

## MUSING

# “Happy days at school time”

The days were full of sunshine and laughter. Teachers in huge can-cans taught us, as if by magic. What they taught us was simple. We would go to our friend's house to rehearse our lines of Robert Herrick. It was great fun to say the lines which were from our older siblings' books. During tiffin time, we would sit and have lunch from boxes gay with river and ship illustrations and then we would go and rehearse plays which had dogs and dolls for characters. I was a gollywog with a blackened face, the shoe polish difficult to rub off. We danced at our girl friend's house too. We would get hats for the school play and romp around with paper dolls, as well as play with the dog and cat, while the father, who had a shoe factory, worked waiting in the car. We had milk soup ever afternoon.

We played games galore. There was throw ball, baseball and races, in which I participated, until one day a tall Anglo Indian bird smashed my spectacles. Games were suspended for me from then on. I sat and watched paper dresses being made.

Going up to the loft and reading borrowed story books was my passion. I would go to my friend's house to borrow “Teen Digest” and other books. These girls are still my friends, even though we have now had careers and entered our “Golden Girls” ages, with kids of our own—adopted or otherwise, on the fourth floors of houses, where we keep cats and birds. We have reconditioned cars, shared by the son, daughter and grandchildren.

On one of my birthdays, I had two georgette dresses. We had so much of food that it didn't even matter. There were cakes, pastries and “samosa”. My elder brother's birthday, which fell on the same month, was celebrated that same day. Birthdays were always memorable and a combined one was especially so- at least for me!

We would go for holidays, near the sea. Then we stayed in Karachi and would go to places like Clifton and Hawk's Bay. We went to Keamari too, and rode big anchored ships. We took pictures of the seaside, and had them preserved in Mother's album, which my sister from Toronto, is hunting for today.

Yes those days were full of happiness and laughter.

By Fayza Haq

## MUSING

# Stronger than a sword

“Ceasar had perished from the world of men, had not his sword been rescued by his pen,” Marcus Valerius Martial

Pens and their owners, with a flourish here and a twist there, have shaped history, spurred revolutions, formed nations, and created great works of art, with lasting effects on the collective human psyche. Of all that are pens, perhaps the most evocative is the feather quill in an ink pot, or its more modern version, the versatile and classy fountain pen.

The tangibility and organic feel of ink flowing onto paper through the pen, seemingly makes all fleeting thoughts a bit more concrete, and the reasoning somewhat stronger. The written word receives more scrutiny, and sometimes more flak, perhaps indicating the gravity

of the act of writing.

We may think many things and change our minds, we may say something unintended, but if committed on paper, it cannot be then justified as a fleeting action. And though today writing instruments are ubiquitous, it were not so in the not too distant past, and the instruments of thought dissemination were indeed mighty, and very important, as they remain so even today.

Now the romantics among us use fountain pens to mark special days in those hidden diaries, perhaps to make the memories a little more concrete and longer lasting, or to reminisce once more, with our fingers tracing over the dried ink, sometime in the distant future.

To an enthusiast, the age old charm of



an elegant fountain pen is not marred by the characteristic blotting even. A few ink-bombed shirt pockets or pencil bags are nothing compared to the love of the fountain pen. The inky mess on fingers is a sigh of relief, somehow a catharsis.

In fact, to a discerning reader, the dots and the puddles of dry ink on a handwritten message could reveal much more than the written word itself - the writer's deliberation over the choice of a particular word, the anguish or desperation of a note for help, the longing of a lonely heart, somewhere far away from friends and family, all hidden in the bends and curves of the letters flowing out of an ink pen.

Many a worthy thinker has perished, but their thoughts and ideas survive, simply for their love of writing, and the tenacity of the written word, seeped into the inky depths of their writing. Many countries were won, and many borders arbitrarily drawn by simple fountain pens in just the last century. The wrath, the salve and the might in the writer's pen remains untamable. Despite the advent and spread of technology, the worth of a handwritten word, and the charm of fountain pen and its promised flourishes, have not diminished, and will not do so. As Shakespeare said, “Let there gall enough in thy ink, though thou write with a goose-pen, no matter.” Or, a fountain pen!

By Sania Aiman

# Raise a child who loves nature

Our ancestors picked wild berries, hunted untamed animals, caught fish in lakes, and scooped up water from streams to quench their thirst and satiate their hunger. At night, they lay on their backs under a star-spangled sky and wondered how far the moon was. Mankind's love for nature therefore flows in its blood.

Our DNA carries memories and experiences of the thousands of years our forefathers lived in the wilderness. And even though we don't live in the wild anymore, we bond with nature instantly and instinctively.

I grew up in Dhaka. And although Dhaka was a metropolis even in the '80s and '90s, there were still safe public parks and patches of green here and there, where people could walk, rest, and enjoy nature.

As a child, I often visited the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with my father. On fall and winter mornings, I would see dew-drops hanging lightly from blades of its lush lawn grass. I would inhale the smell of fresh cut grass and walk on it to feel their tips tickling the soles of my feet.

I can still feel the tickling of that neatly cut grass under my feet when I close my eyes. I think every child should experience what it feels like to walk barefoot on dewy grass.

With my damp feet, I would then walk on the wide stairs of the assembly building; I would enjoy the marks left by my small feet.

If you have a child at home, don't deprive him of nature's bounty. Introduce him to Mother Nature, where he can always find solace. Nature is the only place where our minds find peace when there is no peace around.

Introduce your child to our idyllic countryside. Eating out at a fancy restaurant is enjoyable, but what is perhaps more enjoyable to a child is running across an open field, climbing a tree, soaking feet in a pond, or chasing a butterfly.

Don't worry about those soiled hands, feet, clothes, and shoes; they can always be washed clean.

Health experts assert that spending time in nature not only helps children get their exercise, but also promotes their cognitive development and stimulates their senses.

The high-tech world has snatched away from our children their normal childhood. They are so occupied with screens they don't know that there exists a world, which is far more delightful than the one they see on the screen of a TV or a mobile device.

Our children have not seen falling stars or a full moon. They don't watch the sun

set over the city skyline. Our children never lie on their backs on a pitch-black night and enjoy the beauty of dazzling stars.

If you have access to your house's rooftop, take your children there before sunset or after night falls. Let them and yourself enjoy heavens – you will feel your heart shedding the weight of a hectic day.

When you go abroad on a vacation, spend more time in the mountains, parks, or on the beaches, and less time in shopping malls, restaurants, and hotel lobbies.

We need to go back to nature to raise healthy children!

You may not have a park in your neighbourhood, you may not have a backyard to grow a garden, but you most likely have a balcony, where you can grow plants in pots. Let your child help you when you garden, and let him experience the joy of seeing a rose bush bloom, or a tomato seedling grow three feet tall. Tell him that the chillies you used in the chicken curry are from the plants he potted, and enjoy his young face break into a grin.

It is every child's right to enjoy nature; don't deprive a child of it. It is in the embrace of Mother Nature that the children of today's mundanely materialistic world can learn about the true meaning of beauty and happiness.

By Wara Karim