



We never left

There is an old saying, “East or West, home is the best”. But for us, ‘East or West, hostel is the best’. It may seem surprising to you, but this is the truth. We never wanted to leave it at the first instance. For after staying so many years, our school became our houses and our teachers, warders, housemasters and Principal became our parents. Finally, when the day arrived for us to leave, a mixed feeling overcame our minds. We just stood there, in front of the gate, without uttering any words and occasionally glancing at each other. Even when those gates were thrown open, we just could not understand as to why none of us wanted to take those first few steps into complete freedom. In my case, that same feeling which I had when my father came to drop me in this school

choked me. And to tell you the truth, the lump in my throat was only getting bigger with every passing second.

For me leaving this institution was like leaving my home. Maybe more than that. For here I had spent twelve memorable years of my life. The school had become my home now. It is here that I got all my friends like, ‘Billi’, ‘Titar’ and all. But more than anything or anybody, it is this institution that gave me my true identity. And to leave it now, would be like leaving my shadow behind. With all these thoughts racing through my mind, I was unable to take any decision. Moreover, with the lump in my throat growing bigger with each passing second, I knew I have to take those painful

steps before my friends so that they do not see tear drops in my eyes. I walked out.

When we walked out through that gate, all of us knew that we had to come back again. After all, you just can’t leave a place which has been your home for more than 12 years. So when we returned to our school, we were only too excited to be entering our home again. Besides, our super excitement was also due to the fact that we had all returned for an ‘Old Boys’ Meet’ organised by VINOBA or Vidya Niketan Old Boys Association. We were the ‘old boys’ who refused to grow old.

Speaking of old boys, they have a very important role to play in a boarding school. As much as any regular students, they are also

an integral part of a boarding school. One of the primary objectives of the Old Students Association is to bring all old students of the school to one platform from where they can meet their contemporaries – ones they may not have met since walking out of that sacred gate.

Unlike old students associations of some day-schools which are loosely bound, boarding schools' associations are closely bound and their branches are spread all across the globe. That's because, at boarding schools, students come from every corner of the country and also abroad. The old student associations thus have regional chapters like Delhi-region/Chapter, Kolkata-region, Mumbai-region, Patna-region, Jaipur-region, Chandigarh-region, Haryana-region, U.P.-region, Overseas-region, Defence Services chapter and so on.

Being the President of the Old Boys' Association of our school, I make sure that we meet often and revive our old days. We organise a lot of get together which keeps the communication going between all of us. In fact, it is more than just staying in touch with each other. It is also a reunion of families. One incident which I would always treasure in my heart was the one that happened at Howrah Station, Kolkata. More so, because it made me feel that I am indeed indispensable to my friends. It so happened during my days as the President of Old Boys Association that I went to Kolkata for our annual

get together. It was in the cold month of January but just the thought of being there with the old boys kept my heart warm throughout the way. But before I boarded the train at the New Delhi station, I had asked one of my friends to book a room for me in a hotel. All set and settled, I just could not wait any longer for the train to reach Howrah. Even when the train stopped at its designated halts, I wanted to shout at the people boarding the train and alighting from it to hurry up. I also cursed the train driver, if he slowed the train or let some other goods train overtake us. All I wanted was a non stop journey to Kolkatta. Finally, after much cursing and cribbing, I reached my destination. With the passengers hurriedly taking their suitcases and their bags, not to speak of women grabbing their sleepy children like they were their hand bags and cajoling them to wake up, I made my way through them and the over zealous porters who had already boarded the train and started picking up luggage and were haggling with their prospective customers. Then I placed myself comfortably near the door. Peering over a porter's shoulders, while holding my breath to enter my lungs as he was smelling of sweat and jute bags, I saw one of my friends and shouted out to him. Immediately, I saw him turn and run alongside the bogey while the rest followed him briskly. When the train finally came to a halt, I hurriedly alighted and hugged

him. After all, years had passed since we had last met. But as soon as I saw the other guys approaching, I suddenly realized from their faces that all was not well. Soon in the midst of hundreds of strangers walking past us, we had an argument. The agenda of the argument was me asking them to book a room for me in a hotel. It was more like an insult for them. Their reasoning was, when they were present, how could I even think of staying in a hotel. It took some time for me to cajole them. Once I told them that I won't go to the hotel, before they forgave me. And I stayed with my former classmate, Pradeep Parikh. As we walked out of the platform, it was yet another incident that reminded me how much we are attached to each other, even after so many years.

These reunions also served another purpose of bringing our families closer although, it is difficult to say how much our wives enjoyed these reunions. I can't really blame them for feeling alienated and bored. They wouldn't understand most of our talks. Imagine our talking about 'Shambu', the mysterious dog, they might be imagining a boy tied to the school bell. "How rude!" would be their only comment. Moreover, they always think that we all haven't really matured at our age because we get so involved in reviving our past that at times we forget about our ladies and end up talking till late hours of the night. Only to wake up early in the morning and



Old students memorable, everlasting imprint on the reused SS dining plates which were discontinued, however stored in the school mess and now used on the Dinosaur model at school mess, to be remembered and will be cherished forever. Old students engrave their names & batch on a plate of their times.



'Tears and cheers.'

A Emotional farewell to a teacher. A bond such as this can only happen in boarding schools, as after long years of stay and sharing even little tidbits with them, they no longer remain teachers, but become our father figures.

start huddling together to talk of the past. I am not sure how many of our ladies would accompany us in the future if we stick to our habits.

Apart from that, we further invite the ire of our ladies by organising small treks, just like old days. The only explanation we give them is that it keeps our memories alive. I don't think that convinces them enough for no matter what we tell them, they eventually believe that we are just trying to get away from them for some time. At times, it's not hard to imagine what they perceive us to be. Some little boy's cult, formed by grey-haired men to do childish activities and make fools of themselves. We could never stop their imagination, nor could we stop going back to our school. Every opportunity we got, we are there in our school, meeting old friends and teachers. And the mother of all get-togethers was the Great Diamond Jubilee of 2004.

That great Diamond Jubilee of 2004 was indeed a special one for all of us. We, the Old Boys' Association organised a function to felicitate our old teachers, those who had retired or left after many fruitful years of service to the institution. The Diamond Jubilee celebration was by far the best day to do so. Well, that was not the end of it all. Before we felicitated our old teachers, we could easily felicitate ourselves for the hard work that went into sending those invitation letters to them. Many of our teachers had left the school long back; some during the 60's, and by 2004 most of them had

changed their addresses and moved out to live a peaceful retirement life in the countryside, which they rightly deserved after teaching some of the most naughty students like us. And we broke their peace once again, when we started to trace them and call them. But this time it was different. It was yet another chapter we all wrote together.

As expected, all the teachers were filled with memories of the past and were touched by the fact that they are still being remembered by their students. Each one of us very eagerly and diligently glued our ears to our telephone receiver and began sticking our fingers in the dial pad and turning it around. The hunt for our teachers had begun. After many enquiries and leads, I finally got Mr. Pande, Bursar, one of our teachers who was at my school during the mid-sixties. After retirement, he had settled down in Ajmer, near Mayo College. Interestingly, his son also became a teacher and is teaching at Mayo College. Our conversation was quite strange. It was like a child calling up his father after a couple of decades. He couldn't recognise my voice, nor could I his. He was already eighty years old and I had grown to be a man. But when I re-introduced myself to him after narrating some incidents, he could not speak for a few minutes. I knew how he was feeling. My eyes were watery and I was sure that even his eyes were not dry. We both filled our hearts with memories of our old days. He couldn't come to the

function because of his old age, but we did send him his memento and our good wishes.

We managed to get about twenty five former and retired teachers to the function. They came from all corners of the country. It was a great feeling and we put our heart and soul into preparing for the auspicious day.

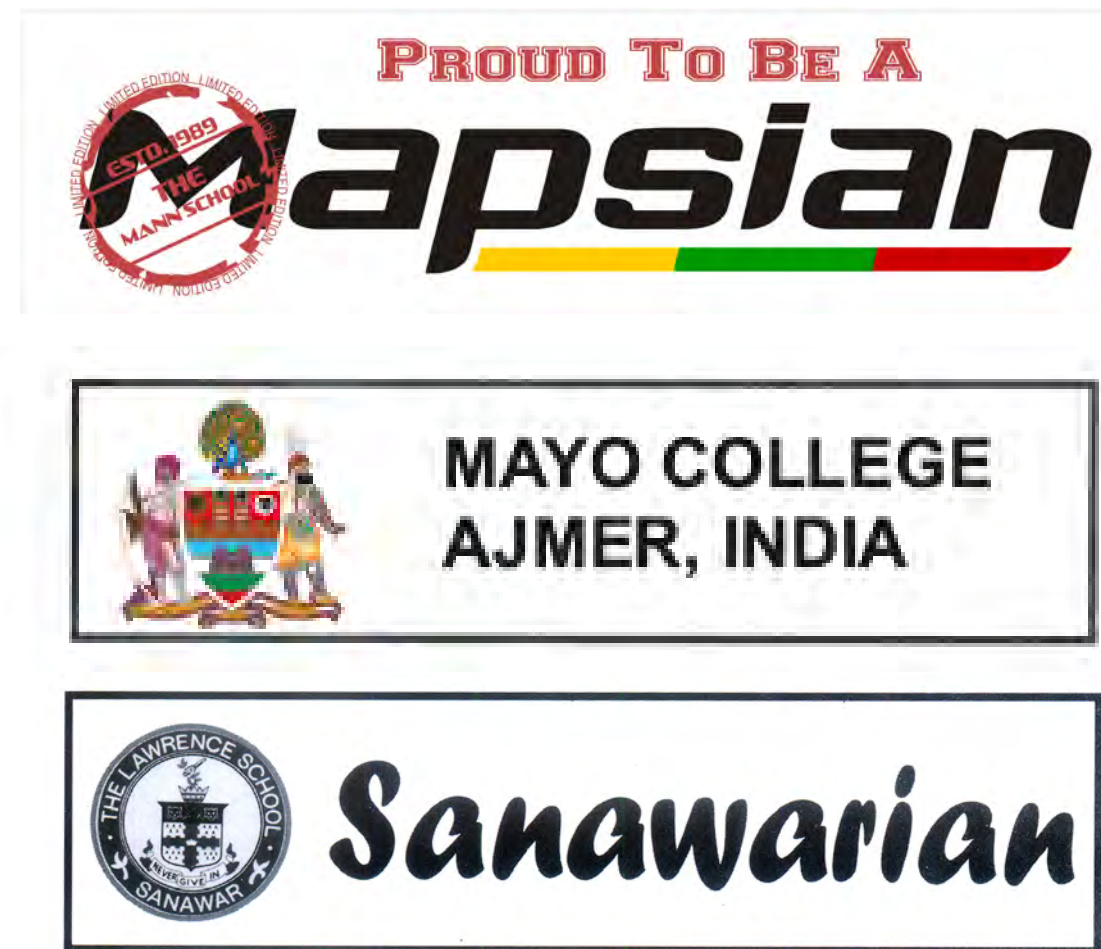
The day came and we wished that the world could see us. It was much more than just another felicitation. It was the most beautiful sight for any student or teacher. We had our teachers, the stalwarts of the school sitting in front of us - people who had built the school over a period of time. We all knew that such moments would probably never repeat, nor would anything hold as much of a nostalgic feeling in the air. We invited all the teachers one by one on to the stage and with utmost respect, handed them their mementos. Those moments had such magical power that we all became little children again. There was hardly anybody in the auditorium with eyes that weren't moist. For not even the current students, who were too young to understand our relationship with our teachers, could hold back their tears. Call it a chain reaction, the deathly silence was only interrupted with sobs and sighs coming out from all corners. Nobody could hold their tears. Nobody wanted to.

It was yet another exhibition of the attachment that develops in a boarding school, between

teachers and students. At that very moment we all wanted to announce our happiness to the world. Also, for us, that one day we knew the true meaning of the word 'reunion'. Believe me, we all didn't want that particular day to end. Finally, when it did end, our attachments only grew stronger. I was feeling blessed that day as I got to meet so many teachers. Even when days have rolled by, the blessings continued in the form of letters. All the letters from my

teachers had one thing in common. Everyone told me that they would remember the Diamond Jubilee for the rest of their lives. I replied by writing that the feeling was mutual. Mr. B.K. Sood, my Principal, whose letter I received a few days after the ceremony was beyond my imagination. He wrote back to me saying *"...every thing was meticulously planned and executed... and that I deserved the blessings of all the teachers"*.

These words still ring clear in my mind. Coming from a man who has taught me all and also made me appreciate life in all its forms makes me want to go back to the school again. Such words, more than overpowering one with humility, only increases the nostalgia. Literally speaking, we still carry this feeling where we go. We proudly on our car windshields the sticker which read, 'Proud to be a MAPSIAN'. Lawsance School Sanawar. 'Sanawarian' Mayo College Logo.



Above: Stickers of Old Students Associations that are proudly displayed on cars of old students.