

# To Madam, with Love

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I was quite lost as a student when I entered my A-Level course. I had done quite well in my O' Levels (which was quantified in terms of the praise I received from my family), and that boosted my ego to the extent that I ended up celebrating my success for the next year and a half. Throughout this time, while I was busy lazing around, socializing and pulling pranks on faculty (which gave me quite a notorious reputation at college), there was this one person who helped me maintain my 'brightness' in tact, as opposed to letting it fade away.

Sonu Rehman will always be one of the most graceful women I would have ever come across. Independent yet sensitive to everyone around her, she is that special leader who even follows to guide others. What I value most about her is not simply the way one observes her from the outside, but the way she was from within and the way she used to connect with others at that inner level!

I would hardly attend a class or two for the rest of my courses, but when it came to Mrs. Rehman one could not but be punctual for her session. It would worry the student if it would worry her. Not because of fear of her anger, but because of love and genuine respect for her. On top of that she was wise enough to keep our attention focused on the topic of discussion - making notes was compulsory. Even the worst of us would be unconsciously forced to collect our wavering thoughts and pay attention. It was not an easy subject; we were studying History! And not easy History either. We had to study Europe between the two World Wars, and the Tudor period in British history. She

deliberately chose these specific periods out of the massive choice in the A-Level History syllabus. She did this to make the coursework challenging and interesting at the same time. In short she had a passion for the subject and she was hell bent upon spreading it!

And this was not it. She would arrange educational excursions, exclusively for her students. More than anything, it made us feel special compared to the rest of our batch-mates. Someday we would be at the Waziristan Mosque in the walled city of Lahore, watching the entire neighborhood from a rooftop; and another day we would be driving all the way up to Malot (near Kallar Kahar) to sit at the edge of the world and observe the grand battlefield where the Indian Rajas once fought against Alexander the Great. And then, to top it all up, she would call us over to her place, serve us delicious coffee milkshakes and *samosas*, and make us watch movies on Stalin, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth, Hitler and others.

How could we not get involved? How could we not love her to bits? How could we not make an effort, even if it was intended just to make her happy?!

As a teacher, Mrs. Rehman had little hope in my performance in the final exams. She believed in my capabilities, but, given my situation at that time, she wasn't expecting much from me. Yet, we became great friends. Our friendship didn't flourish during class hours, but right afterwards. She would hold me back to tell me about my poor performance and somehow or the other, by the end of our discussion, we would be talking about everything else but my performance. That is when my real education took place. We discussed philosophy and literature, she would get me involved in debates and push me to participate in declamation and poetry recitation competitions; we even discussed my personal problems. She gave me enough confidence from within, so much

so that even with all my bad reputation, and its effects on my self esteem, I got to play the lead role in our annual play (and even gave my first autographs for that performance!).

As I said, she helped me keep my 'brightness' in tact!

The day I got my A-Level result, I was quite surprised to have even passed the examination. The surprise was much more pleasant for Sonu Rehman. I got a 'C' in History, which by the way is considered quite a respectable grade for the subject. Mrs. Rehman was extremely happy because she expected me to fall somewhere in the E (or below) category. She just couldn't understand how I got that grade! ... But I did!

While I hardly studied a word for all my other subjects, I put in my maximum effort for the History exam. I don't know why I did that - I was hardly in the frame of mind, but when I look back, I realize that deep within me there was just too much love for this seventy year old, twenty-at-heart woman. She had more energy in her than twenty teachers combined, she was involved in every extracurricular activity, she was loved and respected by everyone around her; she was the most sought after personality at college. For her every effort was worth it. Disappointing her would have meant disappointing myself!

Today, even after twelve years, Mrs. Rehman has all her elements in place. Every now and then when I meet her, I get that same innocent feeling and comfort I used to have while sitting with her after class. I still remember everything she taught me. In fact she was the person with whom I began my intellectual journey. She is the first teacher who made me understand my true talents - not just by teaching History, but by making me experience and appreciate a many-sided life in college.

As time passes, college education is becoming more and more competitive.

Students pay extra money (in addition to the handsome amount paid as college fee) to get the best grades possible - to land in the best universities and to get the best jobs. In this new rat race, one is inclined to lose out on many other aspects of one's own internal make up - the talents we have, the dreams we dream. In such times, we need more and more people like Sonu Rehman. People who don't just carry their pupils through academics, but who also reach out to their inner selves and help them realize their true potential as multidimensional individuals.

I can be thankful, I can be eulogistic but I cannot put in words the love I have for this friend of mine, who, by some great luck, was also my teacher.

And guess what??

This feeling is very mutual!

*The author is a musician. He is a guitarist and vocalist in the popular rock band Noori*