

VG news

1 March 2007. Volume 5 no 1

VGHS: Centre of Excellence for Young Women of Africa

2007 kicked off with that wonderful feeling of being on the brink of something great. There is a buzz in the air, something intangible... So much seems to be contributing to that VG spirit that Akhira alludes to in the next article:

- We have 400 learners, giving us a learner:teacher ratio of 17:1; 148 boarders (1 caretaker to 7 boarders)

- Our Gr 12s are smiling because THEY HAVE ARRIVED. They may wear their white jerseys, a.k.a. *bulletproofs*, because they are 007!

- Despite their egos our Gr 12s are doing a sterling job in their committees. Akhira and her girls must be commended for their enthusiasm – sometimes too boisterous, but generally involved and ready to take responsibility. The spirit evident at the Gr 11 and 12 Formal Social was great with most commenting that it was the best dance ever. (Better still was the fact that the girls took 'smart casual' dressing to heart – no over-the-top dressing).

- The tutor/chat groups are working well. A small group of learners meet with a staff member on a weekly basis for chatting, getting to know one another. I know the groups are not in competition with one another, but mine is definitely the best. Nomfundo Nondzube named us the Circle of Sisterhood!

There is little doubt that education is in turmoil, but if we work together to create a safe, energetic, disciplined and stimulating environment for staff and learners at VG we will continue to be winners.

Make yourself a cup of tea, sit back and enjoy reading about us.

SCHOOL CAPTAIN'S REPORT

By Akhira Harry

We are already 6 weeks into the first term of 2007. I hope the Gr 8s have settled in well, and are starting to form part of our VG spirit. I also urge all the 'old girls' to keep up the amazing VG spirit, throughout the year, so we can all have a fabulous year. So let's all make the most of as many opportunities and activities, as possible.

Paulo Coelho said: "Only one thing makes a dream impossible: the fear of failure."

I hope everyone has set up their dreams, goals and achievements for the year, and is ready for success.

I hope everyone enjoys the long weekend, relaxes, has a good break, and lots of fun, returning full of energy and spirit!

GR 12 RESULTS, 2006

Top school in the District

Top learner in the District

Top Science learner in the District

Two learners in the Top 5 in the District.

Where else but at VGHS?

100% pass with 75% of the girls getting an endorsement. 6 A Aggregates: Kathryn McConnachie, Talia Lancaster, Kabwela Chisaka, Penny Gilbert, Samantha Bezuidenhout and Alexia Berger. 45 Subject Distinctions. Well done to our girls, their parents and the staff.

Something to think about: At the Matric Awards Ceremony last week, Prof Badat, Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, pointed out that there is no evidence whatsoever that the standard of the Senior Certificate has dropped, or that it is easier to get a Gr 12 nowadays. He questioned what message the media (and others) is sending to those who worked so hard when they imply that the standard is low.

ONE OF MANY STARS

A complimentary letter from a Mrs Margie Antrobus to a girl with "friendly, courteous and confident behaviour": Sibongiseni! She and her team of assistants helped at the A.W.F. pancake evening. Mrs Antrobus taught Sibongiseni in Grade 3 and is proud of her.

FOUNDERS WEEKEND

15-17 MARCH 2007

Thursday, 15/3

18:00 VG hosting VP parents, Gr 7s and staff

Friday, 16/3

7:45 Workshops

9:00 Founders Assembly - all welcome

10:00 Service to the school, including tree planting

13:30 Gala

18:00 Sundowners in the quad - please join us for a pre-Supper Theatre drink and chat while being entertained by our bands.

19:00 Supper Theatre: A variety concert featuring the best VG talent and a three course meal.

Tickets available from the office at R60 pp.

Saturday, 17/3

8:30 Memorial Service

9:00 Old Girls' AGM

9:40 Breakfast for Old Girls, Gr 12s, staff and friends of the school. R20 for OGU members; R40 for non-members and R15 for the girls

11:00 Interhouse Singing in the MG Richardson Hall - all welcome

12:30 Sport with the Old Girls

19:00 Variety Concert in the MG Richardson Hall.

See you!

THINKING OF...

- Phiwokuhle Matyumza, 2006 Gr 12, and her family on the death of her mother.
- Nangamso and Khanyisile Mahlali on the death of their father
- Hayley Webb, 2006 Gr 12, who is still recovering after her accident.
- Mrs Bradfield as she recovers from surgery.

RCL MEMBERS

- Gr 9: Danielle Wiblin, Tiana Els, Sony Mzamo, Alisa Lochner
 Gr 10: Melissa Sangqu, Nomsa Maneli, Nomajama Cagwe
 Gr 11: Feziwe Ndwayana, Sharon Mjekula, Tabazi Bengu
 Gr 12: Zikhona Magadla, Donna Whisken, Aphumle Ngcoza. Thando Zono and Akhira Harry also serve on the RCL and are the learner representatives on the SGB.

JUNIOR CITY COUNCIL

Lauren Coetzee, Luwella Nodada, Bongolethu Mtshabe and Thantaswa May represent the school on this body. We will soon be painting drums – a project of the JCC.

CLASS CAPTAINS

| Captain | Vice Captain |
|--|---|
| Grade 8 Melissa Fourie Sibu Zondani Luvuyo Hlatshaneni | Palesa Mtyingizana Marne Mostert Amy von Witt |
| Grade 9 Luthando Nkayi Olwethu Nqebe Sive Mafane Kimberley Chifadza | Sisipho Matinise Amber Higgitt Hannah Stevens Leletu Ndabeni |
| Grade 10 Ntombovuyo Manze Thandile Nombewu Noluvuyo Yantolo | Siviwe Stefane Shannon Thurston Mellisa Killian |
| Grade 11 Thembakazi Maqoko Vuyiseka Joni Linda Ngwabeni | Lungile Dunywa Thandokazi Kulati Aphiwe Ngqunge |
| Grade 12 Debbie Mokhosi Genevieve Jacot- Guillarmod Sandisiwe Mlatsheni | Tulisa Mahote Lusanda Bill Rose Hurford |

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Chairperson: Michelle Schoeman
 Vice-chair: Xolisa Mapatwana

PTPA MOTHERS

Thank you to our willing mothers:

- Grade 8s: Mrs K. Hodge, Mrs Adesina
 Grade 9s: Mrs A. Upfold, Mrs M. Mzamo & Mrs N. Cloete
 Grade 10s: Mrs L. Coetzee, Mrs A. Goddard
 Grade 11s: Mrs J. Gordon, Mrs B. Chithambo
 Grade 12s: Mrs B. Amsterdam & Mrs R. Bowles

MERITS

Congratulations to the following girls on achieving high merits. Audrey Hoeane 280, Olwethu Nqebe 280, Thulisilie Siguca 355, Carla Mostert 340, Taryn Potts 395, Lacey

Isaacs 295, Vitima Jere 315, Feziwe Ndwayane 300.

TOP NOTCH AWARDS

Be careful, Grahamstown, as the following girls have received their learners' licences...
 Chadé Bowles, Michelle Schoeman, Donna Whisken, Belinda Xonxa, & Nomta Zinto

GR 8 & NEW GIRL ORIENTATION

A super group of girls who seem to have settled in well. Certainly not getting lost so often, but the volume of work at VG still has some wide-eyed.

The Gr 8 boarders cannot stop talking about how good the hostel food is – the right way to the hearts of the hostel staff!

SPORTS DAY

Lots of fun, despite the heat that threatened the *kom-kom* (Lucy-speak for complexion) of many, not least of all Mr Schmidt who really got carried away in Ultimate Frisbee.

Games included tug-of-war, fun races, dushe, duster hockey, bean bag golf, rounders soccer shooting.

The staff took a while to decide in which "code" they would thrash the Gr 12s, and eventually settled on tug-of-war. This was not a good choice as the staff have been true to the healthy lifestyle "forced" upon them at the first staff meeting: eating healthily, exercising, toning down. That gave the Gr 12s the weight advantage crucial to tug-of-war...

Some concern has been expressed about us not having a traditional athletics day, but few girls are interested and most end up lounging on the pavilion or spending time with the First Aiders. The current sports day has everyone participating.

Ms McCrindle's report on Sports/Games Day. Rope burns, grazed knuckles, hoarse voices, stiff muscles – a fun day, with lasting memories, had by all! It was wonderful to see the attitude of the girls on the day. Everything was approached with such enthusiasm, and the singing and support given to friends made the day one of fun and spirit building.

Thank you to:

- o Mr Nieuwoudt and his staff for much finding and carrying of equipment,
- o Ms Farquhar and Mrs Cloete for sewing bean bags (and Mrs Dixon for offering her help),
- o Olwethu Nqebe, Sandile Mvula, Michelle Schoeman, Chadé Bowles, Valerie January, Tashlyn Jacobs and Olwethu Bunu for assistance in making of equipment or setting it up,
- o the House Executive members, staff and matrics for their help with

organisation of events and being officials on the day.

And a huge thank you from us to Ms McCrindle who has spent hours slogging away at co-curriculars.



Sports Day action

CO-CURRICULARS

Thank you to the girls and parents who are supporting the new system. We are concerned, however, by the number of girls that are still not doing their co-curriculars and are therefore having to go to Friday afternoon detention week after week.

Please impress upon your daughters/wards the importance of fulfilling one's commitments and the importance of excusing oneself if there is no way of attending an activity. Excuses must be given to the coach in writing before a practice or, in the case of a girl being absent from school, on the first day she returns to school.



Last birthday tea for some Gr 12s – hopefully!

VALENTINE'S DAY

Exploitation, commercialization, marginalization and all those *gogga,s* but Audrey Hoeane really made my day when she said, "someone in this school loves you as much as she loves herself, and believe me when I tell you she loves herself a little bit too much!"

ATHLETICS

Congratulations to the following girls on being selected for the Grahamstown District Athletics Team. They will compete in Cradock on Saturday 3 March in the Cacadu Athletics meeting.

- Open: Amandla Ludidi – Shot- put & Discus
Zintle Matshaya - Discus
U17 Nicola Sewry – Hurdles
Simthandile Mnyikiso – Shot-put & Discus
U14 Siyathanda Yeko – 400& 800m
Vuyisanani Majije – Long Jump
Nicole Osode – Shotput

SWIMMING

Despite our swimming pool hiccups we have had some good team training sessions and a good response from group A, B and Beginners Swimming.

We have had two big galas this term and the team swimmers have performed well, with most swimmers improving their personal times. Our next exciting event will be the Interhouse

Splash Gala on 16 March and the EP Champs Gala on 24 March (This has been moved from 17 March to accommodate our Founders Weekend).

SOCCER

Well done to everyone who came to play soccer in the sweltering heat on 22 January. Thursford and Graeme joined up against Dorset and Ruthville and beat them 4-2.

TENNIS

The Grahamstown Junior Tennis Champs were held at the beginning of the term – 8 VG girls entered the championships.

Results:

- U18: Thando Zono runner-up in singles and doubles (partner: Tarryn Purdon (PAHS))
U18: Julie Dixon runner-up in singles back draw
U16: Carla Mostert runner-up in singles back draw

Quadrangular tennis day: DSG, KC, UHS and VG was unfortunately interrupted by rain. VG lost to DSG and were playing KC when the rain came. Thank you to all the girls for being neat and on time. Results of other matches so far: Beat PAHS by 78 games to 45.

FILM SOCIETY

By Sesona Myosana

Film society started the year off with a wonderful film. Edward Scissorhands is a more refreshing movie than the typical teen movies that most of us usually watch. It's a different, yet entertaining, romantic comedy filled with brilliant acting (it is also Johnny Depp's first big screen appearance). Edward is a boy who was created by a professor who sadly died before he could give Edward real hands. Instead he is given scissors as a substitute. For many years he lived in a mansion by himself until a cosmetic sales-rep befriends him, feels sorry for Edward and takes him to her home. There Edward experiences life with family, love and a few challenges along the way.

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

Thanks to Mr Stoloff a large number of girls saw this movie on global warming.

HIKING CLUB

By Nandipha Tom & Linda Ngwabeni

On the 10th of February 20 VG girls trailed off on our one day hike to Mountain Drive. It was drizzling and a little windy, which admittedly was better than the scorching sun. We walked mostly uphill and soon we were sweating in the cold. For Nandipha Tom and Linda Ngwabeni it felt like walking up Mount Everest. Linda even started shouting "I can't take this anymore". We finally reached our destination, which was the Toposcope, and had breakfast.

While we were eating and relaxing Thina started screaming because there was a huge spider on Zintle's back. Our hero, Mr Stoloff, saved the day and took the spider off. (Unfortunately we didn't have a camera to take a picture of Mr Stoloff's sexy legs).

After this episode we started walking back, but this time taking another route, because the hike was supposed to be an "adventure"! So we walked for at least 45 min when Mr Stoloff stopped us and said, 'Girls we're going to have to turn back, because there is no more trail, it's been covered by grass.'

For some of us walking 4km was unheard of exertion, but we surprised ourselves!

DEBATING REPORT

By Akhira Harry

Debating started off on a highly positive note this year, with so many debaters joining. Unfortunately, we have not been able to have any inter-schools debates yet; but have been improving on our debating skills, as well as our general knowledge on possible notions.

We were lucky to be invited to the annual Rhodes debate (to show first years what debating is all about), a very interesting and topical topic was debated "Legalise child labour."

We all look forward to an exciting term next term, with many planned debates, against the Grahamstown schools, as well as taking part in the St Andrews league.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

By Michelle Schoeman

The year kicked off with a well-attended snippet evening, with the girls discussing topics ranging from the Coega development to the end of the world. No doubt the ice cream boosted mental activity...

Ms Hayes addressed the group on her exchange to India. The girls were spellbound by her passionate report and shocked by what they saw. No doubt she made us all even more proud of our country.

Thank you to all, especially Mrs Schoeman for financing our ice-cream days and for always having time for our girls, and to Xolisa for all her support.

By Xolisa Mapatwana

On 24 February 18 girls attended the Rhodes University Amnesty International workshop at Rhodes.

The workshop was aimed at teaching the girls about their human rights and how to make other people aware of their rights. Speakers from as far as Fort Beaufort enlightened us.

Our girls were complimented throughout for their participation and good behaviour. Thank you to Ms Sachikonye for accompanying us and spending the whole day with us.

CHRISTIANS IN ACTION

By Mrs Retief

During our weekly meetings we strive to teach girls about God and The Word through a variety of activities.

We started off with a "protect your egg" competition. Lots of fun was had by all. The message was illustrated effectively. Christians need to pray, read the Bible and go to church gatherings to grow in God. The movie "A Walk to Remember", taught us of true love.

We spend time on the history of Bathsheba and David to discover that, if we have chosen against God, we can confess and receive forgiveness. At the term evening we viewed "Faith like Potatoes". Mention must be made of the very dedicated committee members: Beth, Claire, Julie and Megan.

CHOIR

Two huge choirs and a passionate choir director are practising for the Messiah on 31 May 2007. Every choir parent should diarize this event.

SENIOR MARIMBA BAND

The girls performed at the Matric Awards Ceremony last Friday. Thanks for the effort and the smiles, girls (and Ms Haarhoff)!

BOOK ROOM

By Mrs Retief

Since November 2006 many books have been ordered to be ready for the new curriculum. A total of 791 books are still expected to arrive – most of these on order from the Department of Education for Grade 8 & 9 learners.

To date a total of 924m of cello tape has been used in covering these textbooks!

Thank you, Mrs Retief, for going the extra mile.

INTERACT CLUB

By Lauren Coetzee

It's been an eventful and exciting term for all Interact members. We have been actively involving ourselves in our weekly service sessions at the Hospital and St Mary's daycare centre. Interact members doing litter collecting in town have received praise for tackling Grahamstown's litter problem so enthusiastically.

Our fundraiser for the term is the Rotary/Interact School raffle. VGHS and four other Grahamstown schools, along with the Rotary Clubs in Grahamstown, will donate all the money raised by our raffle to the refurbishment of the Settlers Hospital Children's Ward. So if you have not yet bought a raffle ticket do so a.s.a.p., as the first prize is a quad bike!

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

By Mrs Retief

Under the leadership of the Grade 12 Academic Support Committee, VGHS learners have several opportunities (offered free of charge!) to be assisted with their school work.

Maths: Wednesday 3:30

Xhosa: Monday 2:30

Grade 10–12 Science: Tuesday 3:30

Afrikaans: Wednesday 2:30 & Day 3 & 7 p7

Homework & Project assistance: Monday 2:30 & General assistance Tuesday 2:30

Grade 12 CompuTyping: Monday 2:30–4:30, Tuesday 2:30–4:30, Wednesday 2:30–3:30, Thursday 2:30–4:30

Grade 10 Accounting: Monday 3:30–4:30

What a pity that so few girls are making use of these opportunities...

Litha Mtshabe said that the Gr 11 external exams at the end of 2006 were a wake-up call. May all our girls be wide awake.

The following insert on Kip McGrath and the insert by Paragon (inside your envelope) were supplied by the two companies. We do not have any experience of them. Remember, at VGHS Academic Support is free of charge!

KIP McGRATH

One of the most exceptional developments in recent years in the field of educational assistance for challenged learners has been the mushrooming of Kip McGrath Education Centres in many parts of the world. Developed in Australia, Kip McGrath has franchised 60 Education Centres in South Africa alone, providing identical remediation programmes of a unique design and of proven success.

Now Grahamstown is to have such a Centre. Businessman John Jennings, well known locally, having investigated the preferred system on the website has, together with Wendy Brooks, obtained the franchise to open a Kip McGrath Education Centre in Grahamstown. They approached Bea Scott to head the teaching programme at the Centre. Bea has many years teaching experience, half of them at local schools, and has tertiary qualifications in remedial education. More teachers will be added as the numbers of enrolled children increases.

This trio recently underwent an intensive 7-day Kip McGrath training course at Amanzimtoti, which was attended by people from many parts of South Africa who are involved in the programme. They returned fired with enthusiasm to bring hope to many Grahamstown children in need of assistance. To this end, an extensive suite of well-appointed classrooms and offices has been

obtained, centrally situated at 115 High Street. Free assessments are available immediately. Interested parents and teachers are welcome to make appointments to view the Centre.

- KIPPY MCGRATH – Tel. 046-6362700
- After hours. 0827159734

STAFF NEWS

Mrs Moodie is our new bursar – a strict, caring lady. We are fortunate to have her on board.

Mrs Smuts' Jon-Jon has been selected for the World Cup cricket squad.

Mrs Bradfield, VGHS's own Florence Nightingale, needs lots of love and care after her surgery. We wish her well.

Mrs Fourie has had a traumatic start to the year, with her mother passing away.

Mrs Alan's brother is still recovering after his accident.

Mr Balana's wife has been in and out of hospital.

Mr Mahabeni's son was acquitted of the charges against him, after many court appearances.

Mrs Ferreira will soon be a great-grandmother, and Mrs Strydom a grandmother!

The Schmidts frequently test their mettle in a national quiz...as do the Baarts.

Ms Hayes wrote an epic on her exchange to India (see later), while Ms Farquhar still throws in the occasional "Crikey" after her encounters with the Ozzies. Mr Stoloff and his family had a frightening experience when Tosca decided to test her jungle gym skills in a fourth floor flat. Mrs Babu and her family were delayed in India due to illness. We are glad they are all well again.

Mrs Retief's Daniel has started school after a holiday fraught with encephalitis and mumps.

And the rest of the staff: as always working hard. They really deserve many accolades and lots of breaks! Thank you to them.

FINANCES

Thank you to our parents for meeting their financial commitments. Without you we obviously would not be able to offer the current programme at VGHS.

One request: please ensure that you give a reference when depositing fees (both at VGHS and at the Art Centre).

MY SCHOOL CARD

New girls' parents have received their My School Card application forms. Please support this as the "commission" the school gets is paid into the VGHS Benevolent Fund. This fund is used for destitute learners.

YOUTH PROGRAMMES

CAMP RISING SUN – DENMARK

VGHS has again been invited to send one of our learners on the Camp Rising Sun Leadership course in 2007. 50 learners from

almost 50 countries will attend the 8 week camp in Denmark over June, July and August. Learners must be 15 but not yet 16 in June. The aim of the camp is to promote international understanding across barriers of nationality, race and religion. This is a unique opportunity for learners from VG. The learner will need a small amount of pocket money, visas and return ticket. All other expenses are covered by the George E. Jonas Foundation. Chat to Beth Stevens, Louella Nodada Kirstin Amsterdam and Megan Riddin to find out more.

APPLICATIONS: Learners must submit a one-page motivation to Mrs L'Ange by Tuesday the 6th of March. Applicants will be interviewed on Wednesday the 8th March. Only one learner will be selected.

FSA YOUTH EXCHANGE

This is an exchange programme with Germany for South African learners 15 years and older. In the past two years, VG has had two learners selected: Litha Mtshabe and Michelle Schoeman.

FSA 3 month and 1 month programmes are offered annually. Learners can get more information and application forms from Mrs L'Ange.

FSA is urgently looking for host families or German exchange students between 10 April and 6 July. See Mrs L'Ange for details.

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY ADMISSION TESTS IN 2007

Port Elizabeth: 14 July, 4 August, 25 August and 29 September

East London: 14 July, 25 August and 29 September

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY MERIT AWARDS

Are you in Gr 12 with a Gr 11 aggregate of above 70%, black, coloured or Indian, a South African citizen who does Afrikaans First or Second Language? Keen to study at Stellenbosch? Then speak to Mrs Fourie urgently!

THE LIFE ORIENTATION DEPARTMENT NEEDS THE FOLLOWING EQUIPMENT TO ASSIST DURING HUMAN MOVEMENT LESSONS:

Fabric softener bottles (750ml), Bricks, Tennis balls, old cricket bats, old hockey sticks, old tennis rackets, any plastic balls (for children). Mrs Retief says, despite these lessons being compulsory, the girls do enjoy this time spent outside the classroom.

WARNING

There are many warnings and dire predictions doing the rounds, but please do not ignore this one:

A woman was gang raped by five men before they dumped her. Blood tests later confirmed the repeat rapes and traces of Rohypnol in her blood, along with Progesterex, which is essentially a small sterilization pill. The drug is now being used by rapists at parties to rape and sterilize their victims. Progesterex is available to vets to sterilize large animals. As with Rohypnol, all they have to do is drop it into the girl's drink. The girl can't remember a thing the next morning, of all that had taken place the night before. Progesterex, which dissolves in drinks just as easily, is used so the victim doesn't conceive from the rape. The drugs' effects are not temporary – they are permanent. Any female who takes it will never be able to conceive.

BLOCK PORN ON CHILDRENS' CELL PHONES

A message from Lisa Heneke, National School Co-ordinator at smsweb:

'PornBlocker service is available to protect your children from accessing pornographic material on their cellphones. Details of this service follow below and can also be seen on website www.smsweb.co.za. All parents need do is to SMS the word "BLOCK", followed by the child's cell number to 41333. smsweb will then have the child's cell phone number blocked from receiving adult content for a year. All blocked number requests are submitted on a daily basis to the relevant adult content providers, who have committed to smsweb to prevent adult content from being sent to such numbers.

Currently we are able to block pornography from at least 75% of the adult content providers in South Africa, this includes iTouch, Sexy-Mobile & Cointel. Smsweb will give a R5 donation to the Ma'Afrika Tikkun Children's Welfare Fund for every SMS received.

If children have internet enabled cellphones they will still be able to download adult content directly from the web, and we recommend that parents monitor this closely.'

MY INDIAN ODYSSEY

By Nicci Hayes

Five weeks in India - WOW - words fail me! My trip certainly was a voyage of discovery (mainly self-discovery) but not in any of the new age cooshy mystical ways that one traditionally expects from the mystic East. This was partly owing to the fact that I went on a Rotary Exchange, and partly owing to the fact that, in South African terms, the Rotary district that we visited incorporated Sasolburg, Lusikisiki, and possibly Mthatha. (So please be aware that any comments I make here do not in any way apply to the Cape Towns or even the Grahamstowns of India. In fact it would be fair to say that I visited Western

Utah Pradesh, rather than to say that I visited India.) Those disclaimers having been laid, let me begin with the best.

As we took off from Jan Smuts I saw a circular rainbow in the clouds - a sign of the many blessings to come, but also perhaps, being a full circle, and thus a little unusual, a hint that things would not all be as I expected them to be.

Despite my deepest suspicions regarding the numerous wars and skirmishes that Ethiopia was engaged in at the time, Ethiopian Air proved to be an absolute winner! (And the airport in Addis Ababa was great, except for the coffee which is so pure it's completely undrinkable! The security guards were unbelievably polite and chatty - one even remembered my name on my return a month later, and they served juice and rosewater cake when the plane was delayed!)

We were very lucky to be able to land in Delhi as the smog was so bad that 300 planes were re-routed to Mumbai that day. We only experienced a 20 min. landing delay which was divine as I could see the Himalayas poking out through the clouds.

We landed in Delhi and laughed nervously all the way to our 'hotel'. On the whole traffic in India is highly amusing with every animal drawn vehicle imaginable sharing the road with every person-propelled and automated vehicle imaginable; and every vehicle overtaking at will, and hooting constantly to alert everyone else to their presence on the road (as is considered polite). Our amusement was somewhat dampened, however, by having seen the scrap metal yard just outside the airport! We were later to learn that the traffic in Delhi is by far the most ordered in the district (tee hee). At least in Delhi there are no camels and elephants on the road, and at least in Delhi people let you wear seat belts and stick to their own side of the highway! (I am significantly less impressed with J.K. Rowling's creativity now that I've spent some time in India as I realise that the Night Bus required no imagination AT ALL - it really exists we travelled in it for 5 weeks (except it was our taxi not a bus). Don't ask how it misses oncoming traffic - it's magic!) The basic rule seems to be that bigger vehicles have right of way over smaller vehicles and pedestrians, but pedestrians have right of way over small vehicles, and stray cows have right of way over everything. A scooter isn't full until it has at LEAST three people on it. And why we worried about squeezing three of us into a tik-tik in Dehli I can't imagine, as the average seems to be about 8.

Our 'hotel' was exquisite, with hundreds of pots of marigolds, huge palm trees and beautiful green parakeets which seemed to be at war with the bees. The Lodhi gardens were a block away from our hotel, and we were amazed by the abundance of birdlife in the middle of such a populous city. Squirrels also abound, and compete with the parrots for food. The many stray dogs were extremely well fed, and the people walking their dogs and practicing yoga all contributed to the wonderful sense of peace in the park (despite the crazy traffic all around it).

I loved the little shrines and temples everywhere, but particularly the sacred trees with Ganesh and Lakshmi statues, and garlands at their bases. We had the opportunity to participate 3 times in a Punjabi festival called Lhori. It is a harvest festival celebration. A huge bonfire is lit and people dance around it, say prayers of thanksgiving and throw peanuts, popcorn and sesame sweets into the fire, and then eat some. The symbolism is burning and leaving behind the bad, and eating, or taking the good with you. All of which is quite civilized until you add a crazy Sikh shooting bullets through the tarpaulin (to signify his happiness apparently). Personally I could have done without that particular expression of happiness (especially when the guy couldn't get the gun to fire and pointed it at the crowd while he examined the inner workings!) Another interesting custom, seen both at the Lhori and at weddings, is that of circling money over the heads of the dancers before tipping the musicians. Seems to have something to do with ridding it of negative energy.

We were extremely lucky to have the chance to visit Jaipur (the pink city) and Agra (of Taj fame) even though these two cities were out of our district. The exquisite beauty of Jaipur, with its many forts and palaces - the most famous being the Water Palace - was breathtaking. The detail of the stone carving is spectacular. Unexpectedly, it was in this tourist Mecca (excuse the inappropriate metaphor as Jaipur was apparently one of the only cities never to succumb to the Moguls) that I had one of a few moments of spiritual resonance.

In the Red Fort in a tiny crowded temple dedicated, I think to Ganesh and Shiva, I felt, amidst the bustle of pilgrims and tourists, and the clanging of temple bells, a real touch of divine peace which awed me, but no time to soak it up - our Rotarian tour guide was quick to organise me a special scented red rose garland, the obligatory Prashad (blessed though not necessarily hygienic food which one simply has no choice but to eat) and

hustle me off (with a somewhat militant "please come, please come!") to the next place on the list of compulsory tourist attractions to be covered in the space of one afternoon.

We were then raced off to the military museum, and to see the largest cannon in the world. Here I once again caused great offence by choosing to sit outside with the squirrels and monkeys rather than going to look at all the guns. But our guide drew the line at letting me off the big cannon - there are, after all, some monuments to patriarchy that just cannot be ignored. After a significant battle of the wills, I was eventually given 10 minutes to see the exquisite gardens and the magnificent view AT A TROT.

Later in Jaipur, having declined conference lunch in favour of an hour or two to do our own thing, we had the bizarre experience of bumping into the GSE co-ordinator from my Rotary sponsor club in Grahamstown, Gordon Barker and his wife Kay, AND as if that weren't enough, discovering that they were Varsity friends of our team leader.

Eventually we found a small textile shop where I perfected the art of bartering: stand back, wait Being, as we were, in the backwaters of India, for the guys to hit a good price and say "I'll have we caused quite a stir by our mere existence. three of those too thank you." The textiles truly In fact by just walking down the street I made are amazing, particularly in Rajestan, where many people's day (if not week). If only it mirror work and detailed embroidery are were that easy at home! Then again, on two common, and where elephant designs are occasions our group catalyzed accidents popular. because people were so busy staring at us.

The next highlight was the Taj Mahal. WOW! Both at a macro, and a micro level, it took my breath away. The majesty of the building, the exquisite detail of the inlay work, the intricacy of the stone filigree work (called 'jali work') and the weirdness of being there with Garth who, true to form, found a beehive in the left minaret, all combined to make a truly magical visit. We took all the classic touristy photos and then just sat for about an hour watching the building change shade with the setting sun. Also close to a spiritual experience.

That night after dinner at the Pizza Hut!!! (this is what happens when you travel with carnivores from Bloemfontein and P.E.) accompanied by Bollywood line dances performed enthusiastically at half hourly intervals by the waiters, we descended into the bowels of a textile shop from which I thought we might never return. A few hours later we were whisked off to a jewellery shop "just next door" (i.e. about 10 blocks away) in the textile shopkeeper's car. He kept assuring us that the shop would still be open despite the hour (11.30pm). Needless to say - it wasn't - but no trouble to him, he went and

woke up the owners who duly got dressed and opened the shop for us. Much bartering later, I bought a ring. By the time we returned to the textile shop, the top that I had asked for a bigger size in had been sown (on an antique hand wheel Singer that had been converted into an electric overlocker!)

And then the 'real' GSE experience began. We were very fortunate to have the city of Meerut as our "base camp" and we encountered some incredible people there who went out of their way to meet all our diverse needs.

Indian hospitality is unbeatable. Everywhere we went we were greeted with garlands or bouquets, and often anointed with red tiklis and rice, a sweet morsel, and a candle and incense blessing. Indian hosts certainly live up to their saying "deiu titi baba" (not sure of spelling) meaning 'the guest is as god'. The food is divine (as a vegetarian I felt as though I was in paradise - hardly a dead animal to be seen) and the eats just never stop coming. 'No thanks' is not an expression taught in Indian schools, so by week two one of our team members had put on four kilograms.

We stopped along the road at one stage to buy something, and were surrounded by a throng of about 50 people who just stood and stared at us until we left again. I was frequently asked for my autograph (Hollywood fame at last!) and children, in particular, never tired of waving and staring at me. The complete cherry on the fame cake was the day we asked to be allowed to walk the 2 kms home to Meerut because we were so desperate for exercise. Instead of giving us instructions, the driver was instructed to drive ahead of us to show us the way. This worked fine for a while - the driver would drive to the end of the street and then wait for us to catch up, but when we got into the more traffic-dense section of town he became protective and insisted on driving three meters behind us with his emergency lights on! Oh boy - did that ever attract attention. I felt like an American congresswoman on an election campaign!

Colonialism has definitely left its mark, although sometimes with a bit of a weird touch. "Bed tea" is a delightful must, and at the cricket bat factory, the tea server showed his

Britishness by wearing white golfing gloves - NOT the cotton variety, the padded leather variety!

What really struck me was the spirit of entrepreneurship. Along the side of the streets are hundreds of people making a meagre living in very creative ways: from the many food vendors with beautifully decorated stalls, to the street barbers, to the people with scales who charge Rs5 for you to check your weight.

Indians pride themselves on their culture which they describe mainly as their ability to get along peacefully despite their diversity (long may that last), and their family structure. The eldest sons (and sometimes all the sons) will bring their wives to live in their parents' houses. This is seen as a great advantage over western living, which most Indian people characterise by the high divorce rate, disposal of the elderly in homes, and the habit of 'living together' merely for the sake of sex. I received many lectures, mainly, but not exclusively, from women, on the foolhardiness of being unmarried at my age, and was assured that it was 'not too late'. When I was asked WHEN I was planning to get married, I varied my reply between "well we'll have to see what happens" and "never". The latter response was met with horror, or laughter, as in 'she must be joking - how cute'. There is also a huge sense of patriotism in the country which I'm sure is fantastic, albeit a bit foreign to me as a somewhat cynical South African.

We were treated to a number of cultural shows including one particularly outstanding performance by a troupe whose repertoire included Shiva's snake dance - with live pythons and cobras; the rage of Kali (performed by a male actor in almost physical theatre style) and fire eating. A cultural performance of a different kind was the Hare Krishna equivalent of televangelism, complete with synthesizer to create all the dramatic thunder and lightening type effects. The highlight of this 'show' was when the "thunder was stolen" by a monkey who dashed across the stage to steal the bananas. Everyone laughed and laughed, and the guy on the synth had to start his thunder roll from scratch.

The colourfulness of India is indescribable. Even in the bleakest most polluted cities, one is saved from complete despair by the beautiful flowers, and veggie stalls and exquisite saris that abound. Even the really poor farm labourers wear the most exquisite coloured saris, and they are made all the more striking by the green fields that surround them.

Some aspects of our trip were frustrating and depressing - the vocational visits to schools

were on the whole whistlestop tours of the buildings plus the inevitable tea with the principal who often was not fluent in English. I had very little time to interact with English or Maths teachers (perhaps 10 mins in total), and very little time to interact with children (perhaps an hour in total). This meant that I was neither able to learn nor share anything of value in terms of my vocation. A sad waste of opportunity. (I did, though, have the opportunity to visit an Ayurvedic hospital, and a Naturopathy Ashram.)

Other aspects were depressing/frustrating at times too, the following extracts from my diary perhaps say it best:

"The maniacal driving, relentless pollution, and extreme overloading of pack animals is beginning to depress me more than I thought possible. Hopkins doesn't work here. This is Elliot country." "I feel like a prize marrow being paraded around. The rosette helps." "Ill in bed. Still feel like exhibit A as gaggles of children from around the neighbourhood flock in to examine me in my bed". "This morning's drive through the windy hills was beautiful, but only through a strength of will I didn't know I had did I manage not to throw up." "Beautiful view of the snow-capped Himalayas. Wonderful breakfast (let's hope it digests!)"

Conditions in some of the factories we visited were disturbing, and the gender politics of the area we were in made me, once again, VERY pleased to be a South African. However, despite the long working hours, the poor pay, the poverty, and the inequality, most people seem content.

The Corbert National Park was exquisite. Sadly we missed the ele-safari, and no tigers graced us with their presence, but it was just fantastic to be out in an open jeep among so many beautiful trees, under a relatively blue sky, that I felt like I was in heaven. Loved the gentle spotted deer. The painted stork are beautiful, and the eles and monkeys make me smile, All this combined with accommodation costing a mere R300 of three meals, tea, a swimming pool, TWO sheets, AND a hot shower made me wonder if I had died and been re-incarnated as a queen.

The hill station of Pauri, from which one could see the Himalayan peaks peeping over the clouds, and the valley town of Shri Naagar which boasts a clean looking tributary to the Ganges called the Alaka Nanda, were wonderful.

I also had the great honour of visiting the Ganges, seeing where people are cremated and where others bathe, and also MOST

amazingly, seeing the Ganges dolphins. Words can't describe it! I felt so incredibly honoured! I'm sure I am one of very few people in the world to have seen these beautiful, highly endangered creatures. Most excitingly we saw a baby! Which is a really good sign.

So all in all quite a journey. Fantastic to be home!

NATION-WIDE WRITING CONTEST OF BLOEMFONTEIN WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

R10 000 prize money!

Whether you are an unpublished adult, or a secondary school learner, who has been wishing for a long time to see something in print which you have written, no less than R10 000 is waiting to be won in a nation-wide writing contest of the Bloemfontein Writers' Association.

Participants who have not yet published short prose, must submit one or more essays, narratives, short, short stories or short stories in Afrikaans on prescribed, interesting subjects before Friday, 4 May 2007.

The competition has three categories: a Junior Category (Gr. 8 and 9), and a Senior Category (Gr. 10 to 12) for secondary school learners, and an Open Category for adults as well as learners. Entries in the school categories should be no more than 1 000 words in length and in the Open Category no more than 2 500 words. Entries are adjudicated completely anonymously.

In each category there are four attractive money prizes, as well as an incentive prize (also a money prize) for a participant whose mother tongue is not Afrikaans.

All entries must be accompanied by a prescribed entry form. To obtain this form as well as full particulars of the contest and the subjects, contact Mr Stoffel Cilliers at (051) 436 8089 (all hours) or Miss Magda Janse van Rensburg at (051) 446 1123 (after hours) or bloemsv@yahoo.com

HEALTHY EATING

As I said earlier on, 2007 is the year of healthy living. Our boarders are now getting 3 fruit a day and a 100% fruit juice, plus loads of vegetables (usually disguised...). (Interestingly enough, one extra portion of fruit per boarder adds R56 000.00 to the annual hostel food bill! Not to worry, boarding fees won't increase - we simply cut out cheese

spread and save R27 000.00 per annum; serve chicken quarters instead of drum sticks and save another R37 000.00!).

Here is some e-mailed info on the wonders of bananas:

Bananas contain three natural sugars - sucrose, fructose and glucose combined with fiber. A banana gives an instant, sustained and substantial boost of energy. Research has proven that just two bananas provide enough energy for a strenuous 90-minute workout. No wonder the banana is the number one fruit with the world's leading athletes.

Heartburn: Bananas have a natural antacid effect in the body, so, if you suffer from heartburn, try eating a banana for soothing relief.

Ulcers: The banana is used as the dietary food against intestinal disorders because of its soft texture and smoothness. It is the only raw fruit that can be eaten without distress in over-chronicler cases. It also neutralizes over-acidity and reduces irritation by coating the lining of the stomach.

Stress: Potassium is a vital mineral, which helps normalize the heartbeat, sends oxygen to the brain and regulates your body's water balance. When we are stressed, our metabolic rate rises, thereby reducing our potassium levels. These can be rebalanced with the help of a high-potassium banana snack.

Overweight and at work? Studies at the Institute of Psychology in Austria found pressure at work leads to gorging on comfort food like chocolate and crisps. Looking at 5,000 hospital patients, researchers found the most obese were more likely to be in high-pressure jobs. The report concluded that, to avoid panic-induced food cravings, we need to control our blood sugar levels by snacking on high carbohydrate foods every two hours to keep levels steady.

Depression and nervousness: According to a recent survey undertaken by MIND amongst people suffering from depression, many felt much better after eating a banana. This is because bananas contain tryptophan, a type of protein that the body converts into serotonin, known to make you relax, improve your mood and generally make you feel happier.

PMS: Forget the pills - eat a banana. The vitamin B6 it contains regulates blood glucose levels, which can affect your mood.

Anemia: High in iron, bananas can stimulate the production of hemoglobin in the blood and so help in cases of anemia.

Blood Pressure: This unique tropical fruit is extremely high in potassium yet low in salt, making it perfect to beat high blood pressure. So much so, the US Food and Drug Administration has just allowed the banana industry to make official claims for the fruit's ability to reduce the risk of high blood pressure and strokes.

Brain Power: 200 students at a Twickenham (Middlesex) school were helped through their exams this year by eating bananas at breakfast, break, and lunch in a bid to boost their brain power. Research has shown that the potassium-packed fruit can assist learning by making pupils more alert.

Constipation: High in fiber, including bananas in the diet can help restore normal bowel action, helping to overcome the problem without resorting to laxatives.

Mosquito bites: Before reaching for the insect bite cream, try rubbing the affected area with the inside of a banana skin. Many people find it amazingly successful at reducing swelling and irritation.

Strokes: According to research in The New England Journal of Medicine, eating bananas as part of a regular diet can cut the risk of death by strokes by as much as 40%!

So, a banana really is a natural remedy for many ills. When you compare it to an apple, it has four times the protein, twice the carbohydrate, three times the phosphorus, five times the vitamin A and iron, and twice the other vitamins and minerals. It is also rich in potassium and is one of the best value foods around.

OLD GIRLS' NEWS OLD GIRLS' THANK YOU LETTERS

Thank you letters from Old Girls, Grace Theunissen (nee Emslie) and Stella Jansen. Mrs Theunissen is turning 90 on 5 June and is still able to get about. We wish her all of the best.

Mrs Jansen (nee King) lives in the Strand. She left VG at the end of 1947, and has had nearly 56 wonderful years together with her childhood sweetheart. She still keeps in touch with Dawn Martin (nee Davies) with whom she has been friends since Std 1. Mrs Martin now lives in East London - we look forward to hearing from her as she has news of Elzabe Crompton (nee Smuts and Mavis Bowls. Mrs Jansen's cousin, Joan Webber (nee Schwartz) is now 85 and took her around when she visited VG in 2005.

Lydia Mathews, matric 2000, wrote to Mrs Long:

'Thank-you very much for your kind words of congratulation. It was very good to hear from you and so nice to realise how concerned the past staff of VG are with past students.

I have won a scholarship called the Emma Smith Scholarship for Study Abroad. This scholarship is awarded to women from urban areas on the basis of academic merit. I received it on the grounds of my marks in my undergraduate and honours degrees, both of which I was awarded summa cum laude. I have been studying Classics and I am presently completing my Masters in Roman History. I intend to continue working in this field when I begin my PhD next year.

I have applied to a number of universities in England, and so far I have had a reply from Cambridge. I have been offered a place there, and will take it up in October this year. I am greatly anticipating the academic challenge of working in one of the liveliest intellectual environments in the world.'

We would love more Old Girls' news!

Our Old Girls and previous staff members are the people who built VG into the Centre of Excellence it is today.

Please keep us updated, not only of what's happening in your lives but also in terms of your contact details.

Have a wonderful leave-out weekend with time to catch up on your daughter's/ward's life.

Maybe, just maybe, us parents will be lucky enough to score a cup of coffee in bed...

All of the best
Madeleine