

Jayam Narayanaswamy

My dear Anantha,

How are you getting on? We seem to have less time together now that you are in Primary 3. All of you used to come every Sunday and we would have a family lunch and you and your cousins would have a great time playing: on the swing, football in the garden, Frisbee in the nearby park and cycling down the road. Then we sang nursery rhymes and children's songs and played hide-and-seek.

I miss you all especially during the weekends but now you have swimming lessons, extra classes in Tamil, chess club activities, family outings to the Science Centre, zoo and beach. Maybe you can spend more time with your grandfather and me during holidays.

I am sorry you missed our 48th Wedding Anniversary celebrations as you were down with a viral fever. I am sure you would like to know what happened that day. All your uncles, aunts, cousins and some old friends were invited. We had a great time going through old photographs of the family, especially when grandpa and I were young. They were delighted to receive a mini-photo of us in a heart-shaped frame. The surprise was that it had been taken on our wedding day 49 years ago. I will give you your gift when I next see you.

We had loads of lovely food and sang a lot of nursery rhymes. The kids enjoyed Jack and Jill, oranges and lemons, the bear went over the mountain, rock-a-bye baby and the grandfather's clock. The last song was sung by grandfather himself with the kids forming a ring round him and doing some actions and mime. He received applause for his singing.

Then it was story time and grandfather was asked about what he was like when young, by your cheeky cousin Shri. He was sporting and this is what he told them: "It was during World War II and the Japanese had defeated the British and occupied Malaysia and Singapore. My father worked in a rubber plantation and we lived in thatched wooden house. When we were young, my brothers and I were taught by my father, as school was a long distance away. Later we enrolled in a school 30 minutes away, the nearest for us.

We had to be up before 5am to catch the bus and got home only at 6pm. It was a long day but we enjoyed the bus ride and studied very hard to do well. As we had no electricity we had to use kerosene lamps to study. We helped mother to draw water from the well and wash the clothes. When father needed us, we dug the garden and planted tapioca and other vegetables. Rice and tapioca were our main food. We learnt to like the food. Everyone nearby also had to live this way.

As soon as the war was over, we moved to Singapore and my brothers and I attended St. Joseph's Institution in Bras Basah Road. We walked three miles to school everyday from Bukit Timah as we could

not afford the bus fare. My father spent a lot on our education especially on books. I did very well and passed the 'O' level exams with distinctions.

I went to work soon after, to help the family. But I wanted to do higher studies so I attended night classes. I did well enough to attend university part-time. I chose to do the Law course, which was 6 years of night school. I married grandma when I was in my second year of college. We had to work very hard to raise the family on an average salary. Grandmother went to teach in a school and we managed to buy a small house and car. Your fathers will be able to tell you the rest of our story." Grandfather stopped here and everyone hugged him and was glad he had told them his life story.

Now that you are old enough to understand most of what I have written, you will agree that hard work and perseverance are important if we want to be successful. Your fathers and mothers are also working so that you can have a better life. For now, it is enough for you to study well, love your parents and brothers, enjoy family life and in school make good friends and be happy. Don't forget to spend a few days with us during the holidays. We'll have lots of fun.

With love and blessings from
Thatha (Grandfather) & Paati (Grandmother)

Your loving grandmother