

The Tadpole

W G A A N E W S L E T T E R A G M 2 0 1 6 I S S U E

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A P R I L 2 0 1 6

OFFICE BEARERS 2015 - 2016

PRESIDENT – Anjali Sapra

VICE PRSIDENT – Shivani Narain

TREASURER – Manvi Dhillon

SECRETARY – Vanita Srivastava 2015
/ Natasha Verma 2016

MEMORABILIA – Parbeen Kaur

EVENTS – Sabina Sharma & Bindu
Vashist

WECARE – Sujata Kulshreshtha &
Shruti Tandon

COMMUNICATIONS – Hema
Badhwar Mehra

SENIOR MEMBER – Renee Chandola

Dear Exigs,

The WGAA is pleased to bring to you the AGM ISSUE of The Tadpole. The past year has been a landmark one in a number of ways.

Many of the objectives we have been working for tirelessly over the past few years are within our reach. The most significant one being the attainment of the FCRA.

All the paperwork is through, we have had an official inspection by the Ministry of Home Affairs and hopefully, we should be issued the certification very soon. This will not only facilitate overseas funding which is a problem many non resident alumni have faced but also enable such alumni to send their membership fee. Our outgoing Secretary, Vanita Srivastava, was of great help in getting this done.

The Executive committee has also been busy systemizing and formalizing procedures. As the Alumni network grows and is more interactive, certain procedures are necessary for smooth functioning. Towards this end, we decided to change our auditor so that we have timely and efficient compliance of accounts, audit and filing of returns.

The remaining year is going to see a lot of changes at School, both Administrative and physical. The Swimming Pool is finally ready and fast becoming a focal point for Welhamites, who have taken to the water much like the Kingfisher!

The Principal Incumbent, Mrs. Sambasivam has taken charge on the 1st April and will be eased into her role by Mrs. Brar, we hope to meet her soon. A brief introduction is given inside this issue.

Enjoy this Special Edition. Cheers!

Anjali Sapra

President WGAA



WELHAM GIRLS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

B 317 NEW FRIENDS COLONY, NEW DELHI 110025

(Society registered under The Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860)

Memorabilia



The WGAA has exclusive rights over the production and sub licensing of school related memorabilia. For the last couple of years, an online site unconnected to the school or the WGAA has been advertising and selling Welham merchandise. Despite efforts to contact them and request them to refrain from doing so, they did not comply. Finally, we engaged the legal services of Anand and Anand, Advocates. We worked conjointly with the Welham Old Boys Society on this front since we share a name. Anand & Anand worked out a comprehensive trademark licensing agreement and sent a legal notice for infringement of copyright to the concerned company. The site has since then been removed. Subsequently, we have also written to another portal and got them to remove the advertised products.

We have sublicensed Campus Mall to produce T-shirts /sweatshirts for us and they are the only official sub licensees. However we encourage the efforts of young Welhamite designers and sign separate agreements with them from time to time so that they may showcase their creativity.

We would once again like to inform and remind all enthusiastic alumni entrepreneurs that no one, including alumni, can use the Welham school name or logo in any format without permission of and signing an agreement with the Welham Girls Alumni Association, so please don't hesitate to get in touch with us in this regard.



Networking

We have had a great year in terms of networking too.

Antara Senior Living hosted a lunch for the senior batches from 1960-1983 in September 2015 at The Lodhi, New Delhi. Needless to say it was a great success and like all Welhamite dos, the last few almost outstayed the hosts.

Founders Day in October saw unprecedented numbers of Exies descending on school and for the first time the Exies contingents had the games fields to themselves during the March Past. Not just that, the venue for the Exies dinner was shifted to the tennis courts. The batches of 1965, 1975, 1990 and 1995 were present in all their glory and the rest of us just basked in their sunshine. We thank these batches for their generous contributions to School and the WGAA.

School development activities and our commitment to social responsibility do require funds and we are sure of continued support from our intrepid Alumni.

During Founders, we had significant interaction with the Board of Governors too. They were very impressed with the support that the WGAA gives to school and retired staff and in fact they felt that the WGAA could play a substantial role in bridging the gap between the school's policy and its social responsibility toward staff and class IV employees.

Tadpole Night in November was an intimate affair at the home of Bindu Vashist. It was a magical evening and we thank Bindu for her amazing hospitality!

Manvi has been working steadily to update our records and Shruti has been reaching out to Alumni for details. This is a tremendous exercise but efforts are beginning to bear fruit with more and more Alumni coming into the fold.

In November this year, we initiated the procedure to induct the passing out SC batch into the WGAA by getting them to fill out forms while still at school. This will effectively bring all future Alumni into the ambit of the WGAA.

The Chief Guest and WGAA representative at the Investiture Ceremony on the School's birthday in February this year was Ms. Abhilasha Bisht, Batch of 1985. Mrs. Arundhati Shukla, Batch of 1986, gifted bracelets on behalf of the WGAA to the passing out batch.

News From School



2015 has been significant with the culmination of Mrs. Jyotsna Brar's stint at the helm. She will retire at the end of March and Welham will welcome a new Principal. After an extensive selection process, the Board has decided to appoint Mrs. Padmini Sambasivam as the new Principal. She comes to Welham with a wide range of cross-border academic and administrative experience, leadership and interests. She has over 12 years of experience leading academic institutions in India and overseas. Mrs. Sambasivam was most recently Director Academics at the Peeves Group of Schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Previously, she was Principal of the Arsha Vidya Mandir School in Chennai where she was responsible for overseeing the school's administrative and academic mandate.

Several other stalwarts of our school have also retired and we will miss these familiar faces when we visit School. Mrs Jugran and Miss Pammi Kaur who was the mainstay of the School library. And the ever popular Mrs Negi our folk dance teacher will be retiring at the end of this term.



The Diaspora

A NOTE FROM DAYITA REGARDING NEWS OF OUR EX WELHAMITES

Ritika Prasad (Batch of 94- Orioles Captain) who is teaching History at the University of South Carolina has just written a book called *Tracks of Change*. It is an academic study of the changes wrought on daily life in India by the railways. It has been published by Cambridge University Press - a very prestigious imprint for a young scholar. Ritika did her BA from St Stephen's, went to Oxford on a Radhakrishnan scholarship and did her PhD from UCLA. - By the way, she also got the Miss Linnell History Prize from school. She is in India right now and her address is ritikaprasad@yahoo.com.

Ritwika Sen (School Captain and batch of 2009), finished her Economics Honors from St Stephen's got an Inlaks Scholarship to LSE, for her Masters, and is now working on Economics and Policy in Rwanda, of all places! Welhamites really go places, don't they? The country is slowly limping back to normal after the horrific civil war and she has a lot of interesting insights about it. She is also in India until the end of the month. *(By the way Ritwika is the 3rd Inlaks Scholar from school - the first two are Devyani Onial (89) who got it for journalism, and Bhavna Thakur (93), who got it for law.)*

You will be happy to know that Welham has been given the International School Award by the British Council. This is an award given for three years, to schools who give an international dimension to their curriculum- from the academic to the co-curricular to games. Mrs Sanjala Wazir (Dean, Academics) worked very hard on this as the BC had very exacting requirements, but finally we were awarded full marks for our various programmes. If you would like more details you could write to hersanjlaw@gmail.com.

The John Addison Porter Prize is a literary award given annually by Yale University to the best work of scholarship in any field "where it is possible, through original effort, to gather and relate facts or principles, or both, and to present the results in such a literary form as to make the product of general human interest. This award is among the highest the university confers. The prize was established in 1872 in honor of Professor John Addison Porter, B.A. 1842, and perpetuated with a subsequent gift in 1901. There are four prizes two for graduate and two for undergraduate level. This year one of the two undergraduate prizes was given to our own **Tiraana Bains** (School Captain 2010-2011), for her paper: "Empire and Intimacy: The Evolution of British Attitudes Towards Mixed Relationships in the Bengal Presidency, 1764-1793."

Subhasini (Sehgal) Ali has become a member of the CPI (M) Politburo? Now there are two women on the Politburo - and both are Welhamites!

There's lots more in the offing and many Welhamites continue to do the School and it's alumni proud as they soar high!

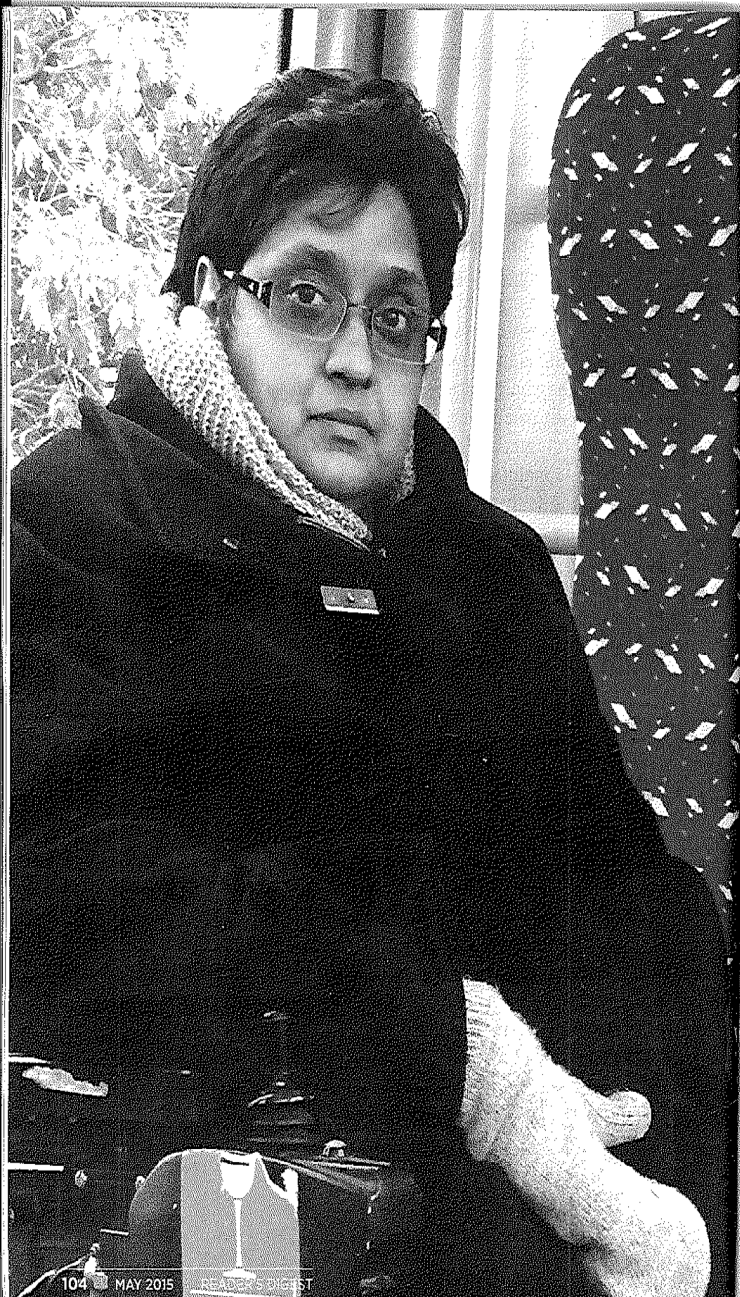


The School has a stated aim and policy to bring up its students to be grounded in Indian culture but to be exposed to the best in global ideas, thoughts and issues as progressive citizens of the world

The Diaspora

If there were an award for grace under almost unbearable pressure, Shivani Gupta would have got it. Shivani is truly a remarkable human being, a fighter and a doer. She epitomises courage, a willingness to embrace all that life dishes out to her, and it has given her knocks that many of us would have succumbed under. She is a Welhamite that Welhamites can embrace and be forever inspired by...

Here's to you Shivani...May you go from strength to strength.



INSPIRATION

A terrible accident changed everything,
but it also led to...

SHIVANI GUPTA'S INDOMITABLE ACCESSIBILITY

BY THE EDITORS

SEATED IN HER motorized wheelchair at the round dining table in her small home-office, Shivani Gupta is using her laptop to chat over Skype with a distant client. There are several books in the room and one of them bears her name. It's the 45-year-old Shivani's autobiography, published early last year.

No Looking Back is a poignant, yet often witty, 250-page account of Shivani's struggle for normality after she became a quadriplegic at age 22. She describes how she tries to live life to the full, pursuing a specialization that few in India had explored before, of being rejected in love and finding love once

more. It's also a rare insight into the mind of a disabled person, of the few people around her who can see beyond the handicap. Today, Shivani is an expert on making spaces accessible to all and is helping people like herself.

BACK IN 1992 Shivani had just quit her guest relations job at a Delhi five-star hotel to go abroad for higher studies. She celebrated it with a party. Later that night, she and her boyfriend, Sunil, decided to drop a friend home. Sunil, who was driving, raced for fun against another carload of friends from the party when a tyre burst. The car flipped over, throwing Shivani out.

AMARANI BHAGAT

Waking up the next day in a hospital bed, Shivani found she couldn't move. Doctors explained that her spinal cord had been damaged.

She lay flat on her back for six weeks with steel supports holding her head in place. Eyes fixed on the ceiling, Shivani wondered about her future, if any. After a former Army surgeon, an expert on spinal injury, operated on her, she was able to use a wheelchair. She even got some movement back in her hands and could now turn her neck. But she would never walk again.

Cut off from friends and with nothing to do, she was lonely and depressed. Visits from Sunil would cheer her up, though she was afraid he'd leave her some day. The simplest of tasks—eating, bathing, or dressing—were a challenge. "Having lost all sensation of pain, I didn't even realize it when I injured myself," says Shivani. "So I made sure I stayed away from hot or sharp objects. As I learnt to live the life of the disabled, I got little time to reflect on my miseries." Eventually, Sunil married another girl, leaving her bereft.

After a friend gave her a box of poster colours, Shivani tried to paint. Initially, she could barely pick up a brush. But it felt good when she finally achieved meaningful images. Her paintings, which she folded into cards and mailed to friends, looked good. A friend suggested she make greeting cards to sell at a college fete—a huge first step. "It made me realize that my disability was no excuse to avoid earn-

ing a living," she recalls. Shivani began exhibiting her paintings and even held a solo show, but she was never sure if people were only buying her works out of pity. Painting never became her profession, but it helped focus her mind and improve the use of her hands.

Though she had a full-time carer, Shivani rarely went out. But when she did, she realized the world had changed for her. People looked at her with pity, openly talking about her bleak future, of how she'd never be able to work or marry. Visiting Haridwar once with her father, she was in the temple queue when a woman came up to them. The next thing she knew, the woman was pressing a 25-paise coin into her hand. "No, no! This is not mine," Shivani protested, meaning she hadn't dropped the coin. As the woman left without a word, the truth dawned. She laughed it off at first, but that "charitable" gesture had shaken her to the core. Just because you are disabled, people assume you are needy.

ON HER COUNSELLOR'S SUGGESTION Shivani agreed to train to become a 'peer counsellor' at the new Indian Spinal Injuries Centre in New Delhi's Vasant Kunj. "I felt drawn to the work," she says. "Having suffered the trauma of spinal injury, I knew I could help rehabilitate others like me."

So, in 1996, Shivani was sent to the UK on a six-week training program. There, she was amazed to find a society that cared so much for the

disabled. She noticed how—unlike in India—wheelchairs didn't stop their users from going out and having a good time. At one party, wheelchair-bound people swayed to music, sang, drank and enjoyed themselves. In the midst of all this fun, a paraplegic young man, Andrew, publicly proposed to Nina, a non-disabled young woman and the pair got engaged, then hugged and kissed each other. *Was all this possible?* Shivani wondered. The trip opened her eyes, teaching her that disability need not be "an end to the road."

fun-filled office trip to Nainital (as always, a carer accompanied her) she was shattered to learn that the others hadn't really wanted to take her along until Vikas put his foot down and insisted. "My disability outweighed me even in the eyes of my colleagues who worked with me to help other disabled people," Shivani later wrote.

Yet Shivani could draw wisdom even from a painful revelation like that. "It wasn't something I could blame them for—they had merely reacted in a manner society had taught them to,"

"I drew courage from people in harder circumstances than mine."

Back home, she joined the spinal injuries centre, where she was also offered a place to stay. It was very basic, but it saved her the long commute from her father's house. She soon got engrossed in work and found new friends, including the charming and brilliant Vikas, an occupational therapist who was seven years younger than her.

At the centre, the very patients she counselled often inspired her. "I drew courage from people in harder circumstances than mine, disability being irrelevant, who continued to live life no matter what," says Shivani. But there were realities to face. Her young colleagues often praised her courage and professionalism, but once after a

she explains. She even learnt to "assist" others by letting go happily in case they did not want to include her in some activity and spoil their fun. Such incidents also brought Vikas and Shivani closer and the two were falling in love, although Vikas's folks would not accept a disabled girl for their son.

Another time, when Shivani went with her colleagues to watch the film *Titanic* at a Delhi multiplex, she was seated separately because of the lack of wheelchair accessibility. Shivani later complained. The theatre owner apologized and invited her back to suggest changes, which she did. But they never altered anything. Still, it was to give her direction into an uncharted area.

In mid-2002, Shivani left the spine centre to study for a diploma in architecture at a Faridabad college, although at 32, she was nearly twice as old as her classmates. There were difficulties to endure. She couldn't use her hands to make architectural models, so her dad and her carer helped, following her directions. The only places she could access in her wheelchair were a studio and the computer room. There were no disabled-friendly restrooms and so managing incontinence was another challenge. "Bladder training and not drinking any liquids for

larger flat in New Delhi. By the time she finished her architecture course, Shivani was also honoured with the 2004 Neerja Bhanot Award for exemplary courage, and the National Role Model Award from President Abdul Kalam.

Now she wanted to study further. She applied for a scholarship but failed. So, in 2004, she took a student loan to attend the University of Reading, UK, for a post-graduate program, where she could specialize in "accessibility"—all about creating inclusive environments for disabled people. Vikas,

"I was reminded that love is not about possessing but about letting go."

hours helped me attend my classes," she says. "Despite this there were accidents and on those bad days I had to miss classes and leave for home, where I'd cry helplessly." Her father consoled her. "Beta," he'd say, "what cannot be cured must be endured."

Most of her young classmates, she realized, were from affluent families and wanted to study abroad after the course. By then, Vikas too had resigned from the spine centre and left for a job in the UK.

Meanwhile, Shivani got ₹24 lakh as compensation from the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal for the 1992 car accident. This helped her move into a

already in the UK, joined her as a part-time student.

When she returned, Shivani was offered a senior position at a big New Delhi corporate house. The office building had a VIP entrance with a ramp that was wheelchair accessible, but she wasn't allowed to use it for weeks although, ironically, her job was to set up accessibility programs for the disabled across their offices in India! This and other, more subtle, discriminations she faced regularly at the workplace made her resign after ten months. Yet, she explains, even those negative experiences gave her a deeper understanding of the attitudes that are

important to her field of architecture.

It was now time to work for herself. Vikas returned from the UK and, with another friend, they started AccessAbility, their own company, from the same round dining table in her flat. In months, they got several important clients, which included hotels, supermarkets, universities and hospitals. Among them was ITC. They made every property ITC's hotel division owned more comfortable for disabled and elderly guests. Vikas and Shivani also co-authored two booklets, *Employing Persons With Disabilities* and *A Guide to Universal Design in Built Environments*. These quickly became ready-reckoners in their specialized area. AccessAbility's work also got them two prestigious awards in their field: The Ability Award, and the NCEPDP-Shell-Helen Keller Award.*

IN TIME, VIKAS'S PARENTS accepted Shivani, who discovered a loving, close-knit Punjabi family in his home. He proposed and the two got married in April 2009. Everything seemed as perfect as it could be for Shivani. Vikas's parents, whom she called Mumyji and Papaji, were so fond of her that the newlyweds decided to take them along to Manali for a long weekend. Four months after the wedding, it was their first holiday out as a family.

Vikas was at the wheel on their way

* NCEPDP is short for the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People.

to Manali when an oil tanker hit their car head on. Shivani and Mumyji survived with injuries. "I can't forget the last time Vikas and I looked into each other's eyes," Shivani writes. "Blood was oozing from his chin and neck." Both Papaji and Vikas were killed following the accident.

For a while, Shivani says, she no longer saw any meaning or purpose in her work, her triumphs or the awards. "I felt that God had pulled me out of a crowd and kicked me hard like a football," she wrote. "I lay in my bed thinking why it was always me having to rediscover myself again and again. Why was I the one who received these wild blows of fate just as I seemed to be getting comfortable in my life?"

But as time passed, Shivani could think more objectively. "I was reminded that love is not about possessing but about letting go." Shivani got back to work, and it's the work itself for disabled people that matters now, not accolades. Loving her work, she says, is her best tribute to Vikas, whose presence she feels everywhere.

Shivani's autobiography ends with a poem. Its last lines are addressed to Vikas:

*And since I know I can't exist without you,
If I exist, then you exist too.*

With reporting by Aditya Sharma and Padmavathi Subramanian. Material has also been adapted from *No Looking Back* (Rupa, 2014), Shivani Gupta's autobiography.



WELHAM GIRLS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
B-317, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-25
(Society Registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860)

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 18 MARCH, 2016 AT THE BLUE ROOM,
DELHI GYMKHANA CLUB FROM 400PM – 6.00PM**

MEMBERS PRESENT –

RENEE CHANDOLA
SHIVANI ANAND
SUJATA KULSHRESHTA
MANVI SINHA
DIMPLE SINGH
NATASHA VERMA
PARBEEN KAUR
SABINA THAKRAN
PAVAN MANN
VIBHA SINGH
ISHA SINGH
.

REGRETS RECEIVED

ANJALI SAPRA
HEMA MEHRA
VANITA SRIVASTAVA

AGENDA

Vice President Shivani Anand was requested to preside over the meeting as President Anjali Sapra could not be present.

1. The audited accounts and balance sheet for the financial year April 2014-March2015 was unanimously passed as proposed by Parbeen Kaur and seconded by Sabina Thankran
2. The proposal of change in auditors for the financial year from Nangia and Co to K.K Khanna was proposed by Sujata Kulshrestha and seconded by Dimple Singh. A vote of thanks was given to the services of Nangia and company and Arvind .K.Jain for their services to date. This change was initiated as the increase in volume of business for the association has increased and a firm to take on the day to day accounting was required.
3. The President's Report was presented and the achievements of the year were discussed. Renee Chandola and Hema Mehra's 'die hard never say never' efforts for the FCRA approval were applauded. The Presidents annual report was proposed by Renee Chandola and seconded by Shivani Anand and passed unanimously

The building of the corpus in the WECARE account was brought up. The amount paid to 4 teachers as a supplementary pension has been increased from Rs.3500 to Rs.5000. .The need for increasing the corpus was discussed and it was proposed that all batches contributing towards school put aside 10-25% towards the WECARE CORPUS. This is to be discussed with all batch reps prior to their collection for school. The efforts and work of WECARE was discussed in detail with those present and it was felt that we need to inform and educate all the exies as to what a contribution towards WECARE helps the retired teachers as well as the support staff in school.

Manvi Sinha Dhillon has given one year's commitment for one teacher as a generous donation to the WE CARE account. This is the spirit we need to inculcate.

4. The time and date for the next AGM before the close of this Financial Year is to be decided by the Committee

5. In the other matters, the following were brought up: It was proposed that Hema Mehra be put forth as the next board member on behalf of the Welham Girls Alumni Association and accepted by all present.

A proposal to induct Dehra Dun resident member Abhilasha Bhisht as a member of the Welham Girls Society was also discussed. Renee Chandola to send the letter to the Principal for approval at the Founders this year.

A proposal to find an online portal for all our memorabilia under one umbrella was discussed and we are to try and find an ex Welhamite's company who would collate all the memorabilia for Welhamites.

Due to the success of the splitting of the batches in to two events it was decided that we should continue with this trend for this year as well. So now we have two Tadpole nights to look forward to this year.

A proposal to initiate a programme called TAKE A DIP AND LEAVE A TIP was proposed. All exies to come and take a swim in the long awaited pool and to leave a donation as per their individual wish towards the pool fund. This needs to be proposed by Sujata and approved by Ms.Brar before we can take the next step to implement it.

It was finally proposed by Shivani Anand that we vote to appoint a new Secretary as our present Secretary has been tied up with various personal issues. Natasha Verma was proposed as a choice for the new Secretary and was unanimously elected to the post.

The AGM was called to an end of business and Tea with Lemon Tarts and Sandwiches were served.

Remembering

Many of our seniors are no more but will always be remembered fondly by their batch mates and those who knew them by name and had the fortune of interacting with them...

Manjula Chowdhury - class of 64-65

Sculptor Mrinalini (Dillu) Mukherjee - class of 63

Danseuse and founder of Adishakti Academy in Pondicherry, Veenapani Chawla – class of 63

Gita 'Judge' Saran Budhiraja - class of 63

May you go softly into the good night and watch over generations of Welhamites as they continue on their flight.



End Note

We look forward to another fulfilling year.
Forging new bonds, bringing together alumni
and continuing with happy times



It has been a busy, busy year and the Executive Committee has worked very hard to take the WGAA to another level. In addition to systemizing accounts, networking and events, we have had a wonderful response to our innovative new memorabilia. The collection was a complete sellout at Founders. Much joy for us as the proceeds from sale of memorabilia form a significant component of the total funds raised for the activities of the WGAA.

As far as projected activities are concerned, we would like to form an internship pool whereby we can connect young alumni seeking internships to senior members who can assist them in providing mentorship, work opportunities and help in furthering their careers. We would definitely like to see this initiative take flight in the coming year.

We look forward to another fulfilling year. Forging new bonds, bringing together alumni and continuing with happy times.

Cheers Welhamites ...may our tribe increase!

Anjali Sapra

Care for the Caregivers

Contribute to the **WeCare** initiative or directly to the WGAA for all Charitable Activities by sending a cheque in the name of **The Welham Girls Alumni Association**, and mail it to either of the addresses below.

Do put your PAN NO. and all contact details on the back of the cheque. All donations made to the WGAA are exempt from tax u/s 80G (5) (vi) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Hema Badhwar Mehra, B – 317 New Friends Colony, New Delhi 110025 – Phone 91 981131717

Sujata Kulshreshtha, A 32 Sector 56, NOIDA 201307 – Phone 91 9810222305

We look forward to hearing from Welhamites. Please do mail your articles, thoughts and suggestions to the Editor at hemabadhwar.mehra@gmail.com