



The Dohnavur Post

The Dohnavur Post is a Newsletter of the alumni community of Santhosha Vidhyalaya, Dohnavur. For Private Circulation Only.

A peek inside

- Karen, the resident writer of Down the Memory Lane column, talks about the 'dear old kitchen' that kept hungry young tummies filled at school.
- Peter, in his refined style, talks about what a little more sleep meant to him as a schoolboy.
- Steve, a student of the Christian religion, talks about two kinds of Christians that we meet.
- Beulah Johnraj Puran in her narration of a visit to a museum is warmed by the joys of thoughts of the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

From the scribbling desk!

Hi Everyone!

The football fever still lingers on long after the World Cup came and went. We at Bangalore (a bunch of alumni) play football every Saturday. Through the week we grown up boys unashamedly look forward to that two hours of football on Saturday early morning. We would give up our precious sleep to be in the field come Saturday. It reminds me of the days at school when we just wait through the post lunch classes for the clock tower to strike 4. If you were in the corner classroom, then you could hear the *Bandi* take the tea for the boys dormitories and it was the fore-runner to the 4 strikes of clock tower. At the final bell we boys would all run out and don our shorts for the play ground. We waited for that one hour the whole day. A little boy would give up anything for that one hour of pure physical exertion. No little girl would like to forgo that one hour of footloose. It didn't matter whether you were good at sports. We wanted to be there and ride the highs of free spirit. Some days it was what kept us going through boring lessons and the mundane schedule. That one hour was a spark in the otherwise dull routine. The anticipation added to the whole affair. You could read it in our eyes during the last class hour. When the final bell rang, and we boys ran out for the games time... you could almost smell the boyish free spirit seeping out. You could feel the camaraderie in the box room while we got ready for the play ground. My prose wouldn't do. One hymn writer captures it in his verse –

Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
The joys I feel, the bliss I share;
Of those whose anxious spirits burn,
With strong desires for Thy return...

That is the exact feeling with which I go to the prayer meetings. It is with the same spirit that Beulah Johnraj Puran, the latest addition to our newsletter writers, writes about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in this issue of the Dohnavur Post.

Have a good time reading!

Our Dear Old Kitchen

Karen Solomon

Warm. Aromatic. Hunger. Satisfying.

The old kitchen of our school. Years after we left our plates clanging in the racks, the cooking noises that stole our sleep, the bandy's rickety joyrides, the old brown tiles overhead still creak with an old familiarity.

The winds breeze in and out of the blackened windows and the wired fences and carry the sounds and smells of the cooking food far enough to cause our stomachs to growl.

Under the summer sun that seemed to last forever, along with the hot Monday mornings came the *chutney* and *idlis*, Tuesdays went by with *upma* and Wednesdays rolled on by with *pongal*, Thursdays with another batch of *idlis*, while the *puttu* and bananas just made our Fridays and the weekend too. The marrow in our bones can thank the glass of milk we drank every single day of the 10 or 12 years. And as for the vegetarians, the kitchen upheld their fuss too.

Sitting in the church the thought of the *egg masala* for lunch kept us awake. The excitement of peeling those groundnuts during our 'walking' in the evening made it a favorite memory.

Not to Forget, the fish curry, *puli columbu* and meat curries that egged us on in the boring study hours to the



The marrow in our bones can thank the glass of milk we drank every single day

8 O'clock bell and comforted us while we slept the long nights. All the waiting was worth the good 'ole kitchen's curry. Sitting Sunday nights under the bright moon and the stars, on the terrace or under the trees, half-spilling the *rasam* and *avial*, we reeled out great stories punctuated with boisterous laughter that gave way to more stories. One big group joined the other, not caring what we ate in the dark and chatting away endlessly till our hands dried up in our plates. Only the moaning gong of the clock tower brought us back to the not-so pleasant reality that the following day was a Monday.

As much as we cribbed and grumbled into our tumblers, the meticulous food chart ensured we got the vitamins, minerals and calcium we required. The over served greens, chow chow dishes and every little gram of dal served a bigger purpose.

This place also fed our tired parents who come visiting and the lovely German Shepherds that barked into the night. The grind that begins at 5 am fades out only at 11 pm. The old hut of a building has stood the test of time – 27 hours a day, 365 days a year – contently putting up

with all the students who couldn't go home for the holidays too.

While the modern technology screams out ads for water-saving faucets, fancy looking tubs, pipes and designer washrooms, the kitchen backhouse protests loudly as the humongous vessels are turned over and washed up and the taps squeal while a rag barely tries to plug its leaks.

The annachis hunch over low stools and chop vegetables on even lower wooden slabs, in the extra room with the 'choola' which is so blackened that no number of tube lights will ever brighten the place. While the vegetables are sliced in rhythm, the boiled eggs peeled, the room huffs and puffs out the black smoke leaving permanent soot, through the gaps in the wall left by missing bricks and under the waves of the asbestos sheet touching the wall.

Students carrying food before lunch time tip-toe on the cold wet floor scattered with vegetable wastes inches away from a depression that leads to a drain a few meters away. While the store room near the dining hall houses the food grains, a small extension near the backroom stores some of the vegetables sprawled over gunny bags or sack cloth.

The kitchen has worked overtime with the increase in the number of students and still holds its ground today. We owe our health and some of our memories to that backroom, to those worn out ladles and over shined vessels and those overworked cooks, whose lives could be made so much easier with a brand new and wider tabletop, a more heavy duty stove, a better storehouse to stock the carrots *and* the brinjals or better yet a swanky look to the entire place. This place needs a break – a breakdown, a buildup, a renovation or anything you might call it – to make a difference.

It is sometimes difficult to donate to a cause from which we have already derived much and will no more be of use to us. It takes something to donate to such causes. Yes, you may never reap rewards of your donation right away. Those who enjoy the rewards are a bunch of kids whose parents work in remote villages of our country. But on that eternal morning we'll see the harvest.



Karen, a sub-editor with Times of India, is a young woman of varied interests. Since her camera is under repair now, she's taken to Art after reading Manga Anime. She's also learning to play the violin and can manage the hymn "Jesus loves me this I know" on it. You are more likely to catch her wearing a raspberry coloured shirt this season. She says it's her favourite colour right now.

Sleep – Precious commodity

Dayanand Peter

If asked what the most cherished habit I picked up at school was I would reply that it was the habit to go into slumber at the most unusual places on earth. It is my most cherished habit and you would agree if you knew a few facts about the regimental life we lived at school. A normal school day would begin at 5:00am, not the most pleasant time to be chucked out of your bed and asked to have a bath especially considering that's it's the exact moment your dreams usually turned extra spicy. The wake up was just the first step into a long sequence of morning routine we had to follow. Once reasonably awake, we were marched out through the courtyard and into the box rooms. Romantic as it may sound, it does not refer to an ammunition pile but it was rather the place where our suitcases and bags stacked with clothes were kept. Once we got our soap dishes out we were frisked off to the toilets to finish our morning chores and get ourselves suitably clothed or stripped for the morning bath. Now this is exciting stuff. Each person had to pick a partner or soul mate also known as the pump partner who would pump water for your bath from a hand pump, while you held your sorry bottom below the waterspout. After the bath we had to get ourselves suitably clothed and ready for the morning study hour which lasted from 6:00am to 7:00am. Once the study hour was done with, we had to attend the Morning Prayer otherwise wrongly named as the quiet time from 7:00am to 7:30am when there is a synchronized murder of church music, loud singing and crude guitar play. After the "quiet time", we had to pick up our tumblers and plates and march off



...finish our morning chores..

ing down the forehead, shoes properly washed with precisely the right amount of rin soap, shirts neatly tucked in with a belt to hold the pant in place and most importantly the shirt pockets are to be place without any loose stitches. A good inmate would in addition to the above mentioned dress code have his hands and legs greased

with a thin layer of coconut oil. As a matter of fact the more you reek of coconut oil the closer you would be to the fuehrer's heart. After the inspection and at the fuehrer's command the troops would march on to the assembly and then on to the classes. The classes would roll on from 8:15am to 12:00pm with a short break in between for refreshment. Post lunch session would begin from 1:15pm to 4:00pm. At 4:00pm we would return to the barracks, change into our playing shoes, take our tea and go off to the ground to play till 5:30pm. By 6:00pm

...troops were properly dressed and ready to combat the day's hardship.



we had to be seated in our respective classes for the study hour which extended till 8:00pm. 8:00 to 8:30pm we had our dinner and had the evening prayer thereafter till 9:00pm. 9:00pm to 10:00pm was the evening study hour in the respective dorms and at 10:00pm the lights would go off. A very hectic lifestyle, if you asked me. Even in this merry go round, I had a few time slots chalked out for my extra shuteye. One was early in the morning between 5:00am to 6:00am when we were supposed to be up and getting ready. The other slot was during the night study hour i.e. from 9:00pm to 10:00pm. Now you would say it's natural to sleep in the morning slot since it takes only 30 minutes at the most for two guys to have a bath and get ready and an hour's time is a luxury. Now there are a lot of other duties i had not included in the daily routine. These would include watering the fuehrer's prized *Casuarinas*, box room duty: which included seeing to it that the stock pile was clean and tidy, and many other such duties. In addition to this, the fuehrer would personally come down to the barrack and see that everyone was up and doing his duty. So there was no place away from his searching eye. The second slot was equally risky because the fuehrer apart from having class leaders to monitor if the inmates were studying made surprise visits from behind the money plant creepers. The punishment for anyone caught napping thereof was always the same, a tanning of the hide and polishing of the knees by kneeling down for the rest of the study hour.

Considering the above facts, it was quiet risky to take even a quick shut eye during these time slots. Ingenuity was of the highest importance in these matters and I would like to reminisce upon the 4 best spots I picked to have my shut eye.

Time slot 9:00pm to 10:00pm: (under the bunks) this was my favourite place to sleep during the evening study. The idea was to pull the bedspreads adequately to fall on both sides of the bunk covering the space between the bunk and the ground. With both sides covered, it was virtually impossible for anyone to see if there was anybody under the bunks. It had its drawbacks too, for a guy like me who likes to move around quite a bit during my sleep, the fuehrer would often spot my feet extended from under the bed. He would therefore make the inmates in the near vicinity move away so that he could drag me out by my feet and let my whole body experience the pounding of his ample foot.

Time slot 9:00pm to 10:00pm: (the sunbathing style or the praying mantle style) this was a style I picked up at the junior dormitory. The junior hostels have a little relaxation in terms of seating, as the students were allowed to sit on the bunk and study. This was due to the lack of floor space. The sunbathing style consisted of lying stomach down on the bunk with the chest upwards propped up with cushions and bead sheets and the study materials neatly spread within ones eye level and in front of the cushions. To make vision complicated for the inspector, the mosquito nets were pulled down and neatly tucked beneath the mattress. The disadvantage of this system was that one could not get too comfortable while sleeping and it is quiet tiresome to have ones head propped up erect for a long stretch of time.

Time slot 5:00am to 6:00am: (in the stock pile) this was the most logical and exciting place to be if you had box room duty. The uneven surface of trunks arranged in a row and their cold metallic surface made sleeping on the trunks absolutely enjoyable. Since, it was the most frequented place in the morning it was also the last place the fuehrer would visit unless he wanted to make sure that the inmate on duty was getting things done right. There is always a downside to this location, more often than not you would find yourself fast asleep when the rest of the inmates were in the study and it would be very hard to claw your way back to the study unnoticed as the box room was isolated from rest of the hostel.

Time slot 5:00am to 6:00am : (on that strong foundation) One of the beliefs of the school was to build the foundation and then pray for the rest of the building. As money trickled in the foundation would turn into a structural frame and thereon into a completed structure. Thanks to this vision we had a foundation with soft river sand beside our bathing area, making it the best flexible sleeping bed. Soon after when the foundation turned into a structure without a roof I enjoyed the granite that was laid as the flooring material as my cold mattress. Once the roof came up and the doors were in place the auditorium became a forbidden fortress especially for sleeping beauties such as I.

The best part of my childhood was spent on a bed, its material varying with its location but it would be the only place where I would forever be the master and lord of.

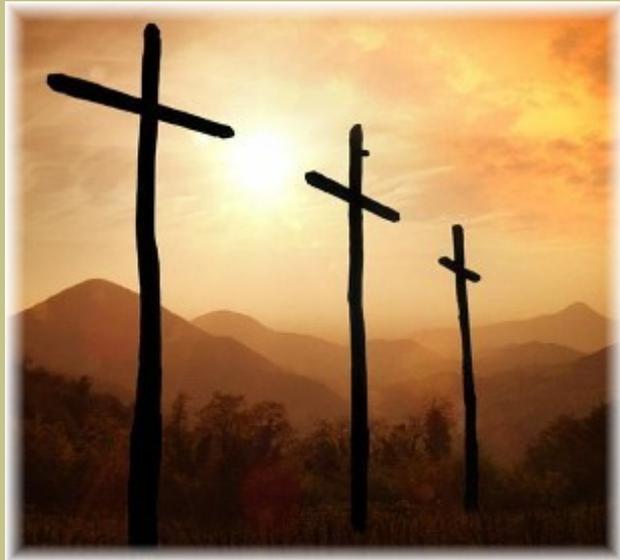
Notes: Fuehrer = Warden.

Dayanand Peter is an Asst. Professor at Karunya University where he teaches Food Technology. His interests lie in reading, writing and listening to music. As a child, he was at the receiving end of quite a few humorous run-ins with the teachers of SV due to his predilection for sleeping at every possible odd time, hence this first hand experience. He also feels that his antics during his childhood have made him a "super sleuth" in catching his college students trying to pull the same sleeping tricks on him.

What is your life?

Steve Jothiraj

James in his letter to the Jews scattered all over the world says "13Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."



Well, there is no harm in the above plan – Go to a place, work/trade and get money in return. I find no harm in such an honest idea. I think everyone of us have such an idea. Go to a place, work and earn money to live. But James poses a question to the ones who have such a common idea. In fact he thunders "What is your life?" James is very direct. He slaps you in your face and makes you think. James' question is a very important one. "What is your life?" Have you thought about this question? Have you thought of answering this question? Have you thought what your life is? James is not asking "What is life?" rather he is asking "What is *your* life?"

Many of us carry on living even if we don't know why. We need not be philosophers to answer James' question. We know what our life is. We know what we live for.

Just like Christ was crucified between two thieves, now there are two kinds of Christians. Those two thieves each had something to say to Jesus that day. Both of them had just a few more hours to live. So it was almost their last words spoken. It was of high importance. Those last words reflected their philosophies of life. One said "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us." Look at what he said. There is no harm in this. He was being honest. He wanted to live. He knew that the Messiah could do anything. He needed a miracle and he asked for it. Of course he asked the right person. In a few hours he would be killed. If there was one person who could save him from that it was the Messiah. Clever chap!

Look at what the other thief said. The other thief said "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". What was that!! That was not very clever. C'mon here was the Messiah next to you and you ask him something that you cannot see now. Hey, don't you want to live in the present? The Messiah is the maker of the universe. He made everything and he could do anything. Why would a thief with his death few hours away utter such a vague wish? Strange.

There are two kinds of Christians today in the Church. One kind is like the first thief. They seem to say "Lord, since you are the God of this universe - omnipotent, all-powerful, please get me this job. I could live comfortably with this secure job." And you would hear them quote scripture too "Lord, since its written in your word that you will do much more than we ask for and beyond our imagination we ask you to help us build this Church building, because we don't have a place to sit on Sunday mornings." Does this sound similar to the prayers in your church? Well, this kind of Christians are only bothered about this life (this life that James calls a mist). This life is very precious to them. They are always looking to be secure and comfortable. Their idea of God blessing a person is when he gets a good job and is comfortable. Their idea of God blessing a church is when the church can afford a huge mega structure with air conditioning or arrange mega meetings in the city with star preachers. You'll find this kind everywhere. "Of course, God said he offers life to the full" is what they say.

There is another kind. They are like the second thief. Their attitude to life is very different. They rarely pray for *things*. They are not bothered about this life very much. They live here but they are always thinking about eternity. Their prayers are for spiritual growth – things that would matter in eternity. Their prayers are for other people. You rarely see them pray long public prayers. They are not bothered much about salaries or possessions. They are pre-occupied with going the way Jesus went. They study Jesus' life and try to follow that. Their idea of God blessing a person is when there is

power in someone's witness. You rarely find people from this group. They are not the ones in the lime light. They are not the ones who pray in meetings. But we will know them in eternity when we stand before the Judgment seat.

What is your life?

Steve is a young Christian, who plays football on Saturday mornings and attends a small prayer meeting on Saturday evenings. Right now he doesn't like the city life as he feels he's a country boy stuck in the city.



The Great Banquet

Beulah Johnraj Puran

Culture has always fascinated me. I was visiting the Palace from where the Shah dynasty had ruled Nepal for over 500 years. It was a hot and sultry day! The then palace and now a museum had people from all walks of life flock around to see what kind of a lifestyle the royals of Nepal had lived. During the era of the kings, they were worshipped as gods by the common people and even still are. As I climbed up the wide staircase guarded on either side by a pair of fishes and then a pair of peacocks and then tigers made of stones, a sense of royalty entered me. The entrance had two enormous doors with inscriptions of different beasts that had symbolic meaning to the Nepali culture. As I entered in, the aromatic incense filled my nostrils and the towering ceiling caught my breath. I have never in my life seen such huge chandeliers that gave the palace a royal and majestic look. There were huge portraits of the kings hanging on the wall as if looking down at me with stately pride and imposing looks of a lion in all its splendour. The intricately woven carpets captured my attention. The curtains, the furniture were all fit for a king's palace.

But, something that filled me with wonder and awe was the luxurious banquet hall. There was something about this room that was enchanting.

Now, I would like to imagine everything possible when the King and Queen would have dined with all the Royal officials, high ranked bureaucrats and Heads of states. It would have been picture perfect! The masterpiece of a dining table, made of the best wood, decorated with candlesticks and linen table cloth, the exquisitely finished china on display and the exotic delicacies from the recipes of the royal chef waited upon by the royal butler and the King himself seated at the head of the table. What a moment it would have been to dine with the King.

I remember a song I sang as a little girl in school and it goes like this, “He brought me to His banqueting table and his banner over me His love...”

Now I would like to think of the time I will one day ban-



quet with the King of kings, the ruler of the whole Universe and all in it. What a moment that would be! My reverence for my King and His royalty has no bounds. My king will sit enthroned with all praise and glory and wisdom and honour and majesty and power. All of us who love Him will be His bride. I would not even attempt to express that ecstatic feeling. In that day my eyes would be fixed on the King of my heart and His banner. His banner over me would read “My Love”.

As I stepped out of the Palace a sad thought lingered on.... the thought that these kings who ruled the Kingdom of Nepal would not be in that *Great Banquet* my King is preparing! The kingdom of this world is but for a moment but the Kingdom of God is forevermore.

Beulah lives in Kathmandu, Nepal with her husband Puran and son Clement. She teaches English in the Bible Seminary where her husband is the dean. Clement is one year old and is hyperactive keeping Beulah on her toes. Apart from her teaching she's learning the Nepali cuisine. She says cooking for Clement is a challenge. Beulah writes on topics that are close to her heart.



About the Newsletter

The Newsletter is run by a virtual team sitting in different places ranging from a plush office in Ohio, USA to a cramped one room apartment in suburban Bangalore. The writers range from a Missionary in Northern India to a Trade International Trade specialist. The newsletter is by the alumni, for the alumni and to the alumni of Santhosha Vidhyalaya. The purpose of the newsletter is to create a literary culture around the school and its associations. Through the months many alumni have written from various batches and we have all enjoyed reading them. All alumni are welcome to write for the newsletter about their life, work and love. Write in to us on how you enjoyed reading newsletter and tell us how we can improve on this. Email: thedohnavurpost@gmail.com

In reply to Robert Frost's “The Road Not Taken”

Steve Jothiraj

As I walk along life's road,
I often keep looking out for
Those big crossroads people talk of
But haven't spotted one thus far.

Little forks filled my way
And I always, for a moment, waited at the node;
Then took the one that'll lead me away
Far from the madding crowd.

As I look back at the fresh track I trod
I spot a few more footsteps along
Friends, brave and good they were
Gave company on this journey long.

Though I never chanced upon those big forks
The small ones have kept me in the game
And when the big ones come out of the blue,
You'll find me treating them just the same.

The poem is taken from the diary of Steve Jothiraj and written, with some persuasion from his friend David, circa 2003 when he was in college. In the poem Steve thinks he's still not come across a fork in the road as big as the one Frost mentions in his but says he'll go about it the same way as the many mundane decisions he makes on a normal day.