

MUSING

Those schoolgirl days

REMEMBER being young and having a merry playful time, when the boys had to stay at home and you were there with Mum and Dad? Remember the hot springs of Karachi with the crocodiles where you bathed to get rid of the blue birthmarks on your back? Do you recall playing 'school-school', reciting 'fair daffodils we weep to see you fade away so soon?' The beds were lined up in Winnie Fernandes's house, and you enjoyed the 'paratha' with jam for tea?

Speaking of finger-licking food, you will never forget the 'shir' dipped 'gojas', the 'sohan ka halwas' which Mum made. And the layers of coloured jellios that went with custard. Also, can you ever forget the fruit cakes made on top of 'dekchis' sand filled?

What of the whiff of the peanut filled cookies which assailed you, as you entered the home from school? And the yummy coconut and jam pie which left Dad speechless. What about the meat filled sandwiches you had, when your friends called for tea? And the delicious kebab with paratha, which was the conventional fare for the evening meal? As for the "khatwa" which the maid concocted from the left over 'daal' and 'bhaat', which had a tangy taste – it was mind boggling for us children. It was nearly as good as the khichuri, from next door which Afsari's father made in memory of dead relatives, which we ate with bits of lemon.

Not doing one's art homework and reading the next door neighbour's Marie Corelli books with green skies, or reading Dad's 'The heart has its reason' and 'The king's story' was the summer past time. Reading the stories in the Saturday Evening Post or Amrita Bazar Patrika or Life, instead of reading ahead in school, was the done thing.

Wearing the tiered dresses mother hand stitched, with ruffles and pique, which Sister



Longina Maria so admired as I danced on stage is one big event in life. Donning the cat and dog bobby-socks with the candy pink dress for the school song was yet another feat in the past.

Posing with the balustrade in the yellow flowered printed dress made me blissfully content too. So what if big brother had burnt his hand while experimenting with my plastic doll! It is strange how boys, even in books, burn the little sister's dolls. This was just when the green dungarees along with the dotted yellow dress were allowed to be worn on rainy days.

Playing imaginary games with the neighbouring friend Rullu was something else which kept me and my sister busy beyond measure. She was supposed to have come and said this and done that. It kept my sister and I occupied for hours on end. We didn't need a third parson to be content. It is strange how happy one was playing with items like plastic kitchen sets or a dressing table - which the niece, as a little girl, smashed to smithereens.

For one birthday I got a teddy bear and a story book with many futures to follow for the protagonist. The book had a hole, the size of a head, so the heroine could be a nurse or a teacher or whatever so we desired. I am still reassured by the photograph of my dad, in a felt hat, and me, with my precious teddy-bear. There are pictures galore in the Family Album and all of them are treasured. This is specially so of the bright red tricycle, which one of my uncles had presented to me — and

was I proud of it! And my siblings were the proud owners of the two-wheeler that is also in the album.

Past memories are sure sweet and unbeatable. There is nothing better than those school girl days.

By **Fayza Haq**

Questing after tropical winter

I have been living in America for more than five years now, and although I lived most of my time here in chilly Minnesota, no winter seemed longer and snowier than the current one. I almost went into a state of depression, and I began to reminisce about the mild winter back home, where trees do not stand bare head-to-toe and streets never hide under foot-deep snow.

There is one American state, however, that people say feels just like Bangladesh — it's Florida.

Located on the southeast of the U.S., Florida has earned a global reputation for its round-the-year good weather. Nicknamed the "Sunshine State," Florida's tropical weather attracts tourists in millions from home and abroad. When I first visited south Florida three years ago, I thought the plane landed in a second Bangladesh! The heat and humidity in the air reminded me of the one and only one place, the country that raised me.

My uncle picked us up from the airport. The entire time in the car I looked outside the window, appreciating the tropical greenery, which I had not then seen in nearly two years. When we were not yet done unpacking our bags, the clouds began to roar and a downpour almost flooded the front and backyards of my uncle's house. "Wow! Now, it really feels like being in Dhaka," I thought happily.

So, this winter when the snow storms began to drive me crazy, I thought I must escape the cold east coast for at least a few days. Florida was on the top of the list. It was a good decision.

Florida is the kind of place where even if you don't do any touristy activities, you still feel on top of the world. The magic is in the weather. Summers are hot and humid, but winters are mild and springs,

gorgeous. People drive and fly to the Sunshine State for another big reason — Florida, the warmest U.S. state is also the only state that borders both the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.

We escaped the sub-zero temperature of Delaware to a very comfortable 26 degrees Celsius. The contrast in weather was hard to digest the first couple of days. I was back in my summer clothes even though it was still early February and most of the U.S. was experiencing sub-zero weather conditions and heavy snowfall.

We went to the beautiful Jaycee Park & Conn Beach in Vero Beach, a small city in Florida, on a Sunday morning. We walked on the sand, admired the beauty and vastness of Atlantic, and gazed at the horizon, where sky and ocean met and became one.

The weather was perfect. We had ice-cream from an ocean side ice-cream parlour. Sitting outdoors under an umbrella-covered table, I lapped up my strawberry shortcake cone and counted my blessings. It was difficult to imagine from the happy faces of the tourists, the sun and the lush green trees that half of the country was battling a biting winter.

The three-day stay at my cousin's place needed to be extended by four days because of a winter storm that hit Atlanta, Georgia, where we had our transit. Thousands of flights were cancelled including our return flights — I could not believe my luck.

I am back in the cold and snowy east coast. I cannot wait for spring to arrive. The Florida trip gave me a much-needed break. I think I can now spend the rest of winter, thinking about the ocean and the tropical weather I had enjoyed in America's Sunshine State.

By **Wara Karim**

Replacement of sugar for cooking delicious sweet dishes for those worried about diabetes and weight management

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