



AMHS CONNECT



SEPTEMBER '21

Teachers' Day Special

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Teachers,

Yes. Just for this edition of Connect, I shall deviate from my usual salutation of Dear Modernites and instead say Dear Teachers because as you might've guessed, this edition is solely dedicated to them.

But hold on! This time, we haven't done the time travel. We've asked our teachers to rewind. To the time when they were students. Or when they joined Modern High as a teacher. Or when they were both!

Our teachers have opened up their treasure trove of memories and through their writings and reminiscences, we can revisit the fondest chapters of our school years.

From being in classrooms, to attending assembly and gulping 'hot meals' in the shed; from Sports Day to picnics and excursions; from momentous occasions celebrated at the Ice-Skating Rink to the impenetrable fortress that was the Staff Room – these personal essays will take us back to our frock and pig-tail days and are sure to leave us smiling.

Respected teachers, on behalf of the entire Alumni, please accept our fond remembrance and regard. As little girls, we'd either be really scared or really excited if we spotted a 'teacher' outside of school. Though that fright has obviously left us, I assure you that even after so many years, we're always happy to meet a teacher. For you'll always be the ones who take us back to our very cherished and most innocent years. And even today, a re-union of Modernites is incomplete without that sing-song, unmistakable and utterly joyous chorus, "Good Morning Mrs.....!"

With warm regards and love,
Supriya Newar



A FLOOD OF MEMORIES AND GRATITUDE

Let me give you a glimpse of the first address of our dear school on 38, Theatre Road. 78, Syed Amir Ali Avenue was still in the future. I was asked to read a paragraph from Rip Van Winkle for my admission test post which I was granted admission in Class 2. Can you imagine things being so simple now? Mrs. Clarke was at the helm of affairs then; a formidable picture of grace and authority.

Teachers like Ms Saugata Bose's history lessons are etched in the mind. Ms. Scold, our English teacher was simple and kind hearted and bore the brunt of our naughtiness. Mrs. R. Banerjee taught us how to be a Guide. It was under her that we learnt our first Knots, passionately made our promises in the special blue Guides uniforms and proudly saluted out national flag. Believe it or not, our annual program was held at New Empire which besides screening movies also had a stage.

It was in 1960 that we entered the swanky new premise where the school currently stands. The garden was undoubtedly the main attraction and we started our sporting activities with great fervour. I was Deputy Head Girl in my time and was entrusted with the commands while holding the flag, thanks to my booming voice even then! Vijaya, the Head Girl, took the oath.

The other new addition and attraction was the multi-purpose Shed. It was here that we had our 'hot meals' that were sent from home. It was also the venue for the Annual Prize Distribution. I had brilliant classmates who secured all the academic prizes, leaving only the 'Conduct Prize' for me.

We used to have a Hindi Literary Club called 'Deepshikha' which put up its first play 'Nirala'. Clad in a white dhoti-kurta, I happened to play the eponymous role! I also remember playing the odd prank on April Fool's Day on our friends as well as teachers and being made to stand outside the Headmistress's room!

The scenario changed when I entered my alma mater as a teacher in the early 1970s. I was acutely shy when I saw my teachers such as Mrs. S. Chakravarty, Mrs. L Mukerjee, Mrs. R Mukherjee, Ms. N. Singh and others. But their warm acceptance soon made me feel at ease. A sense of nervousness however, did grip me when Mrs. Wilson-de-Roze honoured me with the designation of Asst. Head Mistress. I was filled with questions like, "What would my own teachers say?" But they were all magnanimous and their love and acceptance truly touched my heart.

My gratitude reached its very pinnacle on the day of my retirement. I have no words to express how I felt towards not just my students and colleagues but even the office and support staff. I was showered with warmth and love from all quarters.

On this Teachers Day, I send my love and greetings to my colleagues and would like to remind all the students of the cheer which echoed throughout my school life as a student as well as a teacher; words that echo in my heart till today.

"North, South, East, West!
MHS is the best!"

- Ms. Nalini Sicka
(Class of 1964)



OF EXCURSIONS AND EXCITEMENT

At the end of the corridor on every floor, was the Staff Room - the forbidden area, out of bounds for the students, separated from them by a blue curtain. There is no doubt that while turning the corner of the corridor, every student surreptitiously tried to see what went on behind the curtain. Did the teachers sit wearing the expressionless masks that they wore to class? Or did they laugh and chat too? I had the same questions while I was a student at MHS.

Then one day I got the opportunity to cross over to the mysterious 'other side'.

I was terrified! Gathering all my courage, I lifted the curtain and stepped in. Awed, I saw the familiar faces of some of my teachers. I stood rooted at the doorway till somebody smiled and called me in. I was shown my 'seat' at the farthest table. I found myself sitting beside Mrs. G. Mullick and Miss E. D'Souza. I was petrified. But they welcomed me warmly and in no time, I felt at ease.

Soon, the days rolled into years and I was very much a part of the 'Table'. Yes, teachers were normal human beings and we shared our joys and sorrows and from just colleagues, some of us became lifelong friends. We even went on trips together and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Talking of trips, I am reminded of the numerous school excursions I have taken our girls to. But first let me tell you about my school excursion as a student. Our batch was taken to Massanjore in Jharkhand. There was a lot of excitement. We had been allotted a dormitory with bunk beds. Before going to bed our teachers warned us not to leave the room alone since the area was open and wild animals including tigers could come close to the hotel. Like good little girls, we crawled into our bunks and after some whispered conversations, soon fell asleep.



Suddenly I was woken up by the sound of a distant roar. I lay fixed with my eyes tightly shut. But soon enough, I heard it again. I was numb with fear! I gathered some courage and stretched my arm to poke my friend sleeping on the next bed and asked her to listen carefully. By then, some more girls had woken up and we were wondering whether to call the teachers, when one of the girls who had been listening intently, started laughing! Only when she told us did we realize that the 'roar' was not of a tiger but the loud snores of Kancha, our school durwan who had escorted us in the school bus!

Fast forward to four decades later. Accompanied by another colleague, I had taken my biology students for an excursion to Chalsa in North Bengal. After a fruitless visit to the Jaldapara National Park, where we saw nothing but two warthogs, we returned to our campsite. Late in the evening, after sundown, all of us sat around a campfire and over hot pakoras and tea, sang songs and shared experiences of various national parks and jungle safaris. My colleague, who was well travelled, regaled us with stories of elephant rides and tracking rhinos; of tigers and bears. We were mesmerized listening to the hair-raising stories and except for the sound of crickets, there was pin drop silence all around. Suddenly, in the middle of a bear

story, there was a big thud right behind me! I jumped out of my skin, with a muffled cry, "BEAR"! It started a chain reaction with everyone scrambling around. But there was no animal in sight! I must have inadvertently tilted my chair forward and my big, heavy handbag had crash-landed on the ground with that thud! We burst into laughter, more out of relief than anything else.

Now, when I sit back and think of similar incidents, they make me smile and I know that though I have retired and left school, memories of MHS will never leave me.

- Dr. Rajeshwari De
(Class of 1968)

OUT OF SIGHT BUT NEVER OUT OF MIND

It has been 42 years since I stepped into the hallowed portals of Modern High School for Girls (MHS). This particular incident not only left an indelible mark in my memory but also set the tone of my tenure at the school we all look up to.

I joined MHS in 1979 and adapted quickly to its methodical madness especially during the morning hours and school assembly. On one such morning, while rushing for assembly of our second-floor staffroom, I forgot to carry my newly acquired glasses. As I was already in the shed for the assembly, climbing two floors again didn't seem viable. I would just have to manage.

The senior class girls were lining in and the entire shed was abuzz with chatter. It was a vibrant morning like any other until Mrs. Wilson-de-Rose stepped up on a blue podium and cleared her throat. A calm descended. It was a 'House Assembly Day', where she made her obligatory remarks. Then she stepped down and handed the rest of the proceedings to an unsuspecting teacher near her. ME! The house teacher for Magnolia House.

Before I could explain that I am lost without my glasses, the entire assembly's eyes turned towards me. I tried hard to focus and started reading the names positioning the paper as far away as I could. I was managing reading out the names till I came to Rose House. The handwriting was so tiny that I was quite blinded! As I strained my eyes and hemmed and hawed, my colleague Mrs. Anju Chopra stepped right behind me and started to prompt read the names of the students from the second list. She had understood my predicament. As she whispered the names, I repeated them in a clear voice. It was a delight to feel the happiness and pride of the girls whose names were being called out as they had scored brownie points for their respective houses. The assembly got over smoothly.

I immediately went to apologize to Mrs. Wilson-de-Rose for my initial fumble. She just smiled and said I had done a wonderful job and that she was very happy with the assembly. I also thanked my colleague and friend Mrs. Anju Chopra for stepping up to help me.

I learnt an important lesson that day. A leader leads by example. Mrs. De Rose's calm demeanor and a word of encouragement had immediately put a relatively new teacher like me at ease. Anju stepped in to assist when it was required the most. Their support made me feel secure.

My sight may have become weaker over the years but incidents like these and many more have kept my wonderful memory of MHS alive both in my mind and in my heart.

- Mrs. Kamla Bisht



GOD BLESS MY GIRLS

As soon as my youngest daughter's interview was over, I proceeded resolutely to the Principal's Room, my certificates tucked underarm. When summoned, I said, "Good morning ma'am, I too want to join this school!" Mrs Wilson-de Roze smiled but said, "Oh, no Mrs. Daga! No." But I thrust my file in her hand which she very kindly went through but did not acquiesce. Crestfallen, I returned home.

Next morning magic happened! The school peon was at our gate with—joy of joys—MHS appointment papers in my name. It was unbelievable. I was appointed! (And my in-laws were deeply disappointed!)

I taught my girls with every iota of effort and ability I had. Each child was like my daughter. Our day began with a ritual recital of tables. Math, Literature, Social Sciences – I taught them all subjects except Music and Vernacular. I was even their PT teacher and came in white canvas shoes every Wednesday! Later, for years I taught the entire Junior School, knitting, stitching, painting and craft. The last period was reserved for letting them hear a story and finishing the day's set homework there and then. I wanted them to read and play all kinds of games at home instead of be burdened by homework.

I must say, the response from my girls was equally gratifying. Each one did her best.

I taught at Modern High for twelve years or so. It is wonderful to see so many of the girls I taught stand as creditable members of our society today. Reshma Kakkar opened an excellent school in USA. Nayanika Chatterjee became a world-famous model. Konkona Sen, Riya and Raima Sen are admired stars in the film firmament. Supriya Newar a well-known writer. The list is long and satisfying.

Bless you all my girls. Achieve great heights. Exploit your full potential. And remain humane, able and caring. God bless each one of you!

- Mrs. Rajshri Daga
(Taught from 1980 - 1991)



A GREATER PART OF MY LIFE AND BEING

How does one capture 14 years of student life and approximately 21 years of teaching in a few paragraphs? How does one choose from a wealth of memories that in many ways make me the person I am today?

Let me begin with the Silver Jubilee celebrations. I was then a student in Class XI – the first batch of the new 10 + 2 system – the ‘guinea pig’ batch as we were called. I recall a mind-blowing display of ice skating which was a highlight of the celebrations. My students over the years used to listen with utter disbelief when I would tell them that we used to be led (in straight lines of course!) to the Rink once a week during our PT classes for lessons in Ice skating. Babloo – who later generations of students will remember as the Home Science Room assistant – used to help us with our skates and we had trainers who showed no mercy to those girls who clung to the handrails for dear life. The more proficient skaters whizzed past round and round and some even managed to skate backwards or make patterns on the ice with the blades on their skates!

Fast forward 25 years to the Golden Jubilee celebrations. I was summoned one day to meet Mrs. Kar – the first time that I met her. I recall how strange it felt to see anyone other than Mrs. Wilson deRoze in that chair. It felt even stranger to be asked to sit in that office and when I was offered a cup of coffee, I think I must have turned pale! Mrs. Kar asked me (as an alum of the school) to put together a panel discussion with other alums who would represent the five decades of the school’s history. Many ex-students may remember the reunion, especially the ceremonial March Past by former House Captains who turned up in their House colours!

Soon after this programme, I joined MHS for ‘Season 2’ as a teacher. Moving forward to January 2011 – Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi’s visit to the school, which marked the beginning of a series of memorable events to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of our school. I don’t think any of us will ever forget the magical transformation of the school garden with the impressive stage (the Victoria Memorial resplendent as a stunning backdrop) and a whole week when we had events every day and every evening – theatre, dance and music performances by celebrities and students, a pageant and a quiz – to name just a few.

The exhibition “Calcutta – Kolkata: the past 60 years” highlighting sixty years of our school’s history alongside different facets of life in the city, which was mounted in the Rink on a grand, almost audacious scale, stands out in my memory as a unique endeavour.

In my last year as a teacher at MHS, we organized the celebrations to mark the 65th year of the school. The entire school congregated in the school garden in a sun-like formation (older girls lovingly leading the little ones by the hand) while prayers were offered to Ma Saraswati with due solemnity in the lobby. Bimbavati Devi and her troupe put up a memorable display to mark the occasion.

As MHS is poised to celebrate its platinum jubilee, it is still a fairly ‘young’ school when compared to many prominent schools in the city which are inextricably linked with our colonial past. Yet, there is no gainsaying that the school has carved a niche for itself and become a name to reckon with in this relatively short span of time in the sphere of education in Kolkata. I consider myself to be blessed to have been, not just a silent witness to, but deeply involved in so many of the milestones that mark this journey.

-Mrs Amita Prasad
(Batch of 1978)



FROM SPORTS TO STAFF ROOM

I belong to the first Madhyamik batch of Modernites and my association with the school as a member of its staff commenced after my graduation.

Modern High was celebrating its 30th birthday when I was called by Mrs. Wilson De Roze, our Head Mistress, to assist our PT teacher, Mrs. R. Bannerjee in 'Drill Display'. You see, I was quite a Sportswoman in School, proudly wearing the Jasmine House badge on my collar.

The experience and thrill of joining the school as a staff member and sharing the staff room with my teachers cannot be expressed in words.

I thank God for giving me the chance to serve my school for 10 years. Even after moving to Delhi, I continued to teach for 25 years there.

Now that I'm back in town, each time I pass by my school, happy memories as a student and teacher flood my mind and bring tears to my eyes.

The biggest gift of course is when my students still recognize me after so many years! My best wishes to all the students and teachers, past and present.

- Mrs. Shampa Chopra



BEST YEARS OF MY TEACHING CAREER

The twelve years I spent in MHS as a teacher are replete with memories that could easily fill up the pages of a book.

My best moments were spent in the classroom with students as we shared the journey of delving into 'His' story and gathering treasured nuggets which would become cherished lessons forever. From the magnificence of Macbeth in Grade VII, to discovering the nuances of Tagore's 'Ghare Baire' (with a liberal dose of Ray's masterpiece thrown in) in Grade X to explain the Partition of Bengal, to looking at the unfolding of the French Revolution and interlinking it with 'The Tale of Two Cities' in Grade VIII or marvelling at the artistic feat of the Mughals in Grade IX, the joys were way too many.

I still remember the bright and animated faces of the students as they discussed, devoured, dissected and drank in every facet of our discovery of our past.

If this is one facet, in my last five years as a part of MHS, I was honoured to share the Co-Curricular Activities with Ms. Amita Prasad and work very closely with colleagues like Ms. Saugata Banerjee, Ms. Sutapa Roy, Ms. Sunita Biswas, Ms. Chaitali Ganguly and Ms. Ina Bharadwaj to mount the Annual Concerts at the Ice-Skating Rink. The preparation for these were possibly the most important and valuable times as all of us worked together to make every presentation memorable.

We argued, fought, cried and laughed together to make unforgettable memories through 'Shakuntala', 'Many Heavens', 'Tribute', and 'Anandadhara.' From rehearsals in the shed and in the Mace Hall to the Art students working in the first-floor lobby at near 40 degrees temperature, everything is etched in the mindscape forever!

When Mitali was conceptualised for the Middle School and Maitree was revived in a new avatar for Grades IX & X, possibly the best times were spent conceptualising each event for the students so that they would have an enjoyable time. I can only say that I was fortunate to work with some of the best colleagues in this sphere and we gave our heart and soul to making each event we birthed, the best ever! **-Ms Priyadarshinee Guha (Taught from 2004 - 2016)**

ALUMNI OF MHS MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

Fee: Rs. 4500
(for life membership)

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FEEDBACK CORNER

Enjoying the Alumni newsletter?

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TEAM CONNECT

Ritu Singhania - Batch of 1989
Sushma Nevatia - Batch of 1989
Supriya Newar - Batch of 1994
Sayantani Sen - Batch of 2005
Harshita Goenka - Batch of 2010

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