

Truth can be Stranger than Fiction

By Haroona Jatoi

Miss Nasreen taught me science from class sixth to class tenth. She was immaculate in her attire, a perfectionist in her work and generally accessible to all of us at the Government Muslim School for Girls, Faisalabad. She would play badminton with us, help us with our Math assignments for hours even though she wasn't even our Math teacher. She was happy to stay back after school and help us with chemistry experiments. She didn't care how long it took. She wanted us to get it right. Unlike other teachers' sprawling tick marks across our note-books, Ms. Nasreen's corrections would be done in the neatest way possible. The result: we all did tidier work for Ms. Nasreen than we did for any other teacher. It was only natural that we did so.

Her mentor was her older brother who was visually impaired. After the death of her parents he was the head of the family despite his handicap.

Life went on and I joined the Punjab University for my Masters in Administrative Sciences. There I met Professor Muneer Ahmed, upright, straightforward and unbending in the face of political pressures. He was neither impressed nor intimidated by wealth and status. Needless to say, he was very popular among students.

Sir Muneer too was a role model for me for his dignified conduct and his high standards of integrity. My Masters programme at the Punjab University had come to an end. I had now been working as a Research Associate for a year at the same university when we had our slightly delayed Farewell Party. Sir Muneer was there too. Students clustered around him. They were asking him why he hadn't married. He said something

about a blind brother for whom he felt responsible and so had decided against marriage. As I heard this I thought about Ms. Nasreen and her blind brother! I mentioned Ms. Nasreen, and sure enough, she turned out to be Sir Muneer's sister! I was more than surprised! I had been nurtured by two individuals in different cities and at different points of my life, and they both turned out to be branches of the same tree! I marveled at the parents who must have raised this golden crop.

These two teachers, one in Lahore and one in Faisalabad, impacted me at different stages of my life. To this day when I hold my head high and walk I am reminded of how Ms. Nasreen would tell me to be proud of myself and walk straight and tall when she saw me hunch my shoulders because I was one of the taller girls in my class. Ms. Nasreen cared enough to notice everything. She cared enough to do something about the things she noticed. When I see shortcomings in any thing, I am not happy. I know that Ms. Nasreen the perfectionist and Muneer Ahmed the unbending idealist still guide my words and deeds. My only regret is that I have not maintained any contact with them.

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