

Hearing this, it was Debojo who spoke, “Well, in that case you have my full support.” Before I could speak again, Sandeep spoke, “Same here, Dada.”

“Well, now that I have decided to write the book, I am thinking of heading to my school in Pilani to collect some material for the book. In that case, I would like to know if you guys would like to take this trip to the school.”

Hearing my suggestion, we looked at each other and to my surprise they uttered the magical “Yes!” in a nano second. Overjoyed and encouraged by their support, I sprang up and picked my bag. They too did the same and we headed off deeper into the pine forests of Junga. The cool breeze was making our progress easy while a lonely Koel sang its heart out to inspire us on our march towards the summit. In such an environment, I kept thinking to myself that this place would be ideal to begin my book. After all, this solitude is just the environment I needed to put the raucousness of Birla Public School and the tales from a few more boarding schools into this book.



Above: Junior boys' dormitory of BPS, Pilani. This is the very room where I found myself with three other strangers when I joined the institution. My bed was on the top right-hand corner, when I was a student there in 1964, and now, is occupied by a student.



The toughest decision for any parents is sending their child away to a boarding school. In my case, my mother would weep at the fact that she would have to send me so far away. In the end, she was overjoyed at what her son turned out to be.
Left: My parents.

Right and Above: A big discovery begins with small steps. A final click, before we trod our way to Bhagor fort, where remoteness and also a big discovery awaited us. The students being inquisitive and exploratory in nature entered a tunnel of the fort and found two cannons which are today, proudly displayed in front of our school mess.