

Jayam Narayanaswamy

My darling Vaishnavi,

Two months ago I left you to visit your cousins in the US. I really miss the lovely times and fun we had together. Also I miss the engaging conversations, searching questions and sing-song sessions. Keep on singing!

You are going to primary school soon. I am sure you will like the school we have chosen for you. Long, long ago I used to teach in that CHIJ school. I am proud that you are entering that wonderful school where the girls are friendly, polite and love their studies and reading. Your kindergarten teachers said you are smart and well-behaved. I wish you all the best in your new school.

It is the beginning of a change in your life. You have to get used to getting up before six every weekday morning to get ready for school. You must have a good breakfast daily or you will be hungry by recess time at school. Dress neatly and leave for school on time. I am sure you will take to your new routine like a duck to water. You have always been keen to learn and I am sure you will enjoy your schooling.

I remember my first day at school – sixty-six years ago. There were no pre-school or kindergarten classes where I lived. My three elder sisters and I piled into a riskshaw pulled along by an old Chinese

man. When we reached school, I had to join the group of new Standard One pupils. My sisters lined up in their own classes happily. “Don’t worry, I will look for you later,” elder sister said cheerfully. I felt nervous as there were so many pupils all around me and I did not know anyone.

Soon the bell rang and a friendly teacher took us to a classroom and checked our names. I sat next to a Chinese girl. She was crying. I suddenly put my arms around her. I was crying too. I realised many of the others were smiling and looked brave. I quickly wiped my tears and consoled my new friend Su Yin. We became good friends within a week and helped each other with our schoolwork. We shared our storybooks, played hopscotch, enjoyed skipping and a game called ‘five stones’? I will teach you this game when I come back.

I treasure memories of my first year in school. It was like belonging to a big family. The teachers were very kind and understanding. I made many friends. We behaved well in school and outside school. We learnt good manners and wanted to grow up as nice young ladies like the senior students – they looked so smart and grown-up! We wanted to be like them.

I am sure you will enjoy your schooling. When you are at home, have a nice time with daddy and mummy. Show them your school work and ask them if you need help. Don’t forget to cycle in the park and play with your neighbourhood friends.

I have to stop now as it is time to go to bed. Your aunt, uncle and cousins send you their love. Please give my regards to daddy and mummy.

Your loving grandmother