

**I**N October 2005 I got a call from my friend Jan, the chairperson of Mission San Jose High School's Math department. One of the math teachers had just left and he wanted me to take over. I had quit engineering about a year ago and was going through the excruciating process of finding a full-time college faculty position. So I thought, why not kill some time teaching kids?

My first day at Mission High was enlightening ... among the greetings I received were "Welcome to hell!". Another student expressed his disappointment that I was not a substitute teacher and was actually a real teacher. I knew right away this would be a tough journey! Over the next few months I learned a few things about high school in this era. Every kid has an ipod and cell phone. I also realised that going to Disneyland is a rite of passage and my students were aghast that I hadn't been. They were so shocked that they wanted to set up a fund to send me to Disneyland!

Some of the experiences I had were priceless and I will remember these kids forever. I remember one kid came back from a dance show where he said he danced a disco routine. I asked him to show me his moves ... at first he refused ... and then I saw the bulb in his head light up ... "How about for Extra Credit?!" Kids will do anything for Extra Credit. It's all about the points and making the grade. Some things never change. I kept reminding my kids that learning and enjoying the material are just as important, but I am sure that made no sense to them.

Spring Break came and I planned to visit Bangladesh. Of course I got the usual "which part of India is that?" I

put my world map to good use and turned the math lesson into a geography lesson for that day. Students wanted me to bring something back from home. One student wanted an elephant. And of course some kids yelled "Take us with you Mr. Atique!" I pictured myself and 30 teens in the confines of a plane for several hours. Yikes!

In May my dream came true. After several nights spent filling out applications, followed by interviews, I got the call that I had been waiting for. I had got a faculty position at a college in Southern California! With mixed feelings I told Jan. And telling the kids was even harder. With a couple of weeks left the kids were as entertaining as ever. And sometimes I become the entertainment. Two girls offered to tell me I was their favourite teacher if I allowed them to do something to me. Against my better judgment I agreed (Who doesn't want to be the favourite teacher?). Out came the bottle of nail polish. They wanted to paint my nails. I am a man of my word, so I let

them. But negotiated down to one nail. There I was with a pink pinky finger.

The World Cup was about to start, so to get in the spirit I kicked the ball around with the kids outside the classroom today. We didn't break any windows but managed to send the ball into Mr. Jager's Calculus class. Seeing the students all run was hilarious. I wanted to run too! But I was the one who said "sorry" to Mr. Jager. But for a second it was awesome to feel like a kid again. I will cherish my experiences at Mission High. But most of all, I will miss the contagious energy of my students who made me feel like a kid again.

# Last Days at Mission High

NABEEL ATIQUE

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