

The Dohnavur Post

A newsletter of, by & for the alumni of Santhosha Vidhyalaya, Dohnavur.

A Peek into this Issue

It's About to Rain!

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The 2020 Short Story contest winning entry

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In this 'Down the Memory Lane' column, Ruth recollects a haircut from the 90's

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The 2020 Short Story contest Runner-up entry



From the Scribbling Desk...

Hello and welcome to The Dohnavur Post, the alumni newsletter.

A newsletter seems an odd way to communicate in today's world of hand held devices as it doesn't fit your smartphone screen for a clean scroll. And the 8 page format may be audacious given today's ephemeral attention span. Finally it has to compete with mediums such as YouTube that engages your audio-visual senses. So the newsletter may be reserved only for the Sunday afternoon and that too only if you can afford to lose the nap. And that exactly was the niche that the founders of The Dohnavur Post envisaged over a decade ago when they penned the first issue in 2009.

The Dohnavur Post is an initiative to create a literary culture within the alumni community. Literature has been an integral part of our unique culture that has been passed on to us in box-rooms, bunk beds and alumni meets. And through this initiative, we have tried to capture certain aspects of our school's unique culture and experiences in creative ways to gain a newer perspective. You can find the older issues of the newsletter [here](#).

This issue is no different. In this issue, we have a good assortment of works that address some aspects of our experience at school bringing us an exotic arrangement of fresh and honest perspectives. I hope you enjoy it. I hope you ponder and pen your own perspectives too. Good luck!



"It's About to Rain!"

By Smiley K, Class of 2013

"It's about to rain!" is definitely a sound that would startle me awake from Sunday nap at SV. The mere thought of the musty smell that would make home in the uniforms if left at the mercy of the rains would have us all running to collect them from the terrace.

Those who loved sleep felt specially loved by God on rainy mornings as their little extra slumber would go unnoticed under the cover of shadows dancing in the candle light. The smell of rain announcing itself was a dreamy paradise for many who secretly wanted to eat the sand and would have if they cared not for the criticism from others.

For kids, every puddle was as adventurous as any sea; the paper boat sailors wasted no time in tearing papers from other's notebooks to have their share of thrill. Soon, little puddles in the primary block would be dotted with paper boats bouncing to the beat of the raindrops.

Rainy days were just the right time to judge who your true friends were; they shared their umbrellas with you. Some would pride in having sheltered themselves using their least favourite books. The rare luxury of going to school in sandals was readily welcomed by fashionistas. But to the kids, it was just a joyful journey jumping from puddle to puddle, with their towels over their heads.

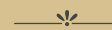
The Sunday walk and evening games were almost always cancelled, but School was not. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration when you say an SVian is initially shocked at the logic of selective rain-holidays.

Power cut due to rain was an event in itself. The unanimous war cry from the girls, some out of fear and others to defy the warden would have her yelling louder than any thunder.

The evening prayers on such days, by an unspoken rule, always commenced with the song Light of the World. The life that the rains leave in their retreat was a welcome sight at the playground.

The evenings at the playground would be a paradise for curious children following the trails of slugs and pitying the plight of crushed *Velvet Poochies* etc...

Years later, all it takes is the sight of a lone paper boat flitting across a muddy puddle and I'm drawn into a world most SVians would love to call Home. Even the memory of soaked uniforms and muddied blue converse cannot dampen the joy that comes with it!



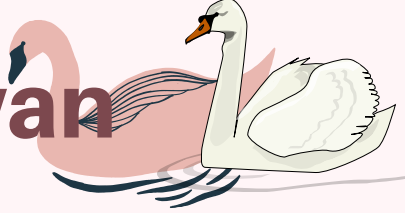
Smiley graduated from school in 2013 and thereafter went on to complete her masters in Computer Science. To help Jeff Bezos become the richest man in the world, she decided to work in Amazon.

Smiley is an avid reader and a poet constantly hunting for good literature. Literature is her escape route. Pilgrims Progress is her favourite work.



The Beautiful Swan

By Ruth Thaveedhu, Class of 2002



Fourth standard was a good year. That was the year Nallakannu (the neurotic thief) lost his way in the girl's dorm. That was the year I learnt to blow a balloon, discovered Young world (The Hindu's Kid Supplementary), and it was also the year that we were finally allowed to watch the horror movie, The Ghost of Canterville. You started choir practice in sixth standard. You washed your own clothes from your fifth. Before these two final obstacles to your independence, was your fourth standard, the last year when you had a house mother (adult in-charge in a boarding school). Thankfully, I liked my house mother that year and she found me tolerable.

March-past for Sports day also began in fourth standard. And in one of those uncountable practice marches - my story begins.

"What did you do to your hair?" the principal demanded, "Where did you get a blade?" I had been swinging my hands to the fullest and keeping step with all of my energy, when the principal called me out of the marching line. Fear gripped my heart.

Everyone responded differently when they faced the Principal. A thin wiry looking new teacher had once taken D- to the Principal's office. The complaint- "She is calling me with nick name." The principal assured the new teacher that he would take the necessary action and sent him away. He then asked D- what she had done. Sir I hit my hand and said "ah mosquito", D-replied. The Principal had to control his laughter. D- was no scaredy cat. But me, I stood in the volley ball court, staring at the white in my canvas shoes, with quivering lips and tears that threatened to flow any minute, while my housemates marched on.

Every summer vacation my mother would style my hair and lovingly bring some shape and order to the head she could not care for, for the next 10 months. In school though, on haircut Saturdays, we usually walked past the dining hall and right in front of the cook's living quarters was a circular bathing structure. So well designed you didn't need a door for privacy. The barbers would set up shop there. You sat up on a wooden stool and they styled every one's hair the same way; mass-production style.

Gender, hair texture and face structure meant nothing to them. This prompted J-, our bench mate during night study time, to tease the girls about their new haircut.

From Fifth standard my hair had a mind of its own. Monday to Friday it stayed in 2 pleated and oiled pig tails. On Sunday, we did French plaits and rice plaits. Fringes and pony tails were frowned upon and the oil had to be generous. Hair trimmings were managed with the skill of a bestie or were reserved for the next vacation. Bad hair days could not be used as an excuse.

Every summer vacation my mother would style my hair and lovingly bring some shape and order to the head she could not care for, for the next 10 months.



By Fourth standard, our hair had long outgrown the crew cut of first standard but was still short for the blue ribbons, so they had to be managed with a wreath or a clip and our combs stayed in green comb pockets hung from the wall. And in that otherwise predictable year, our housemothers, J- Akka and S- Akka decided on a new experiment.

“J- Akka’s girls come for a haircut” someone sang, “S- Akka’s girls come for a haircut.” Our Akkas promised to give us a new monkey crop and to leave some hair uncut just above our foreheads. I stood first in line. Under the Narthangai tree, J- Akka climbed on the stone steps and began her first ever hair-cut in her twenty or so years of existence. And when she was finished, S- Akka stood staring at my forehead for a full minute before she slowly began to laugh.

“She used to look like a beautiful swan and now she looks like the ugly Duckling.”



As the sun set over the palm trees and the Ragland house boys began walking past me, I finally understood the Principal’s question. “Akka only cut my hair, sir,” I finally managed to say.

Later that week the principal came for a surprise visit to the dorm - just in time - before the 15-member height order line got combed, powdered and began the slow walk to afternoon class. “Who is Angelin Ruth’s house mother?” J- Akka looked ready to cry. “You are a house mother” he began,” Don’t try to become a barber.” I can’t remember anything else from that hazy fourth standard memory except his final words. “She used to look like a beautiful swan and now she looks like the ugly Duckling.”

Ruth Thaveedhu (Class of 2002) currently works as a Design Engineer with Technip. Her spare time is spent retelling the David & Goliath story a million times to her 3 and 5 year old boys.

Ah, Woman!

Penned by S. Janneker Lawrence Daniel (Class of 2000)
on the occasion of Women's Day 2021

Gone are the days of servitude
When to clothe the bosom was a crime
Scraping and bowing to constitute
A posterity of meek broads and geezers in grime

The frailty of the weak in multitude
Was adduced to be the prime
Of all the extenuations on the destitute
Through expedient actions by men hardly worth a dime

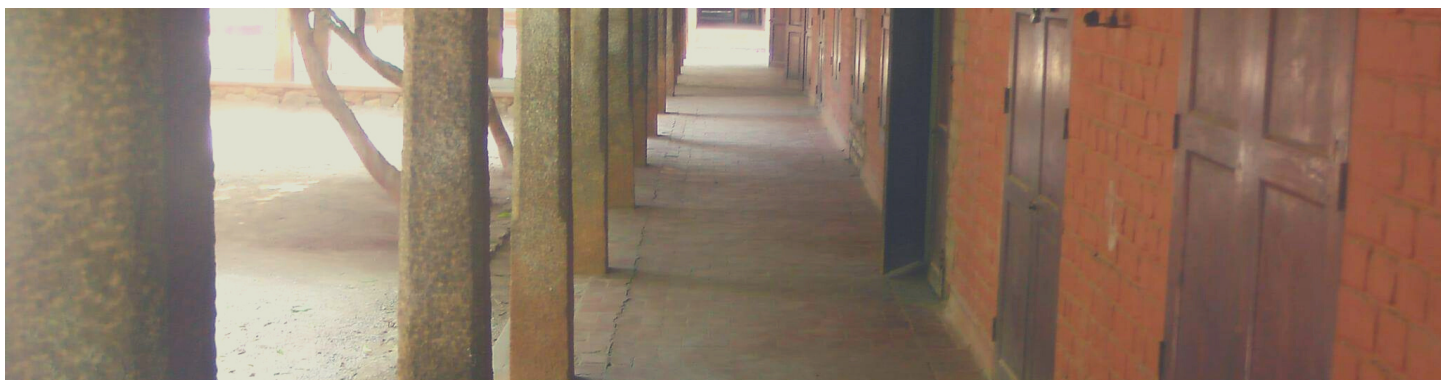
But it was not for ever to subdue
She did break the shackles in time
Bubbling with just the right attitude
As a dame dancing to a joyful chime

Shine much more so without dispute
My colleen, reach the zenith of your climb
For you can attain the highest altitude
Now that the tangle is severed, of slime.

My First Day At Boarding School!

BY STEVE JOTHIRAJ, CLASS OF 2000

The Southwest monsoon had just started its northward journey that year. We could see the clouds brooding over the Western Ghats from our home in the southern district of the southern most state in India. The clouds threatened to rain as we drove from our home to the boarding school. My sister and I were on our way to the boarding school for the very first time. The overcast sky reflected the atmosphere inside the car. We didn't know when our eyes would break forth into rushing waters. We reached the school campus just as the last rays of the red sun went out and the street lights flickered into life. As we got out of the car it was starting to rain. My sister had beaten the clouds by a few minutes - she was already crying.



My sister was admitted into the girls' hostel first, while I waited in the car. My gut was tightening as I sat in the car taking in the strange smells and noise that came from the dormitory nearby. There is a distinct smell that is associated with the start of an academic year in the boarding school. It's a heady mixture of toilet soap, paint and plastic that fills the corridors for the first few days. A whiff of it could get your intestines in knots. The ingredients that go into this concoction are the quintessential elements of the start of an academic year at the boarding school. The major contribution is from the supply of toiletries that a boarder brings. Then there is a dash of the plastic smell from the new buckets, mugs, toys, suitcases etc... which is a highlight of an opening day. Add to this the smell of fresh paint on fabric which is used to imprint initials of each student on his belongings - from shirts to shoes. Finally as a seasoning, the mild odour of stale eatables that has survived a 3 day train journey adds to the distinct fragrance. This smell remains part of the story every year and it can bring back the not-so-nice memories of the time you joined the boarding school. Even today it would make my gut writhe a bit.

"It's a heady mixture of toilet soap, paint and plastic that fills the corridors for the first few days. A whiff of it could get your intestines in knots."

That night had been drowned in the monsoon rains both on the outside and the inside of us. The morning showed evidence of both - a slippery terrain on the outside and wet pillows inside. The heart wrenching event wouldn't even spare an adult – my father would later confess that he shed tears in private that day.

That morning, unwillingly, I trudged along with my father as we navigated the rain puddles to my classroom. Only my Father's assurance of his coming to see me in the break-time would get me into the classroom. Little did I know that the most effective way to part with your ward in the boarding school is to leave without a goodbye before the break-time so as to minimize the agony. My father did just that.

With the only known person gone, I sat in my classroom digesting the scene, which was too much to process at that time. As a young boy of eight I didn't know what to expect in a boarding school. Everything seemed new to me - the language, the people, the smells, the setting. As I sat with my tear-stained face resting on the desk, not listening to the teacher in the front, my sweet bench-mate (who would go on to be my best friend over the years) offered me a candy. I had missed the candy distributed by a boy celebrating his birthday earlier. I accepted the candy immediately like any other 8 year old. Did it cheer me up? I don't remember. I opened the wrapper expecting an orange flavoured sugar candy, but to my total astonishment, I found a piece of chalk. What a welcome to the world of boarding school!

Steve currently is exploiting the covid-19 lockdown by spending time with his parents at his native town making up for the lost time in boarding school.

Apart from temporarily playing the petulant son to his parents, Steve also is the doting father to his daughters. You can find Steve and his daughters loitering in the garden in the afternoons in search of some petty adventure - you can check out a few of them here.



Alumni Meet-ups Around the World

A glimpse from the land of Maple Leaf
Canada



Nightingale (2007) Gladcy (2008)



Chen, Angie and Arun from the class of 2001



Josh (2005), Shekinah (2004) Gladcy (2008)

In a place called “Home”

Titus (Class of 2009)



I couldn't sleep. It was a Wednesday night.

The aroma of beef curry made the late comers come unusually early for dinner. Some were already counting their chapatis and some were tearing it up in different shapes like pieces of a puzzle. Others started drowning them in the curry. Everyone, including the warden waited for the prayer to begin. As soon as the prayer was sung, electricity took a break.

The power supply was gone. Everyone guarded their plates, wishing they had three hands. They all feared the “the thief in the night” who may steal their precious little puzzle pieces. Power supply made its return shortly. The boys started 'thrashing' their delicious manna joyfully.

"Aai Jackku, second time is there ah?" a voice called out from the corner. “No man”, came the reply as Jackku continued to finish his noble service. “Second time” was always welcome here but they were like the second chances in life - rare.

Some were already counting their chapatis and some were tearing it up in different shapes like pieces of a puzzle

It was study time. While few were busy finishing their homework, others were looking restlessly at the clock every 10 minutes. Again the power cut came to their rescue. That, which they dreaded few minutes ago, became their saviour now.

Suddenly, the sky brightened up as the stars winked at each other like lovers. The stray dogs were sipping from the beef curry flavoured water puddles resulting from our washing of hands.

It was soon time to sleep. The best of sleep came to those who arranged their beds in the morning. Gradually, the murmuring stopped. It was a silent night because one could hear the croaking of the frogs instead of the fans.

Oh, the joy in little things !



A cold winter breeze wafted past me, making me uncomfortable. I searched for my phone like a blind man searching for his glasses.

Looking back into the house, I called her to keep me company. She came and sat quietly beside me in the garden. With her long raised ears, she tried listening to the memory that was running like a movie in my head. I gently rubbed her head and she licked my hand, returning the favour. The power supply was back and the sky was dark again.

I walked back to the door, taking the last sip of coffee from my cup. It was bitter sweet!

Titus is a social worker by profession. He is currently consulting for Bright Future an NGO that works with youth in Mumbai.

He loves day-dreaming and juggling conflicting ideas in his mind.



Alumni Book Donation

To the School Library



Every year, for the past 3 years, Jeniat Alexander (class of 2004) has collected a bunch of books that are donated to the library at Santhosha Vidhyalaya.

These books are collected from friends in her neighborhood, packed, then lugged along with her baggage during her journey across the continents and then finally delivered to our beloved library.

These books bring joy and happiness to the book lovers back at school. Books are a safe place for our school children to get lost in. They would only benefit from the habit. Please reach out to mailsvaa@gmail.com if you would like to be part of this in any way.