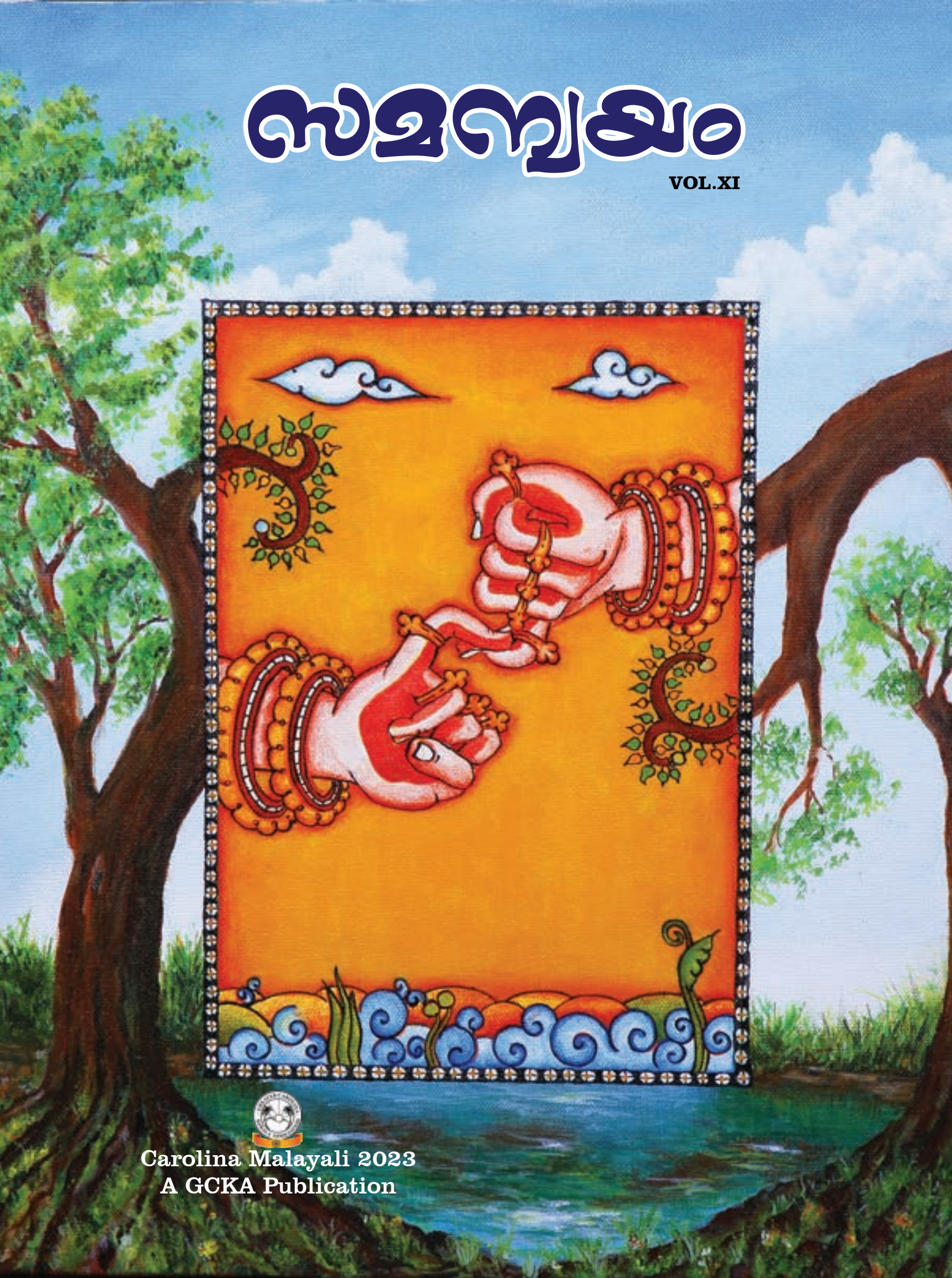
സമന്വയം

VOL.XI



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Cover Page
Arun Kutty

About Cover Page
"When roots are shared, it's certain that hearts will connect. When hearts connect, it's invitable that creative synergy will arise."

Design & Layout
GK Printers

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Printed & Published by
Greater Carolina Kerala Association

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Printed at
GK PRINTERS
Azad Road, Ernakulam - 17

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Editorial

ഭ്രമണപഥമെന്ന ഒറ്റയടി പാതയിലെ ഏകാന്ത സഞ്ചാരിണിയായ നമ്മുടെ ഭൂമിയിൽ അമേരിക്കയിലെ കരോലിനയിൽ ആയിരുന്നാലും ... നിര തെറ്റി ഓടിയിട്ടു ഒന്നിച്ചു കൂടുന്ന നഴ്സറി കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളെ പോലെ നമ്മൾ ഏവരും സ്നേഹംകൊണ്ട് .. പിണക്കം കൊണ്ട് .. ഇണക്കം കൊണ്ട് ..

പിന്നെ ഇത്തിരി കുശുമ്പ് കൊണ്ടും..

പരസ്പരം ഹൃദയം കൊണ്ടു ബന്ധിതരായിരിക്കും ..

ഒരിക്കൽ ഒരേ മണ്ണിൽ ആരോ നട്ട ഒരേ മരത്തിന്റെ രണ്ടു കുരുന്നുകളിൽ ഒന്ന് മറ്റേതിനോട് പരിഭവിച്ചു .. "എങ്കിലും എന്തിനാണ് നമ്മെ ഇത്രയും അകലത്തിൽ നട്ടത് ?" നമ്മുടെ ഉടലുകൾ തമ്മിൽ ഒരിളം കാറ്റിൽ ഉമ്മ വക്കുമായിരുന്നില്ലേ ഇത്രയും കാലവും .."..രണ്ടാമൻ മറുപടി പറഞ്ഞു..," ആര് പറഞ്ഞു നാം അകലത്തിലാണെന്ന് ?

നമ്മുടെ ഉടലുകൾ ഇനിയൊരിക്കലും തമ്മിൽ തൊടാനായില്ലെങ്കിലും നാം നിൽക്കുന്ന ഈ മണ്ണിനടിയിൽ നമ്മുടെ വേരുകൾ ഇണ ചേരുന്നുണ്ടാവും ആരുമറിയാതെ ..

"വരും കാലം , ഒരു മഴുവിനാൽ നാം ഇരുവരും വെട്ടി മാറ്റ പെട്ടാലും നമ്മുടെ തലമുറകൾ മുളച്ചു കൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കും .. "

പുതിയ സ്വപ്നങ്ങൾ പോലെ .. അതേ, വരും തലമുറയും സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ നന്മക്കു വേണ്ടി വേരുകൾ അറ്റു പോകാതെ നല്ല നാളേക്ക് വേണ്ടി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവരാകട്ടെ..

അവർക്കു വേണ്ട വെള്ളവും വളവും നൽകി നല്ല കെട്ടുറപ്പുള്ള ഒരു സമൂഹത്തെ വാർത്തെടുക്കാൻ ഉള്ള ഒരു സന്ദേശമാവട്ടെ നമ്മുടെ ഒത്തൊരുമയുടെ പ്രതീകമായ ഈ സുവനീർ എന്ന് ആശംസിക്കുന്നു ..

സ്നേഹപൂർവ്വം ..

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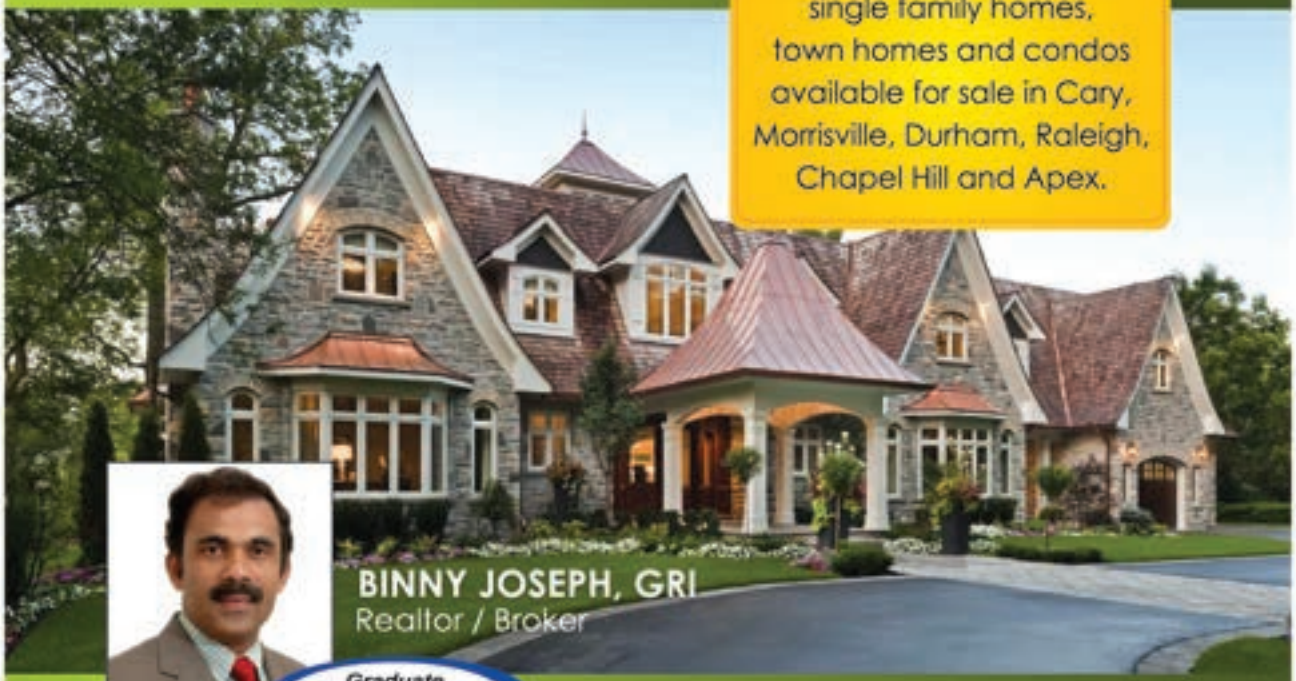

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President's Message

Dear members of GCKA,

As the President of this esteemed organization and on behalf of my fellow BODs, it is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to this year's GCKA Souvenir. I am humbled and honored to address you today. This year's theme, "Reconnecting Hearts; Reviving Roots," holds profound significance, especially in the wake of the challenges of isolation we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a theme that encapsulates the spirit of resilience, unity, and the power of our shared heritage. Our association has always been a beacon of togetherness, fostering a sense of belonging among the Malayali community in the Carolinas. In order to continue growing together, it is essential for us to reconnect our hearts and revive our roots, embracing our shared values, traditions, and cultural heritage.

The baton was handed over to our BOD during the transition meeting in October 2022. We set our goals based on the success of previous years' BODs and hit the ground running from Day One. We started off with the introduction of a Halloween Photo Contest, followed by the Youth Adopt-A-Highway Program, Calendar Photo Contest, Christmas Tree Decoration Competition, as well as the Cake Baking Contest. All of our focus then shifted to the much awaited in-person Christmas/New Year Program that has not happened since December/January 2019. Over 200 adults and children participated in a variety of programs, showcasing their skills in dance, music, and more. We were also able to deliver a sumptuous boxed Christmas dinner right outside of Stewart Theater for our members to enjoy after the program.

The next set of events for the year were various indoor and outdoor games and sports that our members were eager to participate in. We started off with Fifty-Six (56) Card games, the Chess Competition, as well as Badminton Tournaments. These were followed by Twenty-Eight (28) Card games, the Family 5K Walk/Run, the Volleyball Tournament, and the Women's Throwball Tournament. We also introduced the first GCKA "Wine and Dine" event as an opportunity to gather and socialize as a community in a relaxed setting. As of this writing, our upcoming events' - Cricket, Soccer, and Karshakasree competitions, as well as the most popular Onam program - preparations are in full swing.

The Greater Carolina Kerala Association Souvenir is not just a compilation of articles, photographs, and memories; it is a reflection of our shared experiences, dreams, and aspirations. It serves as a bridge between the past and the present, connecting us with our roots while inspiring us to reach new heights. This Souvenir not only highlights the richness of our heritage but also showcases the accomplishments of our communi-

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ty members. I hope this Souvenir serves as a source of inspiration and as a reminder of the power of unity and resilience. May it rekindle our spirits, nourish our connections, and ignite a renewed sense of purpose within each of us. It symbolizes the lasting connections we have formed, the friendships we have forged, and the invaluable wisdom we have gained. As you browse through these pages, may you be reminded of the remarkable moments we have shared and the profound impact we have made on each other's lives. Together, let us continue to celebrate our heritage, embrace our future, and make a positive impact on the world around us.

As we celebrate another milestone in the journey of our association, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my fellow dedicated BOD members, all of our sponsors, and volunteers. Your unwavering support and tireless efforts have been instrumental in our growth and achievements. I would also like to congratulate our upcoming Board of Directors for the 2023-2024 year. We wish you the best of luck!

With warm regards,

Manoj Chonat
President,
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ഒരു ജന്മം താണ്ടുവാനെനിക്ക്
അത് മതിയാവുമായിരുന്നല്ലോ
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Suresh Kumar

മധുര മനോഹര സ്മരണകൾ...

നമ്മളെ പോകാൻ അനുവദിക്കാത്തത്ര ദൂരെയാണ് ഭൂതകാലം.. അത് വളരെ ദൂരെയുള്ള ഒരു മെഴുകുതിരിയാണ്..

ബാല്യത്തിലെ വിദ്യാലയ സ്മരണകൾക്ക് ഇടവപ്പാതിയുടെ തണുപ്പാണ്. ബാല്യകാലം നരച്ചു തുടങ്ങിയ സ്ലേറ്റു പോലെയും അന്നത്തെ ഓർമ്മകൾ ആ സ്ലേറ്റിലെ അക്ഷരങ്ങൾ പോലെയുമാണ്. ആ നനുത്ത ഓർമ്മകളിലേയ്ക്ക് ഊളിയിടുമ്പോൾ മനസ്സിൽ തെളിഞ്ഞു വരുന്നത് ഓടുമേഞ്ഞ മേൽക്കൂരയുള്ള, നീണ്ടു കിടക്കുന്ന ഇടനാഴിയോടു കൂടിയ, വൻ വാകമരങ്ങളുടെ നിഴൽ വീണ മുറ്റമുള്ള ഒരു പള്ളിക്കൂടമാണ്. ചെറിയ മാറ്റങ്ങളോടെയെങ്കിലും പുതു തലമുറകളൊഴികെയുള്ള എല്ലാവരുടെയും ഓർമ്മകൾക്ക് സമാനതകളു ണ്ടാകുമെന്ന് തോന്നുന്നു.

ആർത്തലച്ചു പെയ്യുന്ന പെരുമഴയുടെ അകമ്പടിയോടെയാകും മദ്ധ്യവേനലവധിയ്ക്കു ശേഷം എന്നും പള്ളിക്കൂടം തുറക്കുന്നത്. നനഞ്ഞൊലിയ്ക്കുന്ന നീളൻ കുടയും നനഞ്ഞൊട്ടുന്ന വസ്ത്രങ്ങളും ചേർത്തു പിടിച്ച തടി കൊണ്ടു പുറം ചട്ടയിട്ട സ്ലേറ്റുമായിട്ടായി രുന്നു അക്ഷരാങ്കണത്തിലേയ്ക്കുള്ള ആദ്യ കുറേ വർഷങ്ങളിലെ യാത്ര. നഴ്സറി കാലത്തെ ഓർമ്മകളേക്കാൾ തെളിമയുള്ളത് ഒന്നാം ക്ലാസ്സു മുതലുള്ള നാളുകൾക്കാണ്. അപ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും സ്കൂൾ എന്തെന്നും പഠനം എന്തെന്നുമെല്ലാം മനസ്സിലാക്കി തുടങ്ങിയിരുന്നു. പുത്തൻ യൂണിഫോം ആ കാലത്ത് നിർബന്ധമല്ലായിരുന്നു. അവധിക്കാലം കഴിയാറാകുമ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും കുടയും സ്ലേറ്റും പുസ്തകക്കെട്ടും മറ്റുമായി എല്ലാവരും പള്ളിക്കൂടം തുറക്കാനുള്ള കാത്തിരിപ്പ് ആരംഭിയ്ക്കും. പുതിയ സൗഹൃദങ്ങ-ളുടെ തുടക്കവും അതേ കാലത്തായിരുന്നു. മഷിപ്പച്ചയുടെ തണ്ടും കല്ലു പെൻസിലിന്റെ കഷണങ്ങളും കടം ചോദിച്ചു കൊണ്ടായിരിയ്ക്കും പല സൗഹൃദങ്ങളുടേയും തുടക്കം. ഇന്നത്തെ ഉച്ചക്കഞ്ഞി സമ്പ്രദായത്തിന്റെ നിഷ്കളങ്ക വെർഷൻ ആയിരുന്ന ഉപ്പുമാവ് ആയിരുന്നു അന്ന് ലഭിച്ചിരുന്നത്. ഇന്നും അതിന്റെ അനിതര സാധാരണമായ സ്വാദ് നാവിലെ രസമുകുളങ്ങളെ വിട്ടുപോയിട്ടില്ല. ആദ്യകാല സ്കൂൾ ഓർമ്മകളിൽ ഇന്നും

പച്ചപിടിച്ചു നില്ക്കുന്ന ഒന്നാണ് ആ ഉപ്പുമാവിന്റെ സ്വാദ്. അതിന് പകരം വയ്ക്കാവുന്ന ഒന്നും പിന്നീട് ഒരിടത്തുനിന്നും ലഭിച്ചിട്ടില്ല എന്നതാണ് സത്യം. അന്നെല്ലാം ഉച്ചഭക്ഷണമായ ഉപ്പുമാവിന്റെ വലിയ തൂക്കുപാത്രം എടുത്തു കൊണ്ടു വരുവാൻ ടീച്ചർ ആരെയാണ് ഏല്പ്പിയ്ക്കുക എന്ന് കാത്തിരിയ്ക്കുമായിരുന്നു ഞങ്ങളെല്ലാവരും. ആ ഡ്യൂട്ടി ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നത് ഒരു ക്രെഡിറ്റായിരുന്നു. ഉച്ചയ്ക്ക് മുമ്പുള്ള അവസാന പിരിയഡ് കഴിയാറാകുമ്പോൾ ടീച്ചർ ഏതെങ്കിലും രണ്ടു പേരെ കലവറയിലേയ്ക്ക് പറഞ്ഞു വിടും. താമസിയാതെ ഉപ്പുമാവ് ക്ലാസ്സ് മുറിയുടെ ഒരു മൂലയിൽ സ്ഥാനം പിടിയ്ക്കും. അപ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും സുഖകരമായ ഒരു ഗന്ധം അവിടെയെങ്ങും പരക്കും. പിന്നെ, ബെല്ലടിയ്ക്കാനുള്ള കാത്തിരിപ്പാണ്.

വർഷങ്ങൾക്കു മുൻപ് എന്റെ സ്കൂളിലെ അവസാന ദിവസം എന്റെ ഓർമകളിൽ നിറയുകയാ ണ്. ആൺകുട്ടികളും പെൺകുട്ടികളും ഓടി നടക്കുന്നു. അവരവരുടെ ഏറ്റവും അടുത്ത സൗഹൃദങ്ങൾ അവസാനമായി പറഞ്ഞുറപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന്റെ തിരക്ക്. തങ്ങൾക്കിഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട വരെ ഇനി ജീവിതത്തിൽ എവിടെയെങ്കിലും വച്ച് കാണുമോയെന്നു ഉറപ്പില്ലാത്തതു കൊണ്ട് തങ്ങളുടെ നിഷ്കളങ്കമായ സ്നേഹവും സൗഹൃദവുമെല്ലാം വിവിധ നിറങ്ങളിൽ, രൂപങ്ങളിൽ ലഭ്യമായിരുന്ന ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫ് എന്ന നിധിപ്പുസ്തകത്തിൽ കുറിയ്ക്കുവാൻ പരസ്പരം സമീപിക്കുന്ന തിരക്ക്. ക്ലാസ്സുകളിൽ നിന്ന് ക്ലാസ്സുകളിലേക്ക്... പിന്നെ തങ്ങൾ ഏറ്റവും അധികം ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടുകയും ബഹുമാനിക്കുകയും ചെയ്ത പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട അദ്ധ്യാപകരുടെ അടുക്കലേക്ക്...

നീണ്ട 10 വർഷങ്ങളോളം വിവിധ സ്ഥലങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും വന്നെത്തിയവർ ഒന്നിച്ചിരുന്ന് പഠിച്ച വിദ്യാലയം... ഇന്നത്തോടെ ആ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട വിദ്യാലയത്തോടു വിട പറയുകയാണ്. അവസാന വർഷ പരീക്ഷയ്ക്കുവേണ്ടി ഞങ്ങൾ പിരിയുകയാണ്. പത്താം ക്ലാസ്സിലെ പൊതുപരീക്ഷ. ജീവിതത്തിൽ ഇത്രമാത്രം വലിയ പരീക്ഷണങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാകുമോ എന്ന് മാറിയും മറിഞ്ഞും ചിന്തിച്ചു കൂട്ടിയ സമയം. ആൺകുട്ടികളും

പെൺകുട്ടികളും കൈകോർത്ത് നടക്കാത്ത, എടീ, പോടാ... വിളിക്കാത്ത സ്ക്കൂൾ കാലഘട്ടം. ഉള്ളിലെ ഇഷ്ടം ഒരിക്കൽ പോലും വാക്കിലൂടെയോ നോട്ടത്തിലൂടെയോ പുറത്ത് കാണിക്കാൻ കുട്ടി കൾക്ക് അവസരം ഇല്ലാതിരുന്ന കാലം. ഗുരുനാഥന്മാരെ പേടിച്ചിരുന്ന കാലം. വരാ ന്തയി ലോ, ക്ലാസ്സ് മുറി യിലോ എവിടെ യും ആൺ പെൺ സമ്മിശ്ര സംഘം ചേരലില്ലാത്ത കാലം. ഒരു പ്രദേശത്ത് ഒന്നോ രണ്ടോ വീട്ടിൽ മാത്രം ലാൻഡ്ഫോൺ എന്ന ആഢംബരം ഉണ്ടായിരുന്ന കാലം. ഇലാസ്റ്റിക്കിന്റെ ഒരു വെളുത്ത വള്ളിയിൽ പുസ്തകങ്ങൾ അടു ക്കി വച്ച് നെഞ്ചിലേക്ക് ചേർത്ത് പിടിച്ച്, മഴച്ചാറലിൽ നനഞ്ഞ്, മഷിപ്പേനയാൽ എഴുതിയിരുന്ന സുന്ദരകാ ലം. ക്ലാസ്സിലെ ജനലുകൾക്ക് അടപ്പില്ലാതി രുന്ന, പിൻബെഞ്ചിൽ അക്ഷരങ്ങളുടെയും ഗണിതത്തിന്റെയും അടിസ്ഥാന പാഠങ്ങൾ പോലും അറിയാത്തവരായി എല്ലാവരാ ലും അവഗണിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഒരു വിഭാഗം എല്ലാ ക്ലാസ്സുകളിലും ഉണ്ടായിരുന്ന കാലം. അതി ഥികൾ ആരെങ്കിലും വീട്ടിൽ വന്നാൽ, കുട്ട്യോളൊക്കെ ഏത് ക്ലാസ്സിലാ പഠിക്കണെത് എന്ന് ചോദിച്ചാൽ അച്ഛനുമമ്മയും തൊട്ടടുത്തുള്ള മക്കളോട്' നീ ഏതു ക്ലാസ്സി ലാ'ന്ന് സംശയം തീർത്തിരുന്ന കാലം. ഒരിക്കലും പിടിഎ മീറ്റിംഗും പ്രോഗ്രസ്സ് കാർഡും മാതാപിതാക്കളുടെ ഉറക്കം നഷ്ട പ്പെടുത്താതിരുന്ന ഒരു കാലം. കുട്ടികൾക്ക് കുട്ടികളുടെ മനസ്സുണ്ടായി രുന്ന, ടീച്ചർമാരെ അമ്മമാരെപ്പോലെ, ചേച്ചിമാരെ പോ ലെയൊക്കെ കണ്ടിരുന്ന സമയം. പീഢന കഥകൾ സ്കൂളുകളിൽ നിന്ന് കേട്ടു തുടങ്ങി യിട്ടില്ലാത്ത, ലൗ ജിഹാദും സദാചാര പോ ലീസുമൊന്നും കേട്ടുകേൾവി പോലും ഇ ല്ലാതിരുന്ന ഒരു നിഷ്ക്കളങ്ക കാലം. എല്ലാവരും ധൃതിയിലാണ്. പരമാവധി ഓട്ടോഗ്രാ ഫ് എഴുതിക്കിട്ടുക എന്നുള്ളത് ഒരു അഭി മാനമായി കണ്ട് നെട്ടോട്ടം ഓടുകയാ ണ്. ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിന്റെ പുറംചട്ട, ഉള്ളിലെ പേജുകൾ ഒക്കെ പലതരം. പല നിറങ്ങൾ, തിളങ്ങുന്നത്, വർണ്ണപ്പകിട്ടുള്ളത്, നാടൻ, ഇടത്തരം... അങ്ങനെയങ്ങനെ കുട്ടികളുടെ

വീട്ടിലെ ധനസ്ഥിതി വിളിച്ചുപറയുന്ന ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫുകൾ... ദീർഘചതുരാകൃതിയിൽ നോട്ട് പുസ്തകത്തിന്റെ മൂന്നിലൊന്ന് വലിപ്പമുള്ള ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫുകളുമായി കുട്ടികൾ വരാന്തയിലൂടെ പരക്കം പായുകയാണ്. ഉച്ച സമയത്തെ ഇന്റർവെല്ലിന് ശേഷം ക്ലാസ്സ് തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ എന്റെ നീല ചട്ടയുള്ള ഇടത്തരം എന്ന് പറയാവുന്ന ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫ് പെൺകുട്ടികളുടെ വശത്തേയ്ക്ക് കൈമാറി. എഴുത്തിൽ മിടുക്കികൾ പെൺകുട്ടികളാണ്. സാഹിത്യ ഭാഷയാണ് ഏവരും പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കുന്നത്. മിണ്ടാപ്പൂച്ചകൾ എന്ന് കരുതിയിരുന്ന പലരും ഒടുക്കത്തെ സാഹിത്യമാണ് കുറിയ്ക്കുന്നത്. ഈ കുട്ടിയുടെ ഉള്ളിൽ ഇങ്ങനത്തെ സാഹിത്യമൊക്കെ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നോ എന്ന് ചിലപ്പോൾ അത്ഭുതപ്പെട്ടു പോകും. ആ ലെവലിലൊക്കെ എഴുതിയവരുണ്ട്. "മൗനമാകുന്ന മഹാസമുദ്രത്തിൽ നീന്തിത്തുടിക്കുകയാണ് ഞാൻ. അക്ഷരമാകുന്ന ഒരു പരൽ മീനിനെയും എനിക്ക് കിട്ടുന്നില്ല... വിടപറയുന്നു... കൂട്ടുകാരാ..." ഇങ്ങനെയെഴുതിയവൾക്ക് മലയാളം പരീക്ഷയിൽ മാത്രമല്ല ഒരു വിഷയത്തിലും പാസ്മാർക്ക് കിട്ടിയതായി ഓർമ്മയിലില്ല. ഈ വക സാഹിത്യം പരീക്ഷയ്ക്ക് എഴുതിയാൽ മലയാളത്തിൽ എങ്കിലും ഇവൾ ജയിച്ചുപോയേനേ!

എന്റെ ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിൽ ആരൊക്കെ എന്തെഴുതും എന്നതിൽ ഒരാശങ്കയുമുണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. എന്തെങ്കിലും എഴുതട്ടെ. പത്താം ക്ലാസ്സിൽ ഫസ്റ്റ് ക്ലാസ് കിട്ടാൻ വേണ്ടി പുസ്തകത്തിന്റെ പേജുകൾ മിക്സിയിലിട്ട് ജ്യൂസാക്കി കുടിക്കാൻ വരെ തയ്യാറായ മിടുക്കികൾ. അവരൊക്കെ എന്തു വേണമെങ്കിലും എഴുതട്ടെ. പക്ഷേ, ഒരാൾ മാത്രം... അവൾ എന്തെഴുതും...? മനസ്സിൽ നിറഞ്ഞ് തുളുമ്പുന്ന ആകാംക്ഷയുണ്ട്. അവളുടെ ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫ് കൈയ്യിൽ വന്നതാണ്. ഒന്നും എഴുതിയില്ല. കൈമാറി മറ്റ് കൂട്ടുകാർക്കു കൊടുത്തു. എന്റേതിൽ അവളെന്ത് എഴുതും...? അത് വായിച്ചിട്ട് അതിനുള്ള മറുപടി കൊടുക്കാം... അതാണ് മനസ്സിൽ. പഠിപ്പിസ്റ്റുകൾക്ക് ഒക്കെ എഴുതിക്കൊടുത്തു. ഡോക്ടറാവണം... അധ്യാപികയാവണം...

ഇതിനിടയിൽ കറങ്ങിത്തിരിഞ്ഞ് കൈയിലെത്തിയ എന്റെ ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിന്റെ പേജുകൾ ധൃതിയിൽ മറിച്ചു നോക്കി... ഇല്ല, അവളൊന്നും എഴുതിയിട്ടില്ല. പിന്നെയും മറിച്ചു നോക്കി. അവസാനം കുറേ എഴുതാത്ത പേജുകൾ. പിന്നെ പുറംചട്ട. നിരാശയും സങ്കടവും. ഡെസ്കിൽ തലവച്ച് ആരും കാണാതെ കരയാൻ തോന്നി. മനസ്സിൽ സങ്കടം നിറഞ്ഞ് പെയ്യുകയാണ്. പോക്കറ്റിൽ നിന്ന് പുറത്തെടുത്ത ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫ് വീണ്ടും വീണ്ടും മറിച്ചു നോക്കി. എത്രയധികം എഴുതാത്ത പേജുകൾ ഉണ്ട്, എന്നിട്ടും...? എഴുതാത്ത പേജുകൾ വീണ്ടും മറിച്ച് നോക്കി പുറംചട്ടയിലെത്തിയപ്പോൾ അതിന് തൊട്ടുമുമ്പുള്ള പേജിൽ ആരോ എഴുതിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഒന്നും മനസ്സിലാകുന്നില്ല. അടിയിൽ പേരെഴുതിയിരിക്കുന്നത് മനസ്സിലാകുന്നുണ്ട്. അവൾ തന്നെ. ഇവളെന്താണീ എഴുതിയിരിക്കുന്നത്...? ഒന്നും മനസ്സിലാകുന്നില്ല... ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിന്റെ പുറംചട്ടയുടെ തൊട്ടുമുൻപുള്ള പേജ് കണ്ണാടിപ്പൊട്ടിന് അഭിമുഖമായി പിടിച്ചപ്പോൾ തെളിഞ്ഞ് വന്ന അക്ഷരങ്ങൾ ഇങ്ങനെ വായിക്കാനായി.

'നന്നായി പഠിക്കണം, വല്യ നിലയിലെത്തണം. ഞാൻ കാത്തിരിക്കും... സ്നേഹപൂർവ്വം'.

ആകെ സുഗന്ധം പരന്നിരിക്കുന്നു. കാറ്റിൽ ഒഴുകിയെത്തുന്നത് പനിനീർ പൂക്കളുടെ പരിമളം. ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിന്റെ പേജിലേക്കു മാറി മാറി പലവട്ടം നോക്കി. മറുപടി എഴുതണം... അവളുടെ ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫിൽ. ക്ലാസ്സ് തീരാൻ ഇനി നിമിഷങ്ങളേയുള്ളൂ, മറുപടി എഴുതിക്കൊടുക്കണം. നിറഞ്ഞ് തുളുമ്പുന്ന മനസ്സുമായി ക്ലാസ്സ് മുറിയുടെ വാതിലിൽ എത്തിയപ്പോൾ അവൾ നോക്കിയ ആ നോട്ടത്തോളം നിഷ്ക്കളങ്കമായ നോട്ടം... പിന്നീടൊരിക്കലും അങ്ങനെയൊരു സുഖമുള്ള പ്രണയനോട്ടം കിട്ടിയതായി ഓർമ്മയിലില്ല...

ക്ലാസ്സിനുള്ളിൽ കയറി തിരക്കിട്ട് അവളുടെ ഓട്ടോഗ്രാഫ് അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നതിനിടെ ലോംഗ് ബെല്ലടിച്ചു. മുഴുവൻ കുട്ടികളും എഴുന്നേറ്റ് നിന്നു 'ജനഗണമന അതിനായക ജയഹേ...' ഞാൻ ഒന്നും കേൾക്കുന്നില്ല. മറുപടി എഴുതാൻ ഇനി ഒരിക്കലും എനിക്ക് കഴിയുകയില്ലേ? ഇഷ്ടം എങ്ങനെ തിരിച്ചറിയിക്കും? കണ്ണ് നിറയുന്നു. ഇന്നത്തോടെ ക്ലാസ്സുകൾ അവ

സാനിക്കുകയാണ്. നേരിട്ട് പറഞ്ഞാലോ? വേണ്ട, ശരിയാവില്ല... നേരെ നോക്കാൻ തന്നെ പേടിയാ. പിന്നല്ലേ ഇഷ്ടമാണെന്ന് പറയല്. അവളുടെ സൈഡിലേക്ക് നോക്കാൻ പോലും കഴിയുന്നില്ല. കൈകാലുകൾ വിറയ്ക്കുന്നു. ആദ്യമായി ഇഷ്ടം അറിയിക്കപ്പെട്ടതിന്റെ സുഖമാണോ...? അതോ പേടിയോ...? ശരിക്കും വിറയ്ക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. തല ചുറ്റുന്നതു പോലെ. തിരമാലകൾ അലയടിക്കുന്ന മഹാസമുദ്രത്തിൽ അകപ്പെട്ടത് പോലെ. മനസ്സിനുള്ളിൽ ഒരു സങ്കടക്കടൽ... ആ കടലിൽ അലയടിക്കുന്നത് കണ്ണീരിന്റെ... പ്രണയത്തിന്റെ ആയിരം തിരമാലകൾ... ഒന്നിന് പിറകെ മറ്റൊന്നായ്... തിരിച്ചും ഇഷ്ടമാണെന്ന്... ഒരുപാടൊരു പാടിഷ്ടമാണെന്ന്... ഞാനെങ്ങനെ അറിയിക്കും? ജന ഗണമന കഴിഞ്ഞ് കുട്ടികൾ ചിത റിയോടിയ കൂട്ടത്തിൽ താഴെ ഗ്രൗണ്ടിലൂടെ ആരെയോ തിരയുന്നത് പോലെ പിന്നിലേക്ക് നോക്കി മുന്നോട്ട് നടന്നു നീങ്ങുന്ന അവൾ. കുന്തം വിഴുങ്ങിയ പോലെ ക്ലാസ്സ് മുറിയിൽഏകനായ് നിശ്ചലനായ് തുളുമ്പുന്ന കണ്ണുകളുമായ് പ്രതിമ പോലെ ഞാനും. എനിക്ക് നിന്റെ കണ്ണുനീര്, നിന്റെ പുഞ്ചിരി, എന്റെ മുഖത്ത് നിന്റെ ശ്വാസത്തിന്റെ സ്പർശം എല്ലാം വേണം. എന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ അവസാന മണിക്കൂറിൽ നിന്നെ കാണാൻ ഞാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു. എന്റെ അവസാന ശ്വാസം എടുക്കുമ്പോൾ ഞാൻ നിന്റെ കൈകളിലായിരിക്കണം. ഞാൻ ചെയ്യുന്നതെന്താണെന്നും ചിന്തിക്കുന്നതെന്താണെന്നും നിന്റെ സ്വപ് നത്തിൽ എങ്കിലും ഉണ്ടാവുമോ? ഞാൻ ദിവസം മുഴുവൻ സ്വപ്നം കണ്ടു. എന്നെക്കുറിച്ചു നീ ചിന്തിക്കുന്നത് എന്താണെന്നു ആലോചി ക്കാൻ പോലും കഴിഞ്ഞില്ല...

ബാല്യത്തിന്റെ നിഷ്കളങ്കതകളുമായി ഒരു വട്ടം കൂടി ജീവിയ്ക്കുവാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ എന്ന് ആഗ്രഹിക്കാത്തവർ ആരും ഉണ്ടാവില്ല. എന്തിനും ഏതിനും... കാലമേ, നീയൊന്ന് തിരിഞ്ഞു കറങ്ങിയിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ!

Saji Vettikkalil

Human Conscience

Ashia Anup
1st Prize - Poem
(Kids)

The world had existed, in the span of a moment
It grew in complexity and so did the chaos
One supreme being, as human creation came about, so did she
Her mind, her existence, born from the conscience of a generation
Every case her duty, her obligation
Humanity grew, and so did her knowledge
Every experience, Every event,
All the wisdom, All the failures, And successes
Judgment is solely her right,
As She was born from the chaos of billions of minds,
And so she sat, at the highest chair,
Her power made aware
Velvet made, vibrant blue, of the most royal shade
Ready to give freedom or punishment,
Out to the ones in trial
Listen to the world,
And what new realization humanity had made
For she's all the people's voices, made into one
The walls surrounding her, depicting stories that span centuries
The clear ceiling, boasting the sky,
So high, even a Cyclops could fit in there
People and creatures of various descents,
All waiting to speak their case, their story
Some will be punished, Some will be saved
She's the one who decides
All Hail, The Human Conscience.

A trumpeter's payback

Dhyandeep
1st Prize - Story (Kids)

During the days of colonial India, the British came in charge and named their new colony, "British Raj". In those former days, British Raj proved to be a useful outpost to the Crown, as they had a firm position in Asia, in one of the most unique and diverse countries there were. During this time, warfare would occur through rebels and princely states who didn't agree with the British ruling over them, and so the British would need to engage in conflict with them, and would thus have an entire army dedicated to British Raj. This army would use mostly British weapons, but there was one war tool that it used that hailed from India itself, the elephant. Elephants had been used for centuries prior to the British coming to India, but when the British used them, they were often treated poorly, or given just enough to keep them alive and ready for combat. They would also turn to trading and selling elephants to circuses, theater shows, and to high-class people. This is a story about how some Indians from the state of Kerala decided that they had enough of the British mistreating what they had so much pride for, and decided to get back at them. Udayan looked down at the British camp from the mountain that overlooked the whole settlement. Down there, he saw many people who looked like they were already dead from the paleness of their skin walk around in fancy clothes, going to elaborately built homes made of concrete that was painted in a gorgeous indigo blue. The place they were in was Encased by tall walls made of a similar type of wall, this time patterned with red and yellow, with the top having a small curve outward that made it seem like the wall was banana peeling. The thing that made the camp important to him, however, were the large amounts of giant and small tents down there. The small camps were where the people stayed, and others had been turned into areas of business and outhouses, things that Udayan could care less about.

The big tents, on the other hand, made Udayan's blood boil. They had elephants inside them, caged, trapped by chains, made to live like slaves all so the the people down there, the devils who dared call themselves humans, could make tons of money off the poor beings. That camp had been there for 7 years, since Udayan was 10, and he had always hated it. His village considered elephants to be great friends to humans, beings whom humans would feed and supply water, and they would return the favor by providing the village with protection. This had been the status quo for hundreds of years, then the British arrived. They took that idea, shattered it, burned it, and then put it back together in their own twisted way and called it art.

Udayan walked back to his village, and into the village chief's home, where an entire crowd had gathered. They had been preparing this for weeks, a way to put everything back together, to fix and get back what everybody once had. Everyone watched Udayan as he walked in, as he was the one who had planned and headed this operation. He walked through the giant straw hut, marked with all different shades of brown from the surrounding environment, a testament to its longstanding right of survival. Marching with pride and fury in his step, Udayan reached the center of the giant group of men that had formed. It had almost seemed perfect who these people were, with the exact talents necessary to pull the operation. In the center lie on a stone pedestal a map of the British camp, hand drawn by Udayan's sister, Dhanya, with colors made by her and her group of friends from resources found in the jungle and surrounding river. Udayan looked around the tent, at all the familiar faces he

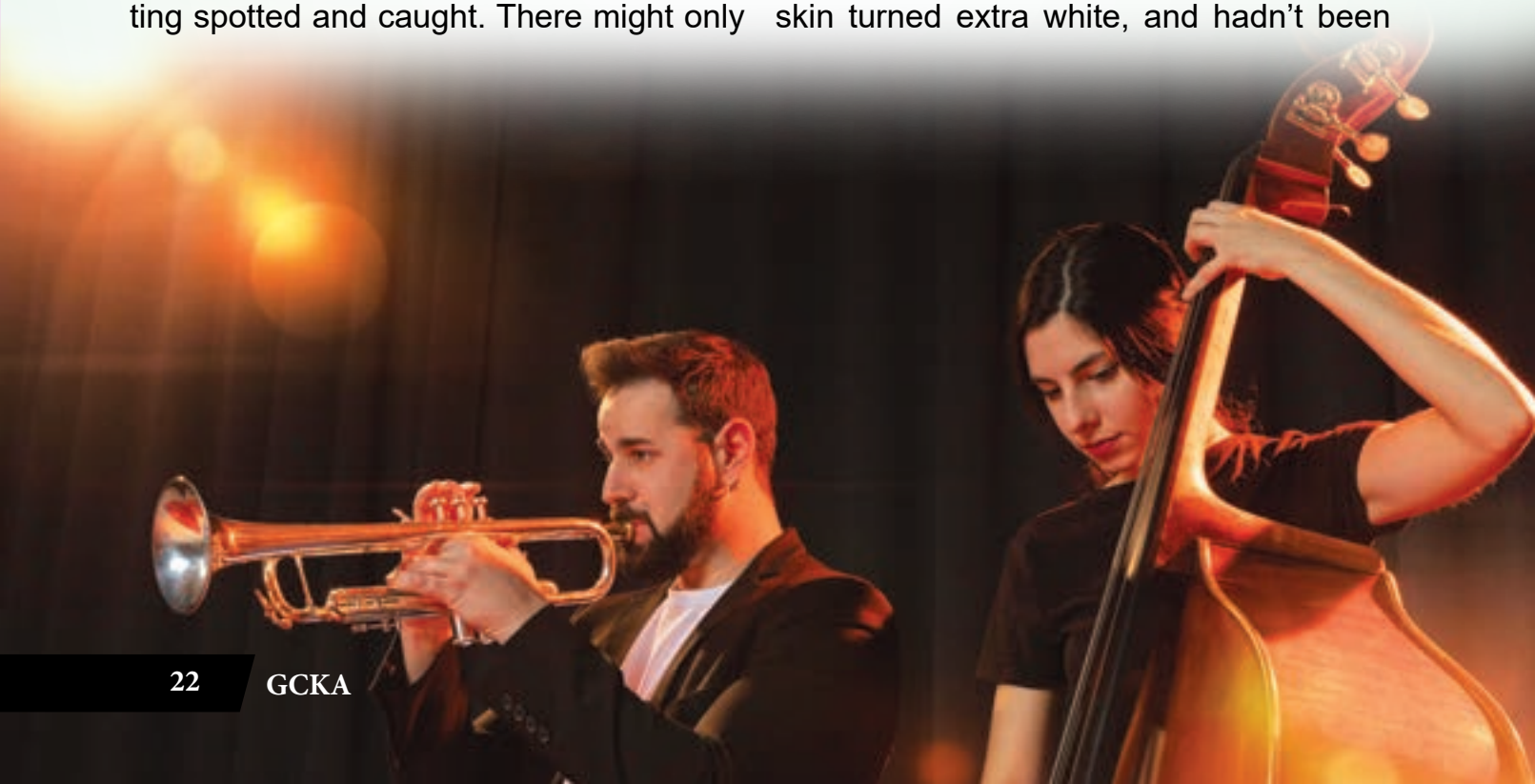
saw, people he had known his entire life, but that was a fact that crucially needed to change for the operation.

“Is everyone ready for review?”, Udayan asked the crowd. While no one spoke, they all either stood still or gave a slight nod of their head. They were ready for an operation that would have made their ancestors proud, an operation with one goal, a goal so important to them that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for it. “Alright then, let’s start.” Not everyone in the village had been there their whole lives, a few had gone to other places across the world and had studied numerous things, though by some twist of fate, they were led back here to serve one common purpose. These special talents would assist in their goal. The hour long briefing that contained excruciating details on the exact precision that the plan was to be operated from, all for that same goal.

One week later, everybody was prepared for the oncoming task. There were three major components of the plan, each specifically needed to be done as precisely and quickly as possible. The first of these was disguise. After the plan had been done, they were almost guaranteed to have been spotted, so the necessity of not having tracked back to this village was essential. This is where the first specialized person came into play. Akash had been involved with economic studies, and had tracked down possible competitors to the elephant market tent, undeniable. This is also where the second specialist came into play. Shrena had studied fashion and design internationally, specifically from specialist immigrants residing in Great Britain. She had been ignored by all other people in that country, due to the fact that she was Indian, and she harbored another level towards the British for ignoring what she had spent years studying for in their

country. Shrena had made costumes for everyone that closely resembled the uniforms of the competitors. She also used bright cream on everyone to make them look white. This had caused a massive hole in her pocket, but they were quickly bridged by the third person who was specialized here, Veydant. He was a lawyer who had studied in British Raj itself, but made a lot of money by working for rich Indian families. He was the pride of the village, and easily the person who had most funded this whole operation. He had also looked up the legalities of the British camp trying to get their competitor to pay for the damage that this operation would do, and there would be nothing they could do if the operation was carried out perfectly.

After being thoroughly disguised, they waited for the fall of midnight, when they were sure that everyone except the guards were asleep. They then began to swarm in around the camp to initiate Phase two, infiltration. This step would be the one that required the most precision and quietness and had found one which was so blatantly obvious, an attack from them was, as any single step out from what they had planned, and they risked all getting spotted and caught. There might only be 6 guards, and dozens of them, but the guards had bayonets, and they did not. Everyone raced towards the camp from all sides except the front, this would have been an easy task, if it weren't for the fact that the walls were curved outward at the top, so there was no possible way in the sides. Then, three people would slowly approach the front from opposite sides of the circular camp, and would make their way toward the guards, hiding in the bushes so they wouldn't get found. Then, one of the sides would purposefully break some twigs, so that the guards would hear it and get suspicious. One of the guards walked towards the bush, bayonet in hand, aiming at that bush. Then on the other side, the people there would also break some twigs, but this time only the second guard would hear, and he would approach the poorly lit group, and when both guards were close to the bushes that the 6 people collectively were hiding in, the guard would have five pound rocks thrown straight at their heads, knocking out the two guards, as they were dragged into the bushed oh so quietly, leaving a bloody, yet short, trail. This is where the final two specialists come in, Umbikuttan and Indeevar. They had their skin turned extra white, and hadn't been



given a costume by Shrena, just so that they could put on the uniform of the guards.

The two specialists were actually brothers who had both joined the military, and were really good at putting on clothes fast, and taking people out even faster. The brothers put on the costumes, looking exactly like a British person to anyone who wasn't squinting from two meters away. From there, the brothers infiltrated the camp, going to the different tents that were stationed around different areas, taking them out, and then dragging their unconscious bodies such that they were no longer visible to anyone else in the tents. ten minutes, they had just ten minutes to perform this feat, and they delivered. They had their own share of racism while

in the military, as they served for nearly fifteen years, becoming extremely good at what they were doing, and still never getting a promotion, as those only went to the other British people who happened to live in British Raj. In one instance, a recruit who didn't even know how to load a gun and had only been in the army for two weeks became their higher up. The fury they received from that resulted in them going into overdrive to take them out, and they didn't hold any punches either. All of the men that came back were alive, on request of Udayan, but they were brutally attacked, their faces almost completely disheveled. At the end of the ten minutes all four of the guards on the inside were gone, with their bodies now

stored in the bushes outside with their companions. With no more defense left for the camp, all of the men from the village entered, though if anyone happened to be outside of their tent at their hour, all they would have seen was their competitors trespassing for God knows what.

It was time for Phase three, rescue. The whole point of the plan came together at this step. One goal, which any outsider to the village would have said was pointless and would have done nothing, but meant everything to them. See, not only had the British treated these elephants poorly, these elephants were the village's former elephants, and the inbred children of said elephants. The feeling of having those elephants stolen from them, treated like slaves, and watching powerlessly as more were created and sold off, resulted in everyone longing for the goal they had so deviously sent into action tonight: Free all the elephants, and completely destroy the camp, financially, reputation-wise, and literally. There were four tents containing elephants, which were the ones the guards were looking after, and six other tents for the business-booming egomaniacs and their guests. The tents were strung down with a series of rods connected to strings that then connected to the actual mainframe of the tent, holding everything up.

Udayan went to one of those tents with some men, and when he went inside, what he saw made him want to cry and scream. A poor elephant, scarred and battered, its once black skin turning red, chained up and sat in a cage. Udayan figured all of the tents must have looked like this, and so he enlisted the help of the final specialist, Dhatri. Dhatri might have been a girl, but she was a tomboy and thief at heart. She could break into and out of almost anything. Needed to break something down? Dhatri can help. Need to break into a vault and get out without getting caught? Dhatri can do that. Need to teach a group of people how to break into giant cages and free an alive and uncooperative animal from chains while not getting hurt and whilst also getting practice for the learners? Dhatri has got you covered. She herself had also participated in the raid, and she was so good at teaching everyone, that her parents accepted her back into their family, and all the elephants were out in 30 minutes.

It was now 1:45 am on the dot, exactly the time it needed to be, because that was when the investor's rides home came. All of the elephants were kept where they were, and the final chains weren't broken until the call from the carriage driver was heard. The moment those chains were broken, all four

elephants erupted out of their tents, they were smart creatures and recognized that anyone else in the competitor's uniform wasn't bad, so when they broke out of their tent, putting a white face of shock on the investors, Udayan knew that he had just cooked up a revenge dish that would leave a very sweet aftertaste. One of the investors was flung by an elephant towards the wall, hurdling in the air. It almost seemed like had lost all of his blood from pure terror when Udayan saw his face, but it was apparent he hadn't when he came down and left quite a bloody streak on the wall. The other workers there didn't exactly have a good time either. When the elephants had gotten out of their tents, they had completely disheveled and broken to the ground as the elephants had marched out with glorious trumpeting sounds. In just a few minutes, almost all of the tents had suffered a similar fate, with all the stored cash the campers had been burned by Udayan using a cigar lighter he had found. He could hear the director of the camp coming out and screaming what he presumed was, "GUARDS, GUARDS, WHERE ARE THE GUARDS?!?" in English, though there were no guards coming.

Udayan's crew all retreated and escaped from the camp, though they made sure to be spotted as the competitors before leaving. It was amazing what they had all done. In just one hour, they had completely destroyed years of dirty work and mistreatment for their friends. The elephants had managed to escape, breaking all the tents before bashing through the walls as well, making sure nothing was left behind. The horses from the investor's carriage had panicked and fled, with the chauffeur trying desperately to pull them back. There was a lot of blood, infuriated shouting, and tears coming from the camp. There were tears at the village too, but only tears of happiness. The elephants had run off, the goal had been achieved. Years upon years of pent up stress, anger, and hopelessness had finally dissolved, gladly passed to the British. Though it didn't do much overall, as it was only a small camp that didn't do much for the economy, it was a huge win for Udayan and the rest of the village. They all hated the British for one reason or the next, and this small victory was like winning a war for them.

Later that day Udayan went back to the top of the mountain, away from his partying family. This time not to look down at the camp, but to look up as the sun rose on a glorious day, with just a little less evil in it.

THE DILEMMA

Ajith Sivadas
1st Prize - Story
(English Adults)

"Mr. Menon. Very rarely does one get a chance to positively impact the lives of five families. These families will be grateful to you for a lifetime. Please keep that in mind and take an appropriate decision." Mr. Walker pleaded his case. I had heard enough. "Stop testing my patience. You better leave now. Do not expect me to be cordial with you anymore. I stood up and started walking to the front door. Mr. Walker adjusted his glasses a little bit, tucked the few papers he had brought back onto his rustic leather bag and treaded down the long corridor. Mr. Walker stepped out, turned around and started to say "Thank you. Have a …" I slammed the door shut past him and angrily strode to my bedroom.

As I walked past the dining room, I caught a glimpse of Varsha sitting on the table with her knitting kit. I could not help but feel jealous of how she can listen to all the conversations and conveniently stay away from taking a stand. I rested on the rocking chair and scanned across the pictures on the wall and onto the trees up a distance. I noticed one tree which had shed all but one of its leaves. Even though the leaf seemed pale and fragile, it was somehow clinging on to the branch. My mind wandered back to the pics on the wall. Majority of them were of Neal during different facets of his life.

When we knew that we were going to have a baby, lot of our friends scared us with the usual stories about sleepless nights, endless hours feeding the baby and things like that. Our experience with Neal was contrary to that of our friends' and neighbors. He was a happy, quiet baby, who gave us no trouble at all. Growing up, Neal was never fuzzy about anything and before we knew he was in high school. He was more on the quieter side and even when he spoke, he chose his words so carefully that he would never hurt a soul. His inter-

ests were in cross country and in playing the saxophone. He loved to spend time outdoors and was very particular about maintaining a healthy lifestyle. He would diligently wake up at four in the morning and go about his exercise routine and be ready for school fifteen minutes before schedule. Neal loved to spend time with the family and his close set of friends.

I remember that day which changed our lives forever. It was the first Saturday of July in 2018. Neal woke up as usual and decided to take his bike for a ride. When we woke up around eight, Neal was not there which was uncharacteristic of him. I tried reaching out to him and it went to his voicemail. I got a call

around 08:45 from Duke hospital that Neal has been admitted to the hospital and we should come over right away. We rushed to the hospital where we came to know that Neal was found unresponsive on the trail by passersby. Doctor informed us that Neal had gone into a coma and that he was unsure when he will get back to normalcy. Days turned to weeks with little progress, but we kept our hopes high.

I kept visiting the section of the trail where Neal was found. He was familiar with that trail, and I am still at a loss on what could have happened to my child on that fateful day. After couple of months, the doctor informed us that Neal's chance of recovery was slim, and we should seriously think about taking him off life support. I was furious and lashed out at him for even suggesting that. Varsha on the other hand, had cocooned herself and seemed to have lost all the hope in Neal's revival.

I made it a point to visit Neal and to spend at least four hours with him religiously every day since the incident. During one of those visits, a man walked up to me and introduced himself as Mr. Brian Walker. He mentioned that he was running a non-profit organization called "Glimpses of Hope" which helps to connect people who need organs with donors. I commended him for the charitable work he has been doing and excused myself to tend to Neal. He visited us again the week after and broached the topic about donating Neal's organs. I gave him a cold stare and he walked out without waiting for my response.

It was late November when Mr. Walker arrived at our doorstep with this request.

He had already done the groundwork and identified five families who could benefit from Neal. I was awfully disturbed by his visit, that I shut myself in my bedroom for the rest of the day. Varsha knew my state of mind and left me to myself. I fell asleep on the floor that day and woke up early morning and was on my way to spend time with Neal. I spoke to him at length that day and asked for his guidance on how I should proceed further.

Another month passed by and there was no change in Neal's condition. Mr. Walker never came to see us after that incident. My hopes that Neal would open his eyes and start his road to recovery continued to fade with the passage of time. I was at a loss on what to do. I had read articles of people waking up

from coma after several years. My mind was torn between hanging on to my hopes and prayers and letting Neal go. On the 2nd of January 2019, Varsha and I went to the hospital together. We spend the entire day with Neal sharing our memories with him. I hugged him closely and gave him a kiss on his forehead and walked to the doctor's room and gave the consent to take Neal out of life support.

The decision to take Neal out of life support was undoubtedly the hardest decision of my life. Not a day has passed since then without me critiquing my decision. Every day at four AM, I can feel a gentle breeze embracing me accompanied by Neal's voice "Dad, you have always taught me to give my best shot at everything I do, no matter what the outcome is and to fight till the last moment. I was doing that till the very end. Why did you let me go so quickly?" I calmly respond back to him, "Son, even though I let your physical body go, I will never let you go from my mind till my last breath."

Utilizing the wisdom of our ancestors

Jiljo Jose

During the pandemic, we experienced a shortage of critical items like gloves, masks, and food items. As the world economy recovers from the impacts of the pandemic, we are still dealing with supply chain challenges, inflation, and constraints on essential items. Healthcare is facing more challenges these days from poor staffing, and shortage of commonly used drugs like antibiotics, and nebulized medications for asthma. While we spend most of our lives looking forward, doing better, and forging ahead, it is important to pause, look back, and utilize the wisdom of our ancestors in dealing with day-to-day problems. In this article, we will be discussing the benefits of some products our parents and grandparents used for their health and well-being.

Ginger and Black Pepper

Cough, cold, and sore throat are some of the commonproblems that can be very annoying, especially if they last for weeks. The constant irritation in the throat can give you a hard time.

Ginger and pepperhave been used by our ancestorsas a traditional go-to remedy to treat colds, coughs, and sore throats. It is the presence of the active component gingerol in ginger that helps strengthen our body from within and provides instant relief. Black pepper comes packed with many nutrients like vitamin C, flavonoids, and antioxidants, and has antibacterial properties, which makes it a perfect natural ingredient to manage cough andcold.

Method of preparation:

Take a vessel with one cup of water, add ginger and black pepper to it, and boil, bring the heat down to low. This mixture can be consumed warm, honey can be added to make it sweet.Honey has antibacterial properties and can also help to clear the throat, alleviating irritation.

Coconut oil

Coconut oil can boost the moisture con-

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tent of dry skin. It improves the functioning of the skin, helping prevent excessive water loss.It may also reduce the severity of mild to moderate symptoms ofatopicdermatitis,a chronic skin disease characterized by skin inflammation and defects in the skin's barrier function. There are a wide variety of moisturizers like Cetaphil, Neutrogena, Aveeno, Olay,etc.available in the market, which can be used for dry skin, and are convenient to use while we are at work; but virgin coconut oil can be used to moisturize our skinand lips while we are at home. Itis the tastiest oil used in cooking and can be used to make many of our favorite dishes, butbe sure to consume it in moderation as it increases bad cholesterol.

Arrowroot

Also known by the scientific name Maranta arundinacia, is a tropical root vegetable. This edibleroot part of the plant is about 10 inches long. It is available as a dried powder. In kerala, this is called Koovapodi. Arrowroot has been used as a home remedy for digestive disorders by our ancestors in India for years. There are studies that showed that it helped reduce diarrhea and ease stomach cramps.

Arrowroots' low glycemic index and high concentration of potassium may help people with diabetes. The resistant starch in arrowroot forms a viscous gel when mixed with water and behaves like soluble fiber in our gut and may regulate appetite. It can be prepared as porridge by mixing two tablespoons of arrowroot powder in a vessel with 100ml of water, boiled and mixing thoroughly by stirring, allowing it to cool, before eating. It can be used to make pancakes or halva, by mixing it with shredded coconut and sugar/jaggery and other ingredients.

തോൽക്കുന്നില്ല പ്രണയം

Paul B Mathew
1st Prize - Story
Malayalam - Adult

ദുബായ് എയർപ്പോർട്ടിൽ ചുറ്റിത്തിരിഞ്ഞ് അയാൾ തന്റെ ഗേറ്റിലെത്തി. ദീർഘദൂര വിമാനയാത്രകൾ മറ്റു പലർക്കുമെന്നതുപോലെ അയാളും വെറുത്തിരുന്നു. ദുബായിൽ നിന്ന് എത്രയോ മണിക്കൂറുകൾ യാത്ര ചെയ്തിട്ടാണ് ബോസ്റ്റണിലും പിന്നെ അയാളുടെ നഗരമായ റാലിയിലും എത്തുക എന്നു ചിന്തിച്ചു തുടങ്ങുമ്പോഴേക്കും അയാൾക്ക് ഭ്രാന്തുപിടിക്കുന്നതു പോലെ തോന്നി. ഏതാണ്ട് രണ്ട് മണിക്കൂറോളം കാത്തിരിയ്ക്കണം ദുബായിൽ നിന്നുള്ള വിമാനത്തിന്.

ദുബായ് നഗരത്തിന്റെ വശ്യത അതിമനോഹരമായി ദൃശ്യമാകുന്ന കൂറ്റൻ സ്ക്രീനുകളിലേയ്ക്ക് അയാളുടെ ശ്രദ്ധ തിരിഞ്ഞു. ഈ നഗരത്തിന് വല്ലാത്തൊരു ആകർഷണീയതയുണ്ടെന്ന് അയാൾക്ക് തോന്നി. ഈ നഗരം ഇനിയൊരിക്കൽ സന്ദർശിയ്ക്കണമെന്ന് അയാളുറപ്പിച്ചു. വീണ്ടും വാച്ചിലേയ്ക്ക് നോക്കി. സമയം ഇനിയും ആയിട്ടില്ല. ചുറ്റുമുള്ളവർ ഫോണിലും ലാപ്ടോപ്പിലും തല കുനിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. ചിലരൊക്കെ കുട്ടികളുടെ ഉത്തരമില്ലാത്ത ചോദ്യങ്ങളെ നേരിട്ടുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. വാട്സാപ്പ് ഗ്രൂപ്പികളിൽ വന്നുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന സന്ദേശങ്ങളിലേയ്ക്ക് അയാളും തിരിഞ്ഞു.

അരമണിക്കൂറിനുള്ളിൽ ബോർഡിംഗ് ആരംഭിയ്ക്കുന്നുവെന്ന സന്ദേശം മുഴുങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ ഫോണിൽ നിന്നും ശ്രദ്ധതിരിച്ച് ചുറ്റുമൊന്നു നോക്കി. എതിർവശത്തെ കസേരയിലിരിക്കുന്ന സ്ത്രീ അയാളെ ശ്രദ്ധിയ്ക്കുന്നതുപോലെ തോന്നി. തോന്നലായിരുന്നില്ല. പലരേയും പോലെ പരിചിതമായ ഒരു മുഖം തന്നെയായിരുന്നു അത്. പുഞ്ചിരിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് അവർ അയാളെ സമീപ ച്ചു, സഹപാഠിയും നാട്ടുകാരിയുമായ ' ആനി മേരി വർഗ്ഗീസ്.

'തനിച്ചാണോ'? അവരുടെ ചോദ്യത്തിന് അതെയെന്ന് അയാൾ ഉത്തരം കൊടുത്തു. ഞാനും തനിച്ചാണ്. ഇവിടെ മദർ-ഇൻ-ലോയെ കണ്ടിട്ട് മടങ്ങുന്നു. താൻ എവിടെയാണിപ്പോൾ? നോർത്ത് കരോളിന,റാലി. അവളുടെ ചോദ്യത്തിനുത്തരം പറഞ്ഞ് അയാൾ ചോദിച്ചു. 'ആനി'?

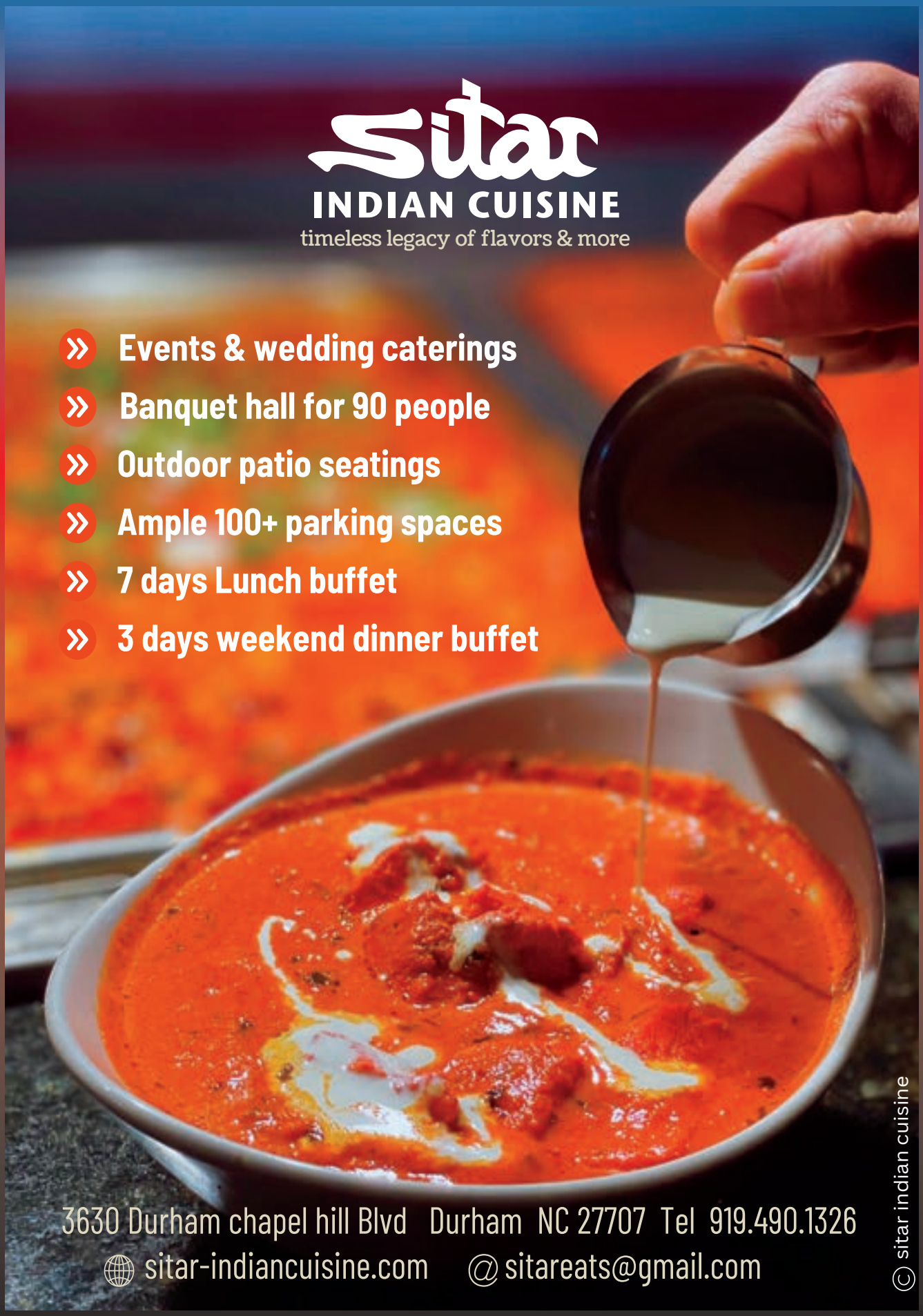
ഞാൻ ബോസ്റ്റണിൽ തന്നെ. - "ബെൽമോണ്ട് " വലിയ സംഭാഷണത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കമായിരുന്നു അത്. പഴയ സഹപാഠികളും കൂട്ടുകാരും നാട്ടുകാരും അധ്യാപകരുമൊക്കെ

അവരുടെ സംസാരവിഷയങ്ങളായിരുന്നു. ഏതാണ്ട് അരമണിക്കൂറിനകം അവർ വിമാനത്തിനുള്ളിൽ കയറാനുള്ള ലൈനിലെത്തി ആനി പറഞ്ഞു 'വലിയ തിരക്കൊന്നുമില്ലല്ലോ'. ("അതെതായാലും നന്നായി കൊച്ചിൽ നിന്നുള്ള ഫ്ളൈറ്റ് നിറയെ ആളായിരുന്നു"). മറുപടിയന്നോണം അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു. ഫ്ളൈറ്റിനുള്ളിലേയ്ക്ക് നടക്കുമ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും അവർ ഒരുമിച്ച് പഠിച്ച സ്കൂൾ കാലഘട്ടത്തിലെത്തിയിരുന്നു. അയാളുടെ ഓർമ്മകൾ. നഴ്സറി ക്ലാസ്സ് മുതൽ ആനി അയാളുടെ ഏറ്റവുമടുത്ത കൂട്ടുകാരിയായിരുന്നു. മൂന്നാം ക്ലാസിലെത്തിയപ്പോൾ അവർക്കൊപ്പം എബിയും എത്തി. അവരുടെ നാട്ടിലെ ബാങ്കിലേയ്ക്ക് സ്ഥലം മാറി വന്നതായിരുന്നു എബിയുടെ പപ്പായും മമ്മിയും. പതിയെ എബിയും അവരുടെ കൂട്ടുകെട്ടിലായി. നന്നായി പഠിച്ചിരുന്ന അവർ മൂവരും ക്ലാസിലെ ആദ്യ സ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ എപ്പോഴും പങ്കിട്ടെടുത്തു.

അഞ്ചാംക്ലാസിൽ ആനി ഗേൾസ് സ്കൂളിലേയ്ക്ക് മാറി. അവളുടെ സൗഹൃദങ്ങളും. പക്ഷെ അയാളും എബിയും അപ്പോഴും ഒരുമിച്ചായിരുന്നു. പ്രീഡിഗ്രിക്ക് വീണ്ടും അവർ ഒരേ കോളേജിലെത്തി. ആനിയും എബിയും ഒരേ ക്ലാസിലായിരുന്നുവെങ്കിലും അയാൾ മറ്റൊരു ക്ലാസിലായിരുന്നു. മലയാളം ക്ലാസിൽ മാത്രം അയാൾ ആനിയ്ക്കൊപ്പമായിരുന്നു. ഏപ്പോഴോ ആനിയോടുള്ള സൗഹൃദം അയാൾക്ക് പ്രണയമായി. കോളേജ് ബസ്സിലും മലയാളം ക്ലാസിലും കിട്ടുന്ന സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിലൊക്കെയും അയാൾ ആനിയെത്തന്നെ ശ്രദ്ധിച്ച് നടപ്പായി. പെൺകുട്ടികളോട് അത്രയ്ക്കൊന്നും സ്വതന്ത്രമായി സംസാരിക്കുന്ന കാലമായിരുന്നില്ല അത്. അയാൾ ആനിയോട് അധികമൊന്നും സംസാരിച്ചിരുന്നില്ല. പക്ഷേ എബിയും ആനിയും മിക്കപ്പോഴും ഒരുമിച്ചായിരുന്നു. അവർ പ്രണയത്തിലാണോ എന്നയാൾ സംശയിച്ചു തുടങ്ങി. ആനിയുടെ ജന്മദിനത്തിൽ ബേക്കറിയിൽ നിന്ന് മധുരം കഴിച്ച് മടങ്ങുന്ന ഇരുവരേയും കണ്ടപ്പോൾ ആ സംശയം ശരി തന്നെയെന്ന് അയാളുറപ്പിച്ചു. ആനിയെ സുഹൃത്തായി മാത്രമേ കാണാവൂ എന്ന് അയാൾ മനസ്സിലുറപ്പിച്ചു ..... വേദനയോടെയാണെങ്കിലും.

ബസ് സ്റ്റോപ്പിൽ, ബസ്സിൽ, മലയാളം ക്ലാസ്സിൽ, അങ്ങനെ പരസ്പരം കാണുന്ന സന്ദർഭങ്ങളിലൊക്കെയും ആ കണ്ണുകൾ അവളെ പിന്തുടർന്നുകൊണ്ടേയിരുന്നു. അവളെ മറക്കുക അയാൾക്ക് അസാധ്യമായിരുന്നു. മലയാളം ക്ലാസ്സിൽ ചില അവസരങ്ങളിൽ അവരുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ പരസ്പരം കൂട്ടിമുട്ടി. അവൾക്ക് അവനോടെന്തോ പറയാനുള്ളതുപോലെ.

തന്നേക്കാൾ പണവും സൗന്ദര്യവുമുള്ള എബി തന്നെയാണ് അവൾക്ക് അനുയോ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ജ്യൻ. വേദനയോടെയാണെങ്കിലും ആ യാഥാർത്ഥ്യം അയാൾ അംഗീകരിച്ചിരുന്നു. പ്രീഡിഗ്രിയൊക്കെ ഒരു തരത്തിൽ കടന്നുകൂടിയെന്നു വേണം പറയാൻ. എന്നാൽ എബിയും ആനിയും നല്ല മാർക്കോടെ പാസ്സായി എൻജിനീയറിങ്ങിനു ചേർന്നു. ഒരേ കോളേജിൽ. മാർക്ക് ലിസ്റ്റ് വന്ന സമയത്ത് ആനി ചോദിച്ചു എന്തേ മാർക്കൊക്കെ കുറഞ്ഞുപോയത്. ഇനിയെന്താ പിരപാടിയെന്നൊക്കെ. എന്തേലുമൊക്കെ പഠിച്ച് ഒരു ജോലി ഒപ്പിയ്ക്കണം. ഒഴുക്കൻ മട്ടിൽ അയാൾ മറുപടിയും പറഞ്ഞു. നാട്ടിലെങ്ങും അഡ്മിഷൻ കിട്ടാത്തതുകൊണ്ട് കോയമ്പത്തൂരിലാണ് ബി. കോമും തുടർന്ന എം ബി എ യും പഠിച്ചത്. ശേഷം ബാംഗ്ലൂരിൽ ജോലിയുമായി. അപ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും ആനിയും എബിയും പഠനമൊക്കെ കഴിഞ്ഞ് കൊച്ചിയിലേതൊ കമ്പനിയിൽ ജോലി തുടങ്ങിയിരുന്നു.

ഒരിയ്ക്കൽ നാട്ടിൽ നിന്ന് ബാംഗ്ലൂരിലേക്ക് പോവുമ്പോൾ എബിയേയും ആനിയേയും അയാൾ ബസ്സിലൊരുമിച്ച് കണ്ടു. അവർ ഏതോ ട്രെയിനിംഗിനായി പോവുകയായിരുന്നു. ഒരുമിച്ച് നഗരം കാണാൻ അവർ ക്ഷണിച്ചെങ്കിലും എന്തോ കാരണം പറഞ്ഞ് അയാൾ ഒഴിഞ്ഞുമാറി.

ഏറെത്താമസിയാതെ ഒപ്പം ജോലിചെയ്തിരുന്ന സുഹൃത്തിന്റെ ബന്ധുവായ ജിജിയുമായി അയാളുടെ വിവാഹമുറപ്പിച്ചു. അന്നൊരിയ്ക്കൽ പള്ളിയിൽ വച്ച് കണ്ടപ്പോഴാണ് വിവരങ്ങളൊക്കെ ആനിയോട് പറഞ്ഞത്. അവൾ അറിഞ്ഞു കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. 'കല്യാണത്തിന് ഇത്ര തിടുക്കമായിരുന്നോ' ഒരു പരിഹാസച്ചിരിയോടെയാണവൾ ചോദിച്ചതെങ്കിലും ആ കണ്ണുകൾ നിറഞ്ഞിരുന്നത് അയാൾ ശ്രദ്ധിച്ചു. ഒരു പക്ഷേ... ഇല്ല ഇത് തന്റെ തോന്നലാവും എന്നയാൾ ആശ്വസിച്ചു.

'സീറ്റ് ഏതാണ്. ആനിയുടെ ചോദ്യം അയാളെ ഓർമ്മകളിൽ നിന്നും മോചിപ്പിച്ചു. '23ഡി' ബോർഡിംഗ് പാസ്സ് നോക്കിയിട്ട് അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു. കൊള്ളാം ഞാൻ അടുത്തു തന്നെയുണ്ട്. '24എ' ആനി മറുപടിയായി പറഞ്ഞു.

വിമാനത്തിൽ തിരക്കുണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. നടുവിലത്തെ നിരയിലാരുന്നു അയാളുടെ സീറ്റ് തൊട്ട് പിറകിലത്തെ നിരയിൽ ആനിയും. നാല് പേർക്കിരിയ്ക്കാവുന്ന അയാളുടെ നിരയിൽ മറ്റാരും ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. ക്യാബൻ ക്രൂവിനോടനുവാദം വാങ്ങി ആനി അയാൾക്കൊപ്പം ചേർന്നു. അവരുടെ സംസാരം കൂട്ടുകാരും നാട്ടുകാരും കടന്ന് ജോലി, കുടുംബം കുട്ടികൾ അങ്ങനെയൊക്കെ വിശാലമായി.

അയാളുടെ തന്നെ ഭാഷയിൽ പറഞ്ഞാൽ സാരിത്തുമ്പ് വിസയിൽ അമേരിക്കയിലെത്തി പല പല ജോലികൾ ചെയ്ത് ഇപ്പോൾ റിയൽ എസ്റ്റേറ്റ് ബ്രോക്കറായി. ഭാര്യ ജി

ജി നഴ്സാണ്. രണ്ട് ആൺമക്കൾ ഇരുവരും ഹൈസ്ക്കൂളിൽ. ആനിയ്ക്ക് ഒരു പെൺകുട്ടി. അവളും ഹൈസ്ക്കൂളിൽ. ഭർത്താവ് ബോബി ഏതോ ഐടി കമ്പനിയിൽ ജോലി ചെയ്യുന്നു. ആനി നിസേർച്ച് ഏൻജിനീയറായി ബോയിംഗിലും. സംസാരത്തിനിടയിലെപ്പോഴോ അയാൾ താനവളെ പ്രണയിച്ചിരുന്നുവെന്ന് പറഞ്ഞുപോയി. സഹോദരങ്ങളില്ലാത്ത എബിയ്ക്ക് ആനി സഹോദരിയായിരുന്നുവത്രേ ആനിയ്ക്ക് തിരിച്ചും. നീണ്ട മൗനമായിരുന്നു ഇരുവർക്കുമിടയിൽ പിന്നീട്. ആനി മുന്നിലുള്ള സ്ക്രീനിൽ സിനിമ കാണാൻ തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോഴേയ്ക്കും അയാളൊന്ന് മയങ്ങാൻ തീരുമാനിച്ചു.

ഉണരുമ്പോൾ അയാളുടെ തോളിൽ തലചായ്ച്ചുറങ്ങുകയായിരുന്നു ആനി. ഉറക്കത്തിന് ശല്യമാവാതെ അയാൾ ആ മുഖത്തോട്ട് നോക്കിയിരുന്നു. അയാളുണർന്നുവെന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കിയതുപോലെ ആനിയും ഉണർന്നു.

അയാളുടെ മുഖഭാവം കണ്ട് സമാധാനിപ്പിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് ആനി പറഞ്ഞു ഇതൊക്കെ ഇങ്ങനെ സംഭവിയ്ക്കേണ്ടതായിരുന്നു. സാരമില്ല, പ്രണയം ഒരിയ്ക്കലും തോൽക്കുന്നില്ല. അതുകൊണ്ടല്ലേ എല്ലാത്തിനും ഇപ്പോഴെങ്കിലും ഒരു വ്യക്തത വന്നത്. ബോസ്റ്റൺ എയർപോർട്ടിൽ അവർ പിരിയുന്ന നേരത്ത് നിശ്ചയിച്ചുറപ്പിച്ച പോലെ ആനി അയാളോട് പറഞ്ഞു. ' എന്റെ കോണ്ടാക്ട് നമ്പർ ഡിലീറ്റ് ചെയ്തേക്കു. ഞാനും ഡിലീറ്റ് ചെയ്യാം. അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഒരു പക്ഷേ നമ്മുടെ കുടുംബങ്ങൾ വേദനിയ്ക്കേണ്ടിവരും. നമുക്കീ ഓർമ്മകളൊക്കെ തന്നെ ധാരാളം. അവൾ പറഞ്ഞത് അയാൾ ശരിവെച്ചു. ഒരു ആലിംഗനത്തിന് ശേഷം പിരിയുമ്പോൾ ഇരുവരുടെയും കണ്ണുകൾ നിറഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. തന്റെ നഗരത്തിലേയ്ക്കുള്ള ഫ്ലൈറ്റിലിരുന്ന് അവളുടെ നമ്പർ അയാൾ ഡിലീറ്റ് ചെയ്യുമ്പോൾ അടുത്ത കാലത്ത് എവിടെയോ വായിച്ചതോർത്തു. 'പ്രണയം ഒരിയ്ക്കലും തോൽക്കുന്നില്ല, തോൽക്കുന്നത് പ്രണയിക്കുന്നവർ മാത്രമാണ്.'

Replica

my shadow grazes the side of the reflective surface
positioned so perfectly that i always manage to walk by it
but this time i pause.

the imitating glass awaits my arrival
but this glass doesn't imitate the way it should
as i fully step into its view, the image appearing in front of me
changes

i swirl and contort, my body and face changing form
every pore on my nose and every imperfection on my face
enlarges
until i am someone whom i cannot recognize

but mirrors are supposed to show you the truth
an exact replica of the subject placed in front of it
so i'll believe the mirror
and the girl who's staring back at me

Namita manoj
2nd Prize - Poem
(Kids)

Just In Time

Alita Sebastian
2nd Prize - Story (Kids)

I felt the continuous buzzing of my phone in my pocket. Right now, I had bigger things to worry about, but if I was getting so many messages, it must have been important. I reached down, pulling it out. Thirty-two new messages and seventeen missed calls from Avery. I read the last message he sent:

Avery: I've sent her to the hospital can you just pick up

My heart beat faster as I opened up the earlier messages. Hospitals were never good.

Avery: Mom isn't waking up

Avery: what do I do

Avery: CASSIDY

He's probably joking, he must be joking. I raised my phone to my ear, waiting for the moment when the ringing stopped and I heard his laughter.

"Cass?"

"Hello?"

"Where were you? Where did you put your phone? I've been trying to call you for the past thirty minutes! Mom's at the—"

"It's not funny. I read your messages. You're just trying to scare me and I'm not in the mood."

"No, I'm serious. She had to be boarded into an ambulance. It's really freaking me out. I'm driving to the hospital right now, which is what you should be doing."

"Well, I would be doing that if my car didn't have a flat tire and I wasn't stuck in the middle of nowhere." I snapped.

"You always have to make it harder for everyone, don't you?" He sighed, "Where are you, I'll come get you."

"No. You should go to the hospital with Mom, I'll find a ride or a tow truck." "Cass, the whole point of this is so that I don't have to see her on my own. I need you to be there."

"You need to be there if something happens. At least one of us does." I hung up. I sighed and shut my eyes. This was the sixth time Mom had to be taken to the hospital this month. She was in critical condition during her last two visits, even to the point where the doctors had no hope. I opened the door and stepped out of my car. The sun beat down on me, making me immediately regret rejecting Avery's offer. Taking out my phone, I searched for the nearest store. I was interrupted by the soft vibration of my phone, alerting me of my further problems. 10% left. I better figure this out fast. Shoving my phone back into its place in the back pocket of my jeans, I looked out towards the road, deserted and dry. After waiting for a few moments, I finally spotted a car

driving toward me. I frantically started waving my arm, hoping that the driver had an ounce of kindness and would stop for me. Fortunately, they did. The car slowed to a stop, “Hey, what’s going on?” The driver said as he rolled down the window.

“Hi, I’m so sorry, but I’ve got a flat tire, and I was hoping you know where I was?” “That’s unfortunate. Who knows where any of us are? Well, good luck!” He slowly began to roll his car forward, “I’m kidding! You’re in Palka.”

“Palka? That’s almost forty-five minutes away from the hospital,” I leaned back against my car.

I thanked the driver for his helpful, though annoying assistance. The heat from the car almost burned my hands. Sweat had begun to collect on my nose and forehead. The only way out of this was to call for a ride.

“Em?” I asked into my phone.

“Cass! Hi! What’s up?”

“Will you be able to give me a ride? My car has a flat tire and I’m stranded in Palka. Please tell me you’re free,”

“What? When did that happen? How?”

“Look, I’ll tell you all of this in your car.”

“I’m so sorry, but my car’s not with me right now! I’m volunteering at the shelter. I’ll ask if I can leave.” She said, guiltily.

“The one time I need you to save me and you’re not free.” I teased.

“I’m so sorry! Here, tell me where exactly you are.”

“I’m near—” My phone screen turned black.

I stared at the blinking charging sign. My face felt strained and my eyes began brimming with tears. My throat was parched, pleading for water whenever I swallowed. I allowed my feet to collapse under me, crouching on the cracked-up road. Sitting there for a while, I took in a few shaky breaths and looked up, the sun’s rays blinding my vision. I’m never getting to the hospital. At least, I wasn’t getting there anytime soon if I kept sitting there. My palms felt rough as I dusted the rocks from them and got to my feet. There was no other option but to walk and, if I was lucky enough, find a store or a gas station. As I took my first few steps, I thought about never seeing Mom alive again. My vision blurred again from unshed tears. Wiping my nose, I walked faster, forcing my thoughts away from Mom. I watched as my

Babu Thomas

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car became a speck in the distance, as I was walking toward nothing but pavement. Then, my ears heard it, the soft hum of a car's engine. I squinted up toward the end of the road, making out the silhouette of a car speeding toward me. The car was going too fast for me to begin my gesturing, but the car slowed down in front of me even so. It felt like minutes went by as I watched the window slowly roll down.

"Excuse me, ma'am, do you need help?"

"Oh, yes! Thank you so much for stopping! Could you possibly let me borrow your phone? I have a flat tire and have been stuck here."

"That's your car?" He pointed to the dot up ahead.

"Yeah," I nodded, sheepishly.

He went in search of his phone, "How long have you been standing out here?" "I don't know exactly how long, but a while."

"Here, it is. Are you going to call family or a tow truck? "

"Oh, a tow truck, and maybe a taxi,"

"I'm a taxi driver!" He showed me his identification. "I could drop you off where you need to go."

My eyes drifted to the top of the car, where a bright yellow board was labeled "TAXI". I couldn't believe my luck. I could finally go to the hospital. And see Avery, and if I'm staying hopeful, see Mom. My tense muscles relaxed and my breathing became easy. I shut

my eyes for a second, relief washing over me.

"Are you okay with that?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Thank you so much! You don't know how much this means to me! I need to be dropped off at Witham Hospital."

"Got it. Do you need to call anyone else?"

Avery. I reached out, took the phone, and dialed in the number. Listening to the soft ring, the tires of the car rolled forward and the engine roared. And my hope became louder within me, too.

First in Freedom & First in Flight

Zacharia Mathew

North Carolina residents should have noticed the “First in Flight” and “First in Freedom” license plates adorning the vehicles registered in our state. Here is the story behind those two sobriquets.

On April 12th, 1776, North Carolina became the first colony to declare total independence from Great Britain. Known as the Halifax Resolves, a name later given to the resolution adopted by the North Carolina Provincial Congress on April 12, 1776, the adoption of the resolution was the first official action in the American Colonies calling for independence from Great Britain during the American Revolution. The Halifax Resolves started the series of events resulting in the presentation to Congress of the United States Declaration of Independence less than three months later on July 4, 1776, thus earning the right to the “First in Freedom” license plate.

An even earlier disputed claim about the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence shows how eager North Carolinians were to chart their own destiny. Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence is a text published in 1819 and supposedly signed on May 20, 1775, in Charlotte, North Carolina, by a committee of citizens of Mecklenburg County, who declared independence from Great Britain after hearing about the battle of Lexington. If true, the Mecklenburg Declaration preceded the United States Declaration of Independence by more than a year.

The story behind the “First in Flight” license plate belongs to the start of the 20th century. After numerous failed attempts by different enthusiasts at flying an airplane, on Dec. 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made the first controlled, powered aircraft flights at Kitty Hawk on North Carolina’s Outer Banks. The flight lasted only 12 seconds, but it was a true flight, nevertheless. The Wright brothers would make three more flights that day, the longest covering 852 feet in 59 seconds Today, the Wright Flyer, the first airplane, is on display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC.

Solitude in Sunshine

The sun emerged, smiling and shining bright,
A new day dawning, chasing away the night.

Two parrots awoke, nestled in their nest,
Welcoming another day, melodies manifest.

Sisters they were, born and raised as one,
Together they flew, their bond second to none.

Dancing was their duty, music their lifeline,
Love intertwined in every breath, so divine.

Nothing could separate them, not even the wind,
Until fate intervened, bringing an unforeseen end.

A devil appeared, a dark vulture in the sky,
Hungry and relentless, seeking its prey high.

Unaware of the threat, the sisters sang and danced,
In joyful bliss, their melodies intertwined and enhanced.

Swift as an arrow, the vulture swooped down low,
Grasping one sister tightly, dealt a painful blow.

Silenced before her sibling, held in an iron fist,
The vulture triumphed, leaving the other in a mist.

Away the predator soared, content with his prize,
Leaving the remaining parrot alone to realize.

In shock and anguish, it wept in despair,
Lost and searching, hoping to find her sister somewhere.

Heart heavy with sorrow, mind clouded with fear,
Alone in a world of sunshine, her pain crystal clear.

Alone in a world of sunshine, she felt the ache,
Longing for her sister's presence, for her bond's sake.

Natarajan Ramakrishnan
1st Prize - Poem
(Adults)

Friends for Life

Deep in the heart of Georgia, there was a farm that any farmer would be proud to own. A field stretching miles and miles filled with lush, emerald-colored grass and grazing cows blanketed the dense, rich soil underneath. A huge patch of fresh, healthy vegetables patterned the area like jewels embedded in green velvet. Daisies and lavenders occasionally peeked out from the ground filling the air with a sweet-scented aroma. Horses happily galloped around an old barn with a shiny tractor parked beside it. Even the trees in the woods seemed to dance with the wind, and the cloud-painted sky seemed bluer at the farm. In the middle of it all, there was a cozy little house, perfect for a family of three. It was a scene right out of a children's picture book; everything was perfect.

"Hey Mom, can Katrina come over today?" ten-year-old Rhea asked. She had been sitting at home ever since summer break started two weeks ago, her only companions being the chickens, cows, and horses. She really needed to interact with another human being other than her mom or dad. "Isn't she on vacation? I remember her parents mentioning something about going to Jamaica," her mother said, while staring at the omelet she was preparing. "Oh yeah…I forgot," Rhea mumbled, annoyed at how all of her friends were out of town just when she needed them the most. Rhea let out a big sigh of boredom. She had done everything that she could possibly do at the farm: milk the cows, ride the ponies, collect chicken eggs, clean the barn...you name it. She even tried striking up a conversation

with her parents, which obviously did not work out because they were always so busy. Rhea was very understanding though. She knew that her father and mother worked in the hot sun all day long to take care of the farm and to provide their family with food and money. Because she had no siblings, Rhea couldn't play with or talk to anyone except her parents and the farm animals. Most kids looked forward to summer break, but Rhea did not; she never got the opportunity to go on vacation because her parents were always working to keep the high-maintenance farm in the best condition possible. So every summer, Rhea was left to fend for herself.

Rhea trudged out of her house and sat down on a grassy area near the woods towards the far end of the farm. The soft, green grass felt like silk against her skin. As she breathed in the cool air, momentarily forgetting about all of her worries, a movement caught her eye. She turned around and her face brightened up as she spotted a girl behind her. "Oh, hello there, Sasha! It's very nice to see you on such a beautiful day!" Rhea exclaimed with delight. She was so caught up thinking about how she couldn't see her school friends, she had forgotten all about Sasha. Sasha had always been there for her, especially when she was feeling lonely. "You do not know how happy I am to finally be able to have someone to talk to. I've been extremely lethargic for the past few weeks. Yup, that's right…new vocabulary word from school. Anyways, time has passed by so slowly, and I can't see any of my other friends because they're all on vacation! Believe it or not, you are the first person I've talked to other than my mom and dad this whole summer. How have you been?" Sasha stared right back at Rhea. Rhea looked at her in confusion, but then a knowing smile crept over her face. "Don't you worry, you don't have to answer me. I myself have some days where I feel like not saying anything at all." Rhea stared at Sasha thoughtfully. Suddenly her eyes lit up. "Wait! I have an idea! Why don't we explore the woods together? It'll be really fun. We can pretend that we are lost explor-

ers trying to find our way back to the farm. We can be adventurers!" Rhea stood up and started running towards her house. She yelled over her shoulder to Sasha, "Let me go get my backpack of safety supplies…I'll be right back…wait right here!" But Sasha came along with her anyways, just like any other good friend would do.

A few minutes later, Rhea and Sasha were creeping through the dark, mysterious woods, huddled close together. "I-I-It's c-cold in h-here!" Rhea said, shivering. She looked at Sasha and noticed that her friend was shivering too. "You look cold, Sasha. You can wear this jacket I brought for you." But Sasha didn't seem to want the jacket so Rhea shrugged and wore it herself. After all, she was cold too. They stumbled into a wide area where only a few rays of the sunlight illuminated the crooked circle they were standing in. Rhea looked up and noticed that the tall trees were blocking most of the sunlight from entering. "This is so cool!" she exclaimed. "It almost looks like a circle of doom, except it's not that bad." Rhea examined the dry grass she was standing on and noticed small bugs on it. "What are they?" she asked Sasha, curiously. Sasha also looked at the ground in wonder, but Rhea got no response from her. As if they could read each other's minds, Rhea and Sasha both ran to the middle of the circle and jumped as hard as they could on the ground. Millions of lights burst into the sky like a starry explosion, making the place glow in a gorgeous shade of gold. "Fireflies!" Rhea yelled at the top of her lungs, twirling around in delight. She closed eyes and imagined she was soaring through the sky, an indescribable feeling rushing through her body. Suddenly, her daydream was interrupted by a rustle in a bush.

Rhea and Sasha went on full alert. "Who's there?" Rhea questioned meekly. She waited for a few seconds. "I'm going to go see who's there," she whispered to Sasha. Slowly and cautiously, she advanced towards the bush. Her hand was inches away from the leaves when a bunny jumped out at her. Rhea screamed bloody murder but calmed down

when she realized it was a bunny. “Very funny,” she muttered. “Let’s keep walking,” she told Sasha. They walked for a few minutes in silence but stopped when they heard yet another rustle in a bush. “You have got to be kidding me. Again?” she complained to Sasha. Without waiting for an answer, she moved closer to the noise. “Come out of the bush, you stupid bunny!” she yelled. But to her surprise and horror, she saw two hungry, yellow eyes and pointy ears sticking out of the bush. A wolf.

Rhea and Sasha ran. They ran like it was the end of the world. Twigs were snapping at their faces, and sweat ran down their foreheads. They could hear the wolf right behind them. Run! Run faster! Was all Rhea could think. Her surroundings became a blurry mess as she ran, but she somehow managed to spot a huge branch blocking her path in the nick of time. “Watch out for the branch, Sasha!” she yelled hastily, as she elegantly leaped over the branch. Sasha leaped along with her, and they didn’t stop running until they got back to the farm. As soon as they were out of the forest, both girls collapsed on the grass, panting with relief. Once Rhea finally caught her breath, she said, “Well, that was one exciting adventure. Definitely the scariest one I’ve been on.” They silently laid down on the grass, processing what had happened. Eventually, Rhea’s eyes started to droop as she fell into a light, dreamless sleep.

Rhea was awakened by a loud clap of thunder

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and a flash of lightning. She opened her eyes and saw dark, puffy clouds looming over her. A storm, she thought. As a few drops of rain started to fall, Rhea heard her mother calling for her to come inside. “C’mon Sasha, you can come inside with me so you don’t get soaked in the rain,” she told her friend without looking back. Now the sky was almost pitch black. Just before it started pouring, Rhea made it inside her house. She breathed out a sigh of relief. But when she turned around to let Sasha in, her friend was gone.

The next day, Rhea ran outside after eating her breakfast to meet Sasha. As soon as she sat down in the field, she saw Sasha sitting down beside her. “How have you been? I missed you! I hope you stayed dry last night. When I turned around to let you inside yesterday, you were gone!” Rhea told Sasha. “Anyways, I was thinking about what we should do today. We can play games in the field, ride the horses, and annoy the chickens …” As she was telling Sasha about her fun ideas, Rhea’s dad walked up to them. “Hey Rhea, who’s this Sasha you’re talking to? I heard you talking to her yesterday too, but I don’t see anyone.” “What do you mean you can’t see her? She’s right here!” Rhea scoffed. Her dad looked around quizzically. “Where?” he said, evidently confused. A knowing smile crept onto Rhea’s face when she realized why her dad was so puzzled. Adults and their lack of imagination, she thought to herself. “Dad. Sasha’s my shadow!” Rhea said, patting the ground behind her where Sasha silently stood. “Since none of my friends are here right now, I decided that I should make some new ones to keep me company while they’re gone. After all, friendship can come in many different forms, can’t it?”

Hridya Ajith
3rd Prize - Story (Kids)

Memories

Sahya Binu
3rd Prize - Poem
(Kids)

As the days fly by and the nights grow dark,
I think about what we would say to one another.
And what all we would play,
and even all the little things like what we would tell
one another after having a bad day.
All these small things were what made our
memories great together.
Back then, our bond together was strong,
and we thought that nothing would ever break it.
Two tight ropes connected, attached to the other,
never leaving the other one's side, a solid
friendship between two that was never to be broken.

Colouring (Children)

1st prize

Gauri Menon

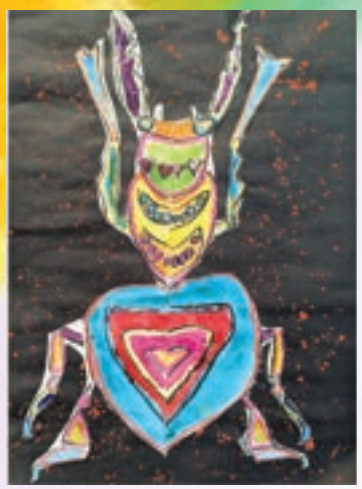
2nd prize

Annette Anish Jacob

3rd prize

Ganga Poduval

Angelina Joby Sebastian



Hridya Anish

Jason Jiljo Jose

Keshav Manuprathap

Kanav
Manuprathap

Rhea Paulson

Madhav Binu

Maya Sony Paulson

Neva Parathattal

Colouring Adults

Remya Bijesh
1st Prize

Smitha Chandran
2nd Prize

Anita Tisha

Smruthi Nambiar

EVEREST: A SYMPHONY OF ADVENTURE, RESILIENCE, AND BEAUTY

My Everest Base Camp Journey
Article By: Jaya Uthamanthil

Jaya Uthamanthil

Embarking on a journey to Everest Base Camp isn't just about the physical feat; it's a spiritual voyage where adventurers challenge their limitations in pursuit of an extraordinary human experience. For years, my friend Leena and I had been yearning to stand in the shadow of the majestic Mt. Everest, to not only observe its grandeur but also feel the pulse of its icy veins. This article recounts the incredible journey we undertook, where we learned more about ourselves than we ever imagined possible.

THE ROUTE TO EVEREST BASE CAMP

The route to Everest Base Camp is a journey that requires not only commitment and dedication but a razor focus of willpower and determination that one would need to get themselves through 6-8 hours of hiking each day. It takes 7 days to reach Everest Base Camp from Lukla Airport, one of the world's most dangerous airports, by trekking along the Dudh Kosi River to Namche Bazaar (3,867m), then climbing to Dingboche (4,260m), Lobuche (4,930m), Gorakshep (5,140m), and finally to Everest Base Camp (5,364m).

SETTING OFF

Our expedition began on May 4th, 2019, as our team arrived in Kathmandu, Nepal's vibrant capital. Our flight to Lukla, the gateway

to Everest region was the next day; however due to ongoing renovations at Kathmandu airport, we had to take a 3hours jeep ride to Ramechhap, a village surrounded by hollocks to catch our 15-seater Tara Air flight.

May 5th greeted us with inclement weather, and to our dismay, our Lukla flight was canceled. We were disappointed, but we understood the importance of safety in the Himalayas. Determined to conquer the challenges that lay ahead, we rescheduled our flight for the following day, hoping for clearer skies and a chance to set foot on the legendary Tensing and Hillary Airport at Lukla.

THE TREK BEGINS

Finally, on May 6th, the weather granted us a favorable window, and our Lukla flight took off from Ramechhap's tiny air strip. The flight itself was an adventure, with breathtaking views of the Himalayan peaks combined with a belly buster feel of roller coaster ride. Landing in the most dangerous airport in the world was an adrenaline-inducing experience, marking the official start of our trek.

After landing in Lukla, we embarked on our trek, making our way towards Phakding, a picturesque village nestled amidst the mountains. The trail offered stunning vistas, with the

Dudh Kosi River guiding our path. As we settled in Phakding, we marveled at the serene beauty surrounding us and prepared for the challenges ahead.

The following day, we continued our ascent, crossing suspension bridges, watching prayer flags dancing in the mountain breeze,

and turning prayer wheels along the challenging trails. Our destination was Namche Bazaar, a bustling Sherpa town and a major hub along the trekking route. The climb to Namche Bazaar had steep ascents, demanding both physical endurance and mental resilience. The next morning as we gazed out of our room window in Namche, the majestic view of the Kongde Ri peak greeted our eyes. Bathed in golden sunlight, the snow-capped peak stood tall and proud against the deep blue sky. The tranquil beauty of Kongde Ri lifted our spirits.

In the following days, we trekked through the beautiful Khumjung Valley. As we walked through the village, we met kids returning home from Edmund Hillary School. We stayed the night at Kyangjuma lodge surrounded by vibrant rhododendrons. As we climbed higher, the panoramic views unfolded, revealing the majestic peaks of Ama Dablam, Thamserku, Island peak, Makalu, Khumbila and Lhotse. And along the way the Tengboche monastery greeted us with tranquility, stillness and a sense of spiritual presence. The next morning as we stepped out of the teahouse in Debuche, the sunbathed mountain peaks had a breathtaking spectacle of fiery glow that filled the air with a sense of awe and wonder.

As we ventured further into the higher altitudes, the weather became colder and oxygen scarcer. We took our second acclimatization break at Dingboche, where we met climbers who had come to summit Ama Dablam.

MORE ACCLIMATIZATION

The climb was getting tougher after Dingboche, due to the extreme environment we were in, and the thin air made the breathing a challenging task. However, with proper acclimatization and a slow and steady pace, we managed to adapt and preserve. On the way to Lobuche, the trail took us through Thukla Pass Everest Climbers' memorial. There were dozens of memorials of adventurous climbers, out of which Scott Fischer's memorial caught our attention. As we visited Fischer's memorial, we experienced a profound sense of reverence and admiration. Scott Fischer, a renowned mountaineer, lost his life during the ill-fated 1996 Everest expedition.

We were excited to reach Lobuche as our accommodation was at Pyramid, which is an international mountain research center, and Phurba, our Sherpa had told us we would be getting heated rooms. But to our dismay, the LPG distribution helicopter did not arrive that day and we had to curl up into our insulated sleeping bags as usual. As we were getting closer to the rocky plateau of Gorekshep, the absence of even a minute form of vegetation

presented an uninhabitable look. We noticed the surrounding peaks, including the iconic Mount Everest, standing tall behind Lohtse. By lunchtime we reached Gorekshep, the final lodging point before reaching Everest Base Camp.

THE FINAL PUSH UPWARD

We started our final stretch in the afternoon. As we made our way through the rugged terrain, snowflakes gently started falling around us, creating a serene atmosphere. On the way Phurba showed us a captivating lakebed where the lake vanished during the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Every step required careful footing, as the path was rocky, and visibility was limited. The biting wind cut through our layers of clothing; the cold air felt like piercing our lungs. We passed through icy trails, crossing frozen streams and ascending rocky slopes. Despite bone-chilling cold, the journey was filled with sense of accomplishment and anticipation.

AT THE EVEREST BASE CAMP

As we reached Everest Base Camp, standing in the shadow of the mighty Everest, we couldn't help but marvel at what we had achieved. We took a moment to absorb the grandeur of our surroundings. The sheer majesty of the Himalayas, combined ith the winter wonderland, created a captivating and humbling experience that will forever be etched in our memory. Standing at Everest Base Camp, surrounded by the majestic grandeur of the Himalayas, I was overwhelmed by a surge of emotions. The enormity of our accomplishment washed over me, as the rugged landscape and the icy winds whispered tales of countless adventurers who had walked this path before us. Every ache, every labored breath, and every hard-earned step had led us to this moment. As I gazed at the mighty Everest, a titan in its icy armor, I felt humbled and grateful. This journey had transformed me, fostering resilience, humility, and a profound appreciation for life's simple joys. Standing there, in awe of nature's limitless power, I realized that this unforgettable experience would forever serve as a beacon of human endurance and our boundless potential.

The Everest Base Camp trek is a journey that tests the limits of human endurance and rewards adventurers with awe-inspiring natural beauty. Despite facing obstacles like flight cancellations, harsh weather, and the challenges of high altitude, our team pushed forward, fueled by determination and a passion for adventure. As we reflected on our journey, gratitude welled up within us. We were grateful for our bodies and the fitness that allowed us to undertake such a demanding adventure. Our legs became our unsung heroes, tireless-

ly carrying us over rugged terrain and steep ascents.

THE DESCENT

The descent down the mountain was swift since breathing was easy. The walk took 10 days in total, with an average of eight hours of trekking every day. We were all looking forward to returning to Lukla and communicating with our families, as well as cleaning our hair. I enjoyed glancing around on the way down; the scenery was more beautiful now. As you travel down the same path you took up, you wonder how you managed to get up some parts. It seemed strange that I climbed up some parts of the trail on the way up, but pure motivation made it feasible at the time. The final day of the trek is primarily uphill to Lukla. We arrived at our final lodge for one more night before flying back to Kathmandu the next morning.

PHURBA SHERPA – OUR GUIDE

This article would be incomplete without a paragraph about Phurba Sherpa, our guide. Phurba played an incredibly important and indispensable role in making our trek to the Everest Base Camp both successful and memorable.

His expertise, care, and attentiveness made all the difference throughout our journey. Phurba's extensive knowledge of the region ensured our safety and guided us effectively.

His outstanding patience and skill to handle difficult situations made us feel secure and confident every step of the way. Not only did he take care of our safety, but also attended to our physical well-being. Phurba went above and beyond to ensure our comfort in the challenging conditions of the mountains. In addition to Phurba's exceptional support, the assistant Sherpas and porters who accompanied us were instrumental in making our trek a success.

The Everest Base Camp trek wasn't just an adventure, but a humbling lesson in endurance, resilience, and the aweinspiring power of nature. Despite the flight cancellations, the harsh weather, and the highaltitude challenges, we pushed forward, our spirits fueled by determination and thirst for discovery. Standing on the cusp of the world, we learned the true power of the human spirit, and for that, we will always be grateful. This journey left us not just with aching limbs but with hearts brimming with a newfound respect for nature and our bodies that bravely carried us through.

Malayali

In the land of the coconut tree,
Where the Western Ghats meet the sea,
Lies a culture as old as time,
A tradition that's truly divine.

Malayali culture,
so rich and diverse,
something we should cherish,
and never let it disperse.

From the traditional attire,
to the mouthwatering cuisine,
Malayali culture is unique,
and deserves to be seen.

Let's celebrate Onam,
and cherish our folklore,
let's pass on our traditions,
and keep our culture galore.

Malayali culture is vibrant,
and we should take pride,
for it is our identity,
and cannot be denied.

For in the revival of Malayali culture,
Lies the key to our identity and heritage,
A cultural awakening that will inspire us,
To be the best that we can be

Abel Benny

THE CASE OF THE MISSING AUTHOR

Gauri Prasoon

Hi, my name is Lilac Aswal! I don't know why or when I got here but I do know how.

Let me start from the beginning. The TV was on the News Channel, and I was eating cereal, a normal summer morning. "The last day of school is today!" I said excitedly. My family was so tired of hearing me say that and to be honest with you, I was too. I finished my cereal and slipped on my shoes. As I walked out the door and into the car. I adjusted my dress and purse. I had a purse instead of my bag because there was absolutely no class today, just movies and things like that. My dad soon got in the car along with my siblings Harper, BillyMichael and Hannah. That's how "it" started. "It" being this totally crazy and weird day! Or should I say, week? So, just as my dad was going out the driveway. As if they planned it, my siblings and my dad said at the same time," I forgot something!" And they all rushed out of the car which I thought was weird.

Since I had a bit of time, I opened my book, "The Case of Leah Carson".

It was very interesting and about the author of the book who went missing.

"I can't believe that Leah wrote this book even if it didn't happen!" Said Lilac.

I went to the first page and frowned. There was nothing there! I flipped through every single page but there wasn't even a single letter! "Huh! Something is a bit weird here.

Well, I'll look at it later, right now we must go to school!" I said to myself. We all got to school on time and were going to our classes. When it was lunch, I took my blank book with me. I went to my regular lunch table and sat down. I was opening it and just then, my friend Viola sat next to me. "Hey Lilac, do you mind if I sit with you?" Said Viola. I sighed then said sure. She must have known something was wrong because just then she turned to me and asked, "What's wrong Lilac?" She spoke. "It's this book, I don't understand it. It says absolutely nothing!" I nearly yelled. Almost half the cafeteria turned to look at us. Viola gave me very good advice, "Calm your mind, may-

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be if you write in it something will happen?" That night at home I opened the book, I started writing and writing, I was going fast! In 20 minutes, I filled up ten pages. I slowly closed the book and went to bed. The next morning, I was packing my stuff. I grabbed my book and headed out. When we got to school, Viola and my other friend Kimberly were waiting outside with a bag. As I got closer, I realized it was for me. I opened it and gasped. Inside was a very carefully wrapped gift. I ripped through the wrapping paper and saw the new Crystal Chloe statue. It was from the Official Crystal Class Set! The best movie set ever! I put it carefully in my bag and headed off to class. When we had a free period for reading, I opened my book. But before I could there was Viola. Again. I was getting tired of not having time for the book anymore. I pulled Viola and Kimberly into a corner and told them everything. We agreed we would open the book at recess. Recess came and the three of us hid near the lake. We opened the book and saw what I had written. Almost nothing had changed. Almost. Viola flipped to the first page, and it said in bold letters, Written By: Lilac Aswal. I freaked out at that! It took five minutes, a pack of gummies and several cherries to calm me down. We looked at it for the entire recess for something that might help us. No luck. Then at the last-minute Kimberly found a small button on the back and pressed it. To this day it was the worst and best mistake of our lives. We woke up cautiously and on a huge board it said, "Cheer City" As we were starved from everything, we looked around the town for some food. I know in a crisis like this we should be focused but we were hungry. We saw a place called "Fruits and Berries" and decided to eat there but just as we arrived a guard stopped us and said, "Trivia Question: What is the best town in the world?" "Uh, Paris?" Said Viola. The guard replied, "You are not from Cheer City, Trespasser." Well, we got kicked out and woke up again in the nurse's office. We were asleep for 15 minutes! That felt like 3 hours though. "Look! It's Lilac Aswal! The famous writer!" I was speechless. I hadn't even written a book, let alone become famous because of it! I was looking for who said that and figured out it was Kat, the most popular girl in the school. She was looking at me. I took one look at her and said the wisest thing I could say right now. "Huh?" She said I made a story called Untitled's Story. A girl who had no name and was called Untitled. It was about her life. I just wrote a story I made as a kid. Kimberly and Viola came to my house that night and we went back to Cheer City. Turns out that the answer to every question was Cheer City. "What is the best color?" Cheer City. Where is the best place on Earth? Cheer City. What is my

name? CHEER CITY! Anyways, we explored for some time and returned home with none of our parents knowing. We kept exploring every day straight for 3 weeks. Turns out, it was a cool place. We had so much fun together. Finally, it was a humid day in March when we decided to go back to Cheer City. We hadn't been there for a month, so we went back. Before it was an amazing and joyful place but, as soon as we got there everyone was screaming. They said "Untitled's Missing! Untitled's Missing!" We were shocked. How could this happen? I never even touched the book! So, we returned and discovered that my book was very cursed. It wouldn't burn, break or go away. Then we finally realized it. Our town was exactly like Cheer City. The same people. The same stores. The same landscape. To destroy the book is to destroy us and this town. First, we wanted to put this to good use. But then, we realized, whose name is Untitled? The next day before class started, I ran to Viola. "Guess what I figured out Vi?" Viola had a confused look on her face. "What is it?" She spoke. "The only way to fix this world, this book is by-'' The bell suddenly rang. "Sorry Lilac, I have to get to class." After class, I started explaining to Viola and Kimberly how to fix it. "You're right! That's what we should do!" Said Kimberly. "Kim, we must tell someone else, that's the only way that we could access the documents!" Viola sighed and started walking down the hall. "Where are you going?" Said Kimberly. "The librarian, she knows everyone in this town." We rushed down to the school library. "Running is very tiring!" Viola said. "Hello Mrs. Ryder! Do you know anyone in this town named uh… Untitled…?" Mrs. Ryder started moving her lips but then closed her mouth. "Yes, yes, I do. Now, err… why?" Viola replied slowly. "So basically, Lilac had this book but when she opened it all the pages were blank. So, she figured out that it was aum... portal. And found this place called Cheer City. Long story short, this person named Untitled is missing in the story and the book is connected to us. Or rather everyone in this town. And we need to find Untitled! That's the only way we can break this curse!

Mrs. Ryder carefully handed a slip of paper that said "738 Eastern Sea Dr." We clutched the paper in our hand and ran out of the school. Kimberly yelled out, "If my calculations are correct, it will take us around 2 minutes to get there!" "Kimmy, your calculations are NOT your phone's calculations." Violet replied. As we rang the doorbell, a little girl with ginger hair opened the door. "Yes?" She whispered. I boldly said, "Hello Untitled." She softly whispered, "Please take me home where I belong." I picked her up and took her to her mother, Mrs. Ryder. "Ah yes, you've found the author of this book. Girls, you are one of the most amazing detectives I've ever seen. Welcome to Mission Sparkle." But seriously, who names their kid Untitled?

മലയാളം കളരി

" മറ്റുള്ള ഭാഷകൾ കേവലം ധാത്രിമാർ
മർത്ത്യന്നു പെറ്റമ്മ തൻ ഭാഷതാൻ"
-മഹാകവി വള്ളത്തോൾ നാരായണമേനോൻ

മലയാള ഭാഷതൻ മാധുര്യം നമ്മുടെ വരും തലമുറയ്ക്ക് പകർന്നു കൊടുക്കാൻ GCKA നടത്തുന്ന എളിയ ഒരുദ്യമമാണ് മലയാളം കളരി. കഴിഞ്ഞ രണ്ടു പതിറ്റാണ്ടുകളിലേറെയായി GCKA മലയാളം കളരി നടത്തിവരുന്നു.

അൻപതോളം കുട്ടികളാണ് ഇപ്പോൾ മലയാളം കളരിയിൽ ഭാഷ അഭ്യസിക്കുന്നത്. ഇന്നത്തെ രീതിയിൽ കളരി വളർന്നു വന്നതിന്റെ പിന്നിൽ കളരി അദ്ധ്യാപകരുടെ അർപ്പണബോധവും സേവന മനോഭാവവുമാണ്. അദ്ധ്യാപകരും കുട്ടികളും അവരുടെ രക്ഷിതാക്കളും ചേർന്ന ഒരു കൂട്ടായ്മയാണ് മലയാളം കളരി. ആ കൂട്ടായ്മയുടെ ശക്തിയാണ് കളരിയുടെ വിജയം.

നമ്മുടെ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് അവരുടെ അപ്പൂപ്പനോടും അമ്മൂമ്മയോടും മറ്റു ബന്ധുക്കളോടും സംസാരിക്കുവാനും മലയാളം പാട്ടുകളും സിനിമകളും ആസ്വദിക്കുവാനും, സർവ്വോപരി മാതൃഭാഷയെ അറിയാനും കളരിവഹിക്കുന്ന പങ്ക് ചെറുതല്ല.

അക്ഷരമധുരം നമ്മുടെ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് പകർന്ന് കൊടുക്കാനായി തങ്ങളുടെ തിരക്കുകളും സമ്മർദ്ദങ്ങളും മാറ്റിവെച്ച് പ്രതിഫലമോ അംഗീകാരങ്ങളോ ആഗ്രഹിക്കാതെ കളരി അദ്ധ്യാപകർ ചെയ്യുന്ന നിസ്വാർത്ഥ സേവനം പ്രശംസനാതീതമാണ്.

അലീജ അനൂപ്, ബിജുനായർ, ദേവീ രത്നശങ്കർ, ധന്യഅരുൺകൂട്ടി, ദിനേഷ് കുറുപ്പ്, ജ്യോതി വേണു, സുനിത വിനു, സുരേഷ് ബാബു എന്നിവരായിരുന്നു ഈ വർഷത്തെ മലയാളം കളരി അദ്ധ്യാപകർ.

ഈ ഒരു വർഷംകൂടി കടന്നു

പോകുമ്പോൾ, കളരി പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കുകയും സഹകരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്ത എല്ലാവരോടും GCKA നന്ദി പറയുന്നു. കഴിഞ്ഞ കുറേ വർഷങ്ങളായി കളരിക്ക് വേണ്ട സ്ഥല സൗകര്യം തന്ന് കളരിയുടെ മേൽവിലാസമായി മാറിയ ലൂർദ് ചർച്ചിനോടും നന്ദി അറിയിക്കുന്നു.

വരുംവർഷങ്ങളിൽ കൂടുതൽ കൂടുതൽ കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾക്ക് മാതൃഭാഷയുടെ സ്നേഹം പകരാൻ മലയാളം കളരിക്ക് സാധിക്കട്ടെ എന്നാശംസിക്കുന്നു.

Jaya Uthamanthil

Kalari Teachers

Kalari Teachers

Allija Anoop

Biju Nair

Devi Retnasankar

Dhanya Arun Kutty

Dinesh Kurup

Jyothi Venu

Sunitha Vinu

Suresh Babu

Kalari Students

Kalari Students

Travel: A Tool for Self-Enhancement

Jacquelin Jose

Traveling is an incredibly rewarding experience as it reduces stress, helps one acquire new knowledge, and is perfect for adding excitement to our mundane lives!

Reducing stress and thereby improving one's well-being is one of the fundamental benefits of traveling. It can improve your mental health by helping you feel calm and relaxed. Taking time from work or school to see new places releases the stress you've been holding onto. As a result, this can prevent an individual from getting too caught up in their work life by making space for time to unwind. In addition, physical activities are an excellent opportunity to improve our physical and mental well-being. Traveling consists of numerous activities that can get one moving. These activities include hiking, canoeing, walking around to explore new cities, and learning new things!

I visited the Smithsonian National Zoo Park which is located in Washington DC. At this zoo, there are a plethora of opportunities that can help one engage in physical activity. What's great about this attraction is that you will be able to see all sorts of native and foreign animals while walking. Washington DC also has monuments, museums, and historic buildings which can serve as a learning experience for us. Overall, it was a notable trip! A city famously known for walking to be the most common source of transportation, New York City, is an amazing tourist estination. In a typical year, nearly 360,000 pedestrians enter the heart of Times Square each day! Times Square is New York's most famous landmark and the liveliest area in the city. With its glitzy billboards, unique characters, iconic landmarks, and award-winning entertainment, Times Square is surely a site worth visiting.

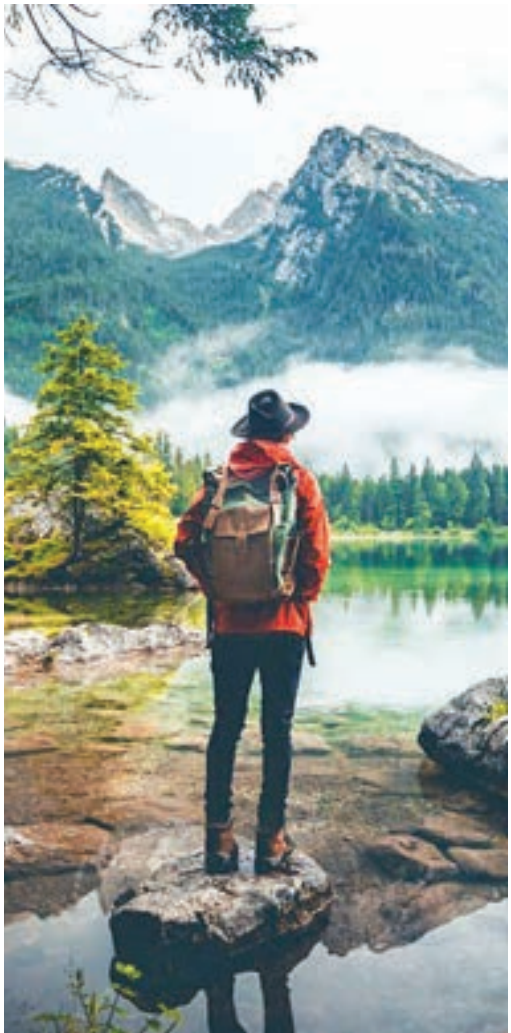
Another advantage of travel is the surplus amount of knowledge and new skills it offers. Traveling can make you knowledgeable in many ways. It can broaden your perspective and make you open-minded in thought. It expands your outlook on life and serves as an educational device when cooking a traditional

dish or even learning new languages. When we travel, we are exposed to other cultures, whether it be another civilization or just the way people do things in another part of our own country. This exposure can help us learn about other people and their customs.

Every other year, my family and I visit India. Kerala is famous, especially for its ecotourism initiatives and beautiful backwaters. A few popular tourist attractions include Alappuzha Beach, Kovalam Beach, Kumarakom, Ponmudi Hill Station, and Punnamada Lake. Both Kerala and North Carolina are blessed with beautiful mountains and beaches. Those who visit India can learn much regarding the different styles of cooking as the country is renowned for its spices. One of the many things I learned on my most recent trip was the process by which nutmeg starts on a farm and is soon used for medicinal and cooking purposes. We had the opportunity to see this process firsthand. In summary, before planting the nutmeg, the land must be prepared. This preparation can be done by clearing the land and plowing. The conditions favorable to planting nutmeg include well-drained soil, spacing of 6 meters between trees, proper fertilization, and pest control. The tree will soon produce fruits that will split open, revealing the seed. These can be picked by hand and then sun-dried, graded, sorted, and packaged. Another interesting experience was watching the gathering and processing of the well-known spice, turmeric. The turmeric must be washed, sliced, and left to dry in the sun. After this, it is ground into fine powder which can be used in cooking and has a variety of medicinal values.

Another location that was beneficial in acquiring more knowledge was London, the capital of the nited Kingdom. When I visited London in 2018, the first thing I noticed was the detailed historic sites which conveyed a sophisticated look. Amongst the many special features of London, my favorites were the Beckingham Palace, London Eye, and the iconic London Bridge! When I was in London, I went on a boat ride which was a great way of viewing the entire beauty of London. At a lavender farm in suburban London, I was able to get a first-hand experience of the extraction of lavender oil from the plant by steam distillation. Lavender oil is widely used in aromatherapy, health, and beauty products. From the famous dish of 'fish and chips' to the history behind each and every building, visiting London was certainly an educational experience.

Alongside reducing stress and gaining knowledge, traveling also provides one with the chance to enjoy themselves. Sometimes, all we need is a vacation. Taking a break from heavy workloads is influential in creating time and space for self-care. Self-care is significant because it enhances our well-being by keeping us connected to ourselves and what matters most to us. It supports overall well-being and can help maintain self-confidence and self-esteem. Self-care makes us more aware of our personal needs and allows us to be resilient. It can help you feel well-rested and energized. As a result, when you return to our busy schedules, you will feel a sense of readiness as you enter the workplace with a new and positive mindset. On the other hand, refusing to set aside time for personal enjoyment will cause a dissenting mentality and tiredness.



The Shapeshifter

Hrithik Ajith

As I walked down the road after school, I heard a voice behind me say, “Hey! Wait up!” I turned around and spotted my best friend, Adam, running to catch up to me. Adam and I have been friends since kindergarten. My heart soared to have my best friend with me again. But before he reached me, someone stepped in his way. It was Glen, the biggest bully in my school. He was a big guy and nobody messed with him. Adam and I knew what to do right away. We ran. I ran hard, breathing roughly as my legs strained themselves to their limits. As for Adam, he was practically an Olympic runner. He zipped through the streets and got way ahead of me. After a few minutes of tension and sweat, we managed to pull away from Glen. It was already late, so we thought of getting something to eat before we started walking home. We had just enough change rattling around in our pockets to grab a couple chicken sandwiches from McDonalds which we gobbled up as we headed home. As we teased each other along the way, I heard the leaves behind us rustle.

We turned around and saw an old man walking towards us. He held a blue vial in his hand which had a weird sloshing liquid inside. He had a face so scary that any person would cower against it. My first instinct was to run but it felt as though my legs were made out of bricks. Adam couldn’t move either. I shivered and stuttered, “W-who are y-you?” He didn’t answer, but he just kept coming forward. When he was so close that I could smell his ghostly breath, he forced the liquid in my mouth which made me drowsy. The last thing I heard before I fainted was the man saying in a raspy voice, “I have now given you the ability to harness the power of shapeshifting.”

I opened and the first thing I saw was my mom, fussing over me like I was two years old. I was back home! My dad was asking Adam what had happened. Adam looked really scared. When he saw me awake, his eyes lit up like he was seeing his dreams come true. “Dude, your back! I thought you were dead!” he cried. He ran to me and wrapped me in a bear hug. My mom and dad kept asking me questions but I just wanted to rest. As I laid down on my bed, I asked Adam what had happened. He retold the event and my memory came flooding back. The last thing that came to my mind was the shadow saying, “I have now given you the ability to harness the power of shapeshifting.” I dismissed that thought from my head as I went to sleep. I had horrid nightmares. I saw myself falling from a tall mountain, being hunted by a lion, and drowning in a megalodon’s mouth, and in every place, a scary man who was almost see-through was there. In the end, the man stood right in front of me and said, “You have a power no one else has. But remember, I will take it from you.” Then he said, “I will take the power of shapeshifting.”

I woke up in a pool of sweat. How could this be happening? Who was that man? I decided not to think about it. I walked downstairs, got some water, and played minecraft to reduce my stress. Suddenly, as I was mining coal in the game, something popped up that made my heart stop. It was an ad that said, “Breaking news! Scientists find out that there is a potion that can make you shapeshift but now it’s stolen! Nobody has seen it since!” My head felt like it was spinning around and around. That old man was telling the truth. I am a shapeshifter now.

First, I thought I should try it out so I could see if it was true or I was just not thinking straight. I thought about turning into a tiger and, as I wished, nothing happened. I was so relieved until something happened that I could not explain. My body got shorter, my skin turned striped with orange and black fur, my hands turned into another pair of legs, and my face turned into a tiger’s. It worked. I had just turned into a tiger! But then, my sister walked into the room. As quick as lightning, I turned back into a human and tried to look as normal as possible though inside, I was scared to death. My sister looked at me, confused. “I thought I saw a tiger or something here but it must have been my imagination, right?” she said suspiciously. I mustered my best smile and said, “Yeah, probably.” She looked at me like I was crazy and went away. I sat down, relieved, but that didn’t stay long. I just remember that I was the only one that had this power. That means that if anybody found out, I would never have peace. Nobody could know about this.

That night, I walked up to my room and saw a horrible sight. A creepy man was standing at the end of my bed, smiling viciously. I blinked a few times, thinking all of this was a dream but it wasn’t. He was holding a weird

cone thing that I wanted nothing to do with. In a sharp and scared tone, I asked him, “What do you want?” He snarled and said, “I want your shapeshifting. “ It had been less than a day and people were already trying to steal my powers! But how did he know? “What does that cone thing do? “ I asked in a voice full of fear. “It takes your power. “He then pointed the cone at me and released the trigger. I don’t clearly know what happened next, but I know I didn’t stick around. The blast boomed as I raced out of my house, not ever looking back. I ran for what seemed like hours and stopped when I was sure nobody was following me. But then, I took in my surroundings and saw that I was lost.

I walked around a few times, screaming. When I didn’t get anywhere, I started thinking of turning into a cat or dog to sniff my way out but shot down that idea because I knew that it would take too much energy. I thought about camping here until morning and went to find some materials for a tent. I had been in a survival camp before so I knew how to build one. After I built it, I went to find some food but I couldn’t. I sighed and then gathered my supplies and built a small cozy tent to sleep in with a fire to keep me warm. That night, I dreamed about being in my house, safe from the clutches of the scary man. I woke up, wishing my dream had come true but it had not. I was still hungry and lost in a never ending forest.

The next day, I went on a mission to find my house and to get some food so I won’t starve. I had no sense of direction, so I went where my instincts told me to go. After a few hours of searching, I tripped on a hard metal thing and fell. I got up, shook off the leaves that were on me, and started uncovering the interesting object. As I dug out the whole thing, I gasped in surprise. The metal thing was a 6 foot tall robot! Then I saw a bright neon button which had “On” written on it. Without thinking, I clicked the button and the robot got up and stared down at me.

I thought I was going to die until the robot said, “Hello! My name’s Rex.” I looked at him and said, “What in the world are you? Why are you here?”

“I am an AI intelligent bot. My type is A123THI4598P. I have no clue how I got here,” he said cheerfully.

I was getting really uncomfortable so I started to creep away when he said, “I am also programmed to help the person who helped me, so now you’re stuck with me.” I had no choice but to let him come with me. I

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told him what was happening and he listened dutifully. We were so engrossed in our conversation that we didn't notice the big emerald green pythons coming up to us. When I saw them, it was too late. One python wrapped around Rex and the second one came right at me! I dove away just in time. Both pythons had emerald green scales, sapphire blue patterns, and ruby red eyes. They would have been beautiful if they were not trying to hurt us.

I was thinking of shapeshifting, but I didn´t know if I had enough energy. But, when the python got ready to bite me, I knew I had to do it to keep me alive.

I mustered as much energy as I could and then I turned into the animal pythons fear the most. I turned into a lion. I roar at the snakes, rattling their bones. The snakes had two choices: to be eaten or to slither away, and they chose the second choice. To slither away in fear.

After the pythons were gone, I turned back into a human and collapsed, exhausted. Rex came up to me, still shivering from that experience.

I looked at him and said in an angry tone, "Thanks for all that help."

I don't think he knew sarcasm because he said, "Thanks!"

I sighed, got up, and said, "Why don't we get something to eat. I'm hungry."

"I have food right here," he said and he pulled ten bolts out of his metal shoe.

I cringed away, disgusted. Then I went to get some edible food. In survival camp, I had also learned how to find food in the wilderness so I was plucking all the good, non-poisonous berries. I whistled a cheerful tune to keep my spirits up while I walked back to Rex with my big stash of berries.

When I got to the spot Rex was waiting for me, he was nowhere to be found. I called for him but got no answer at first. But then, I heard a faint robotic scream from far away, followed by a bunch of growls and howls. Then it dawned on me. Rex had been taken by a pack of wolves.

I ran as fast as I could toward the sounds. After a few minutes, I had to slow down to catch my breath beside a river. Then, the bushes behind me rustled. I quickly turned around and saw the scary man pointing the cone at me. I ran the other way to get away from him but then I stopped in my tracks. There, standing in front of me, was a pack of wolves guarding their prize, which in this case was Rex.

I knew I had to save Rex, so I turned into a gorilla, (which was the first animal I thought of), and ran into the pack of wolves to get my friend. I pushed all of them away, and picked up Rex, but then I felt a searing pain in my right leg. I looked down and saw a wolf had sunk his teeth into my leg. I vigorously shook him off and tried to run away, but my hurt leg was slowing me down. I then noticed that I had forgotten about the man with the cone and that he had pulled the trigger. I did the only thing I could think of. I jumped in the river. As me and Rex Fell into the cold water, I thought to myself, "This adventure is not over yet. "

Karma

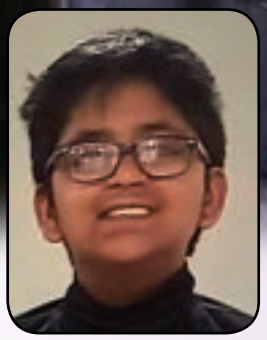
Hridya Ajith

Maybe if you'd thought before you'd said those words
Sharp as knives cutting through the air
Aimed at my soul with razor-like stealth
Meant to bruise and haunt me for eternity
You wouldn't have ended up in despair

Maybe if you'd known that it was a dangerous game
You were mindlessly playing with your own life
And that the cacophony of your cackle would end in catastrophe
You wouldn't have said what you said or did what you did
Yet here you are in the deep, dark pits of strife

Maybe if you'd felt even the slightest bit of doubt
Before you mercilessly slashed up all my hopes and dreams
Instantly burning them to ashes at your own feet
Only to have yourself be buried in those same ashes
Your unsuspecting smirk replaced with silent screams

Maybe if you'd believed in the sacred saying
That whatever you do comes back to you
You might have spoken differently
But you've already said your words
Now karma has spoken too



Abhay Nair

Becoming King Arthur

Arthur walked into his throne room as the newly coronated king of Castonia. He had only turned 19 a few months ago when his father unexpectedly passed away, leaving him as the new king. Arthur was always passionate about painting. He was studying art in school when he learned that he was the next ruler. Arthur was very nervous about being king. He was scared and had no idea how to rule or what was expected of him. As Arthur entered the room he noticed his assistant, John waiting for him.

"Hello John, good morning," said Arthur.

John replied, "Good morning king, I bear unfortunate news."

"What would that be?" Arthur wondered.

"I have learned that our neighbor Lucinia is planning to invade us," John continued.

Lucinia was one of the neighboring kingdoms that had not so cordial relations with Castonia. The Emperor of Lucinia was Marcus. Marcus was very courageous and led his mighty army to many victories. But he was also very crooked. Emperor Marcus was striving to build an empire and had already invaded numerous kingdoms. In addition to Marcus's might, he used various strategies of attack that most nations could not counter.

Arthur's father, Jerald, was a gallant fighter and a great ruler. Under his rule, Castonia prospered. King Jerald worked from the bottom up developing every part of the country to make it run like a well-oiled machine. King Jerald used the might of his nation to protect itself and others from lucinia. He ensured his army was always trained and instilled his tactics into the minds of his soldiers. King Jerald also had good relations with neighboring nations, helping to improve and strengthen themselves and benefit their allies.

Castonia was greatly weakened after the fall of King Jerald. Castonia started to lose many of its allies as they were no longer able to support others. Marcus realized Castonia was unstable and that now would be the perfect time to invade them. Marcus already knew that the current king was weak and unprepared for an attack. He also realized that since they had

just recently lost a king, they would still be mourning and unable to fight back properly.

Arthur already knew from John that Lucinia was planning to attack but he didn't know when they would be coming. This changed when one of Castonia's spies in Lucinia sent word that troops were progressing toward the Castonian border. Arthur was terrified, he didn't know how to fight a war and didn't know any tactics. He immediately reached out to Lewis, king of Whayla to help him fight the war. King Lewis supported Castonia and sent supplies, troops, and other equipment. King Lewis also mentored Arthur on how to become a better military leader. King Arthur and Lewis marched their troops toward the border to stop Lucinia. Emperor Marcus was ready and waiting for King Arthur's army to arrive.

Once the two sides began fighting, it was obvious that Emperor Marcus's Lucinia was much more powerful than Castonia. Arthur turned around to King Lewis and exclaimed "What do we do? We're being beaten."

"We'll need a new strategy and a larger army," replied King Lewis.

The next day more soldiers arrived from Whayla to aid in the war. In addition, King Lewis took more of a leadership role to show Arthur the ropes. King Lewis mentored Arthur into becoming more courageous and taking calculated risks. As the battles progressed, Arthur was losing land to Emperor Marcus. However, Arthur was now learning more tactics and becoming more fearless.

Arthur was continuing to progress with the aid of his mentor. One day when the two sides were about to begin fighting.

King Lewis said, "Arthur, I think you have progressed greatly since the beginning of this war. I also think it's time for you to begin leading your army."

Arthur quickly replied, "Are you sure? It still feels like I have a lot to learn."

"There is still a lot for you to learn but it would improve your learning if you lead the army and just use me for help. Remember, I have taught you the strategies you will learn the rest along the way," said King Lewis.

Arthur accepted what King Lewis said and confidently took command of the army. The new approaches he learned helped Arthur control his land. King Arthur started to attack more instead of being so defensive. Arthur's new offensive methods helped him slowly force Emperor Marcus away from his kingdom.

He also no longer feared losing the war or how people would judge him. Arthur learned the lesson that he first needed to defeat the demons inside before he could defeat the enemies outside. He truly felt like the King. As King Arthur returned to his palace the area was surrounded by Castonians who now accepted him as their new king.

Youth BOD Report

On behalf of everyone on the GCKA youth board 2022-2023, I would like to thank everyone for their unwavering support. Our next generation were partners and leaders in our efforts – volunteering and organizing cultural programs. This year's Youth BOD was led by Zacharia Mathew, Jaya Uthamanthil and Manoj Chonat and our team consisted of Celeste Ann Samuel, Irene Maria Raju, Angelina Manoj, Krishna Menon, Lynell Mary Franklin, Meenakshi Menon, Neha Maria Santy Sian Elizabeth Jose and Yadunand Sreelesh.

Adopt-a-highway

We had two Adopt-a-highways last year, the first in November 2022 and the next in May 2023, that allowed for our youth volunteers and adult chaperones to keep our community clean and put the values of hard work and volunteerism to good use. We spent much time socializing and picking up trash from the highway in a safe and responsible manner. We divided into groups and sorted the trash so it can be disposed of responsibly. By holding such volunteering activities serving our local towns we set the foundation for our youth to become better citizens of tomorrow.

Christmas / New Year program 2022

In addition to the Youth BoD members taking an active role, in program participation and volunteering in the cultural programs, Yadunand Sreelesh and Meenakshi Menon led from the front by taking on roles as MCs for the Christmas / New Year program conducted in January 2023. With our young leaders taking responsibility to conduct such events, we hope we are planting the seeds for better events and programs in the future, to be hopefully conducted by such young, energetic and capable leaders

Report by Zacharia Mathew

adopt a highway

GCKA YOUTH BOD

Pencil Drawing Kids

1st prize

Ganga Poduval

2nd prize

Ishana Smitha Arun

3rd prize

Nihaarika Bijesh

Jacquelin Jose

Sahya Binu

Parvathy Subhash

Rhea Sony Paulson

Pranav Subhash

Pencil Drawing Adult

Subhash Balakrishnan
1st Prize

Calendar Photo Winners

Hari Narayanan
1st Prize

Subhashkumar
Balakrishnan
2nd Prize

Manu Mathew
3rd Prize

Ram Krishnan
3rd Prize

Sidharth Venugopalan

The Gem of Happiness

Sammy yawned and stretched his arms. It was morning, and the sun was shining through the curtains in his room. He heard the chirping of birds and the squeaking of his pet rabbit, Daffodil. Then, he looked at his clock. It said the time was 9:00 am. Oh no! Sammy was going to be late to school!

He rushed downstairs, ate a few bites of breakfast, and leaped onto his bike. His parents were at work. He furiously pedaled down the street towards his school. He didn't stop to look at both sides of the street, and received a honk from a car. "Whoa!" he said as his bike hit a pebble and went swerving toward an alley. Before he could steady himself, his bike hit the wall.

Sammy got off his bike. He looked around. "Where is this?" he said to himself. He had never seen this place before, and he had seen his whole city! It had unusually clean brick walls with no graffiti on them, which was an uncommon thing where Sammy lived. All the shops seemed closed. "Weird," he said and got back on his bike. He reached school right as the bell rang. Huffing, he ran to his English class and burst in.

After school, Sammy decided to go explore the alley again. He got onto his bike and pedaled down the street toward where he thought the alley was. He took a right at the signal on Chestnut Drive, and there it was. The dark, mysterious alley.

Sammy saw that there was a donut shop in the alley. He decided that it wouldn't hurt to buy a donut. After all, this might just be an alley that had been newly constructed. He walked into the shop. "One chocolate donut, please," he said to the clerk. The clerk reached over and gave him a donut. Right as Sammy was going to leave, the clerk said, "Hey, boy. Come back here. You didn't pay enough." Sammy said, "B-but I paid what it said on the sign." The clerk said, "Who says the sign is right? It's been years since we opened." Sammy gave an additional quarter and thought about what the clerk said. Had it really been years since the shop was opened? Sammy sensed that something suspicious was going on.

Suddenly, a mysterious shadow fell over Sammy. He looked up and saw a figure in a ragged cloak descending towards him. The figure landed and started making strange hissing

noises. Sammy screamed, leaped onto his bike, and started pedaling as fast as he could. He swerved out of the alley and frantically biked home. The figure was flying behind him, getting closer and closer. Somehow, it seemed that nobody could see the figure but Sammy. He was too scared to notice what was happening around him as he crossed the street. He heard a honk and an ear splitting noise that sounded metal ripping,
and felt himself falling down. The last thing he felt was the creature's arms closing around his neck, and everything went black.

Sammy cracked open his eyes, and found that he was in a cave. He heard a voice hissing, "So… you're awake?" The voice sounded like nails scraping on a chalkboard. The voice continued, "I'll just send them to finish you off." Suddenly, hundreds of similar-looking hooded creatures started flying towards Sammy. Sammy tried to run, but he was magically locked in place. "Help me!" he yelled. Suddenly, a high pitched voice cried, "Back off!" Sammy looked toward where the voice was coming from, and saw a gingerbread man furiously waving a candy cane at the beasts. He had blue frosted eyes, a red frosted mouth, and a frosted outfit, complete with gumdrops for buttons. "Rigomiordia!" the gingerbread man yelled. His candy cane blasted a ray of light at the creatures, and they disappeared. "Come with me, before he finds you," said the gingerbread man.

Sammy followed the gingerbread man out of the cave. "You can talk?!" asked Sammy. "Yes, I can," said the gingerbread man. Then, Sammy asked, "What's your name? I'm Sammy, by the way." "Fred," replied the gingerbread man. "Um, so I am very confused about where we are. Where are we?" "We're in Sugarland, of course!" said Fred. Sammy looked around. There were trees with no leaves and a dark sky overhead. The land didn't seem to live up to its name, but Sammy kept that to himself. Just then, he saw a car with a gingerbread frame, lots of frosting, and Oreo cookies for tires. "Hop in!" said Fred. He started up the car. "Um, where are we going?" asked Sammy. "To my house, of course!" said Fred. They suddenly heard a horrible screeching noise. "Well, that's them," said Fred grimly. "Hold on!" He turned on the car and sped forward.

The car bounced down the chocolate rock road and flew over several gumdrop hills. Suddenly, the road ended. "Oh no! How are we going to escape now?" "Never fear," said Fred. He sped even faster to the sign that read DEAD END, knocking it down in the process, and continued speeding into the forest. This forest

was made out of candy cane trees and green frosting. The ground was littered with nuts and little shards of chocolate. The car suddenly entered a city through a forcefield. “Where is this again?” Sammy asked. “Sugarland! Haven’t I already said that?” Fred replied. There were lots of gingerbread houses, candy cane signs, and more gingerbread cars. Groups of gingerbread people walked around. A castle lay in the distance. Sammy looked around him with awe. Fred then drove to a house with rolling meadows behind it. “Come in!” said Fred. They both went into the house.

There were little couches made out of marshmallows and a kitchen that was made out of candy. Sammy asked, “So, why did you save me? Who are you? What do you want from me?” Fred said, “I saved you, well, because it’s my job to save others from…those things. Look, I already introduced myself, so I don’t-” Fred was cut off by the phone ringing. He picked it up and went to another room. Sammy could hear Fred saying, “Oh, really? Oh no. That’s not good. I’ll be right over.” He then cut the phone. Fred came out and said, “I have to go for some important business at the castle, okay? Stay here.” Sammy asked, “What’s happening at the castle?” “I’m afraid that is classified information,” said Fred. He jumped into his car and drove off. Sammy wanted to know what Fred was off to, but decided to stay put.

Suddenly, Sammy heard a loud bang from outside. A dark shadow enveloped the house. “Give him,” a hissing voice said. “Turn him in, and all will be well.” Sammy felt afraid. He ran to the third floor of Fred’s house and watched. A dark car that wasn’t made out of candy waited outside. Sammy heard a crash, and watched as a cloaked figure smashed open the door and all the windows in the process. He heard footsteps coming upstairs. He frantically looked around for something to defend himself with. There was nothing.

Suddenly, the figure reached where he was hiding. “AAAA!” screamed Sammy. The figure pounced on him. Sammy crawled from its grasp and ran to the door. He jumped down two flights of stairs, the figure in his pursuit. Sammy ran through the broken door, saw a vacant car, and hid in it. He needed to get to Fred. Fast.

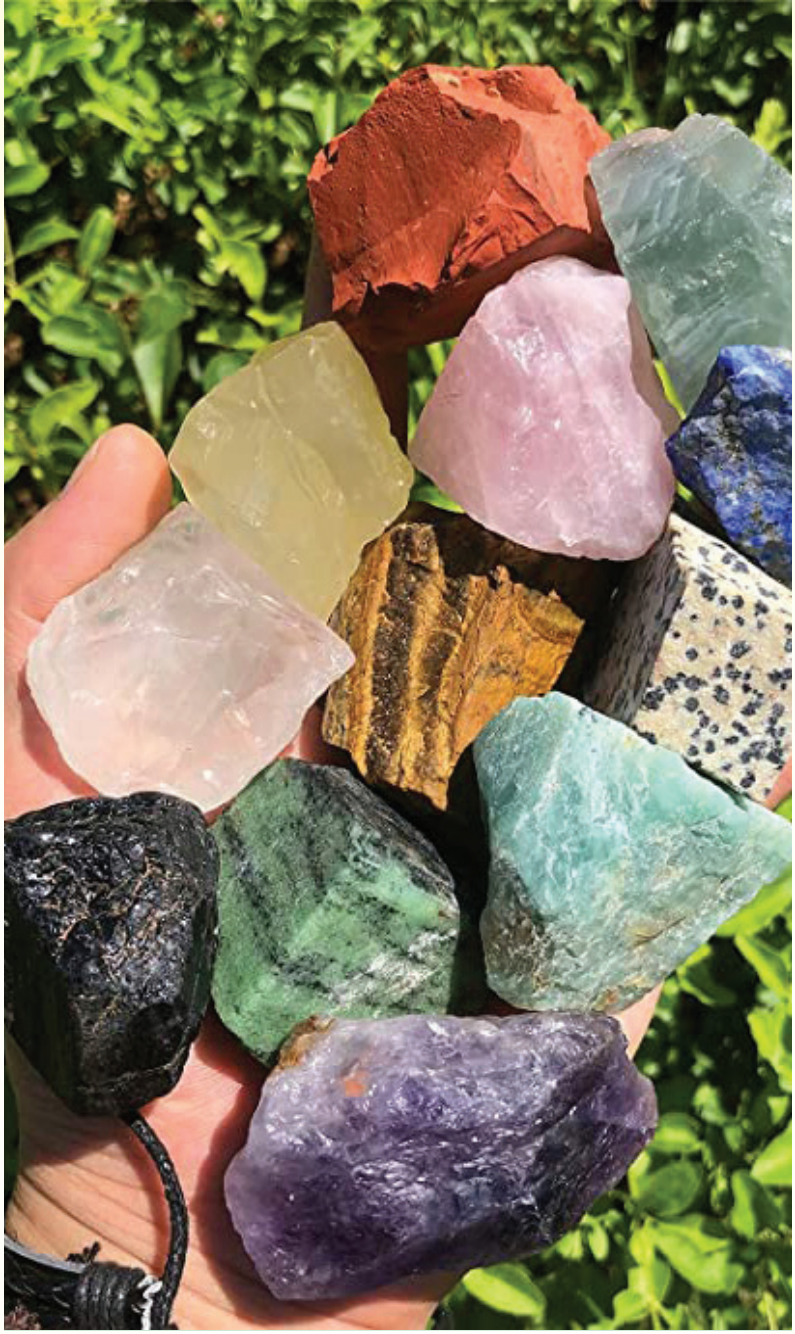
The car suddenly turned on. The figure noticed and started running to it. Sammy saw that this was some fancy sports car that had a bunch of technological features. The car somehow started speeding away from the figure. Sammy said, “Take me to the castle.” The car went on, gaining speed, going much faster than Sammy assumed was the speed limit. Suddenly, he heard sirens. “Unknown figure spotted,” boomed an automated voice from the castle gates. It meant the figure that was chasing Sammy. A huge wall started closing the road from the castle, and Sammy said, “Go faster!” The car went even faster and just

slipped underneath the wall as it closed the city from the castle. The figure was trapped in the city. Sammy told the car to wait by the tree and started walking towards the castle.

After a few minutes, he reached. He saw Fred's car parked outside. As he approached the entrance, a pair of Oreos surrounded him. "Why are you here?" they asked. "Uh, trying to escape from somebody," Sammy replied. Surprisingly, the Oreos let him in. Inside, the floors were made out of white chocolate and had elegant patterns on them. Several chocolate chandeliers hung from the ceiling. Sammy saw several gingerbread people exiting a room–including Fred.

Fred came running and asked, "Sammy! Why are you here?" Sammy said, "Well, someone broke into your house." Fred seemed surprised at the fact that someone broke into his house, and then asked suspiciously,"So, what did you do?" "I escaped and um, got here," Sammy replied. "How exactly?" Fred asked. "I took a car," Sammy confessed. Fred said, "Well, now that you're here, I might as well tell you what we discussed." He continued, "There is a great danger coming to Sugarland. Apparently, the Gem of Happiness has been stolen. The Gem of Happiness is what keeps everything in Sugarland alive and thriving. Without it, horrible things could happen, like evil taking over the world, and Sugarland losing its prosperity." "So, what do we do now?" asked Sammy. "Well, I just don't know," said Fred. "How about we go get it?" Sammy suggested, thinking that this was the obvious solution. "No!" said Fred. "How are we supposed to go get it, anyway?" Sammy could not answer this.

Fred and Sammy walked to Fred's car. The wall between the city and castle had risen, so they both drove into the city again. "Um, just don't be surprised to see how your house looks," said Sammy. Fred drove to his house. "Oh no! Oh nooo!" Fred was shocked. The house



was almost demolished. Nearly everything seemed to be broken. One wall had just crumbled away to ruins, and half of it was charred and blackened. An official Sugarland officer said to Fred, "Well, the mysterious stranger ran into your house, and um, was breaking everything, and when we tried to catch it, um, it set fire to one wall. Don't worry though, we'll pay for all the damage!" Sammy asked the officer, "Did you catch it?" The officer sheepishly said, "Uh, no. Goodbye!" The officer promptly left as he had come.

Fred grimly said, "Let's have a look around." Inside the house was no better. Everything was shattered and ripped, and some of it burnt. The stairs had completely collapsed. Fred jumped upstairs and Sammy followed him. Fred said, "Uh oh. I think I know why he was so eager to steal something from here." Fred ran to his room and saw everything shattered. "Oh no! He stole it!" cried Fred. "What?" asked Sammy. "A paper showing where the location of the Gem was!" Fred replied. "We've got to get it!" "Hey, I see something!" Sammy said. It was a scrap of paper that showed a path. "That's it! That's where the stranger is going!" said Fred excitedly.

They both ran to Fred's car. Fred started it and sped to the castle. "Okay, so it seems that the stranger first stopped at the Sugarcane hills. Let's go there." Fred drove toward a sprawling expanse of green hills in the distance. He went on a highway, speeding past many cars, almost tipping over while zooming towards the exits, and constantly swerving. They finally took an exit, almost going vertically in the process, and narrowly avoided sitting down on another car – then, they reached the hills. "Okay, let's see. You need several things to forge the key to open the chest to the Gem, so here…it would most likely need a blade of special peppermint grass." Fred then got out of the car and ran to the hill. "Come on, we need to find the special hill!"

Sammy followed him. There didn't seem to be a single pink blade of grass. Everywhere around them, there was green. "Oh, I know!" Fred exclaimed. They ran to the stables. Inside, there were a few unicorns. Fred said, "We need to ride one of these." He sneakily unharnessed two of them. Sammy leaped on top of one of them and followed Fred, who was also riding on his own unicorn. Then, with a

blast of light, they suddenly found themselves in a field of pink grass. “Okay, let’s just pluck one of these,” Fred said. They took a single blade of peppermint grass and leaped back on their unicorns. Suddenly, there was another blast of light, and they found themselves back in the green hills. Fred put the unicorns back into the stable. He and Sammy both ran to the car and sped off.

Fred looked at the map. “Okay, so the next place where the stranger stopped is in… the Medieval Ruins.” “What’s that?” Sammy asked. “It’s a place where an ancient civilization used to live. But it got mysteriously destroyed,” Fred explained. “Hey! You wait right there!” a voice called out. “Uh oh. Time to go!” said Fred. Sammy turned around. A guard was chasing them. The guard raised a candy cane stick. Fred said, “GET OUT! NOW!” He and Sammy leaped out of the car, just before the guard pressed a button on the stick and blasted the car into smithereens. “Well, well, well. No stealing is allowed!” the guard said. Fred whispered to Sammy, “Quick! Grab my hand.” Sammy obeyed. “Okay, so we surrender. Alright?” said Fred out loud to the guard. Saying this, Fred raised his arm up. He pressed a button on his frosted sleeve, and bam! He and Sammy found themselves in another place.

“What just happened?” Sammy asked. “We teleported. Welcome to the Medieval Ruins!” Fred said. He then went over and jumped over a heap of junk. “We need to find, let’s see, a piece of golden candy!” All around them, there were only gray stones and crumbled pieces of buildings. “Let’s start searching!” Fred said cheerfully. He also added, “We can split up. You go near the castle, I’ll search near the mines.” Sammy ran off to the castle ruins. All around him, there were pieces of stone and rubble scattered around. He saw many precious jewels on the ground, none of them a piece of golden candy. He then saw a glowing light nearby. It was coming from a trapdoor. Sammy opened it and slipped inside. The tunnel it led him to seemed to be very much intact. There were glowing torches on the old stone walls. He saw many intricate spiral designs on the wall. He ran down some old, muddy stairs and saw an array of stones, all with different carved patterns on them. He saw some words on the wall, “The right stones will lead to your success. The wrong stones will take you away. Can you do it?”

Sammy looked at the stones. He gulped. He then realized why the spiral patterns were there. “Oh! I just need to tap the ones that connect together!” He carefully tapped the correct stones. Then, with a grinding noise, the stones that he was standing on fell out underneath

him. Sammy let out a surprised shriek as he fell into a glowing chamber
below. He ran to it and saw a gold piece of candy! “YES!” Sammy yelled as he grabbed it. He suddenly heard a rustling noise. A dark shape was behind him. It was the figure! The one that destroyed Fred’s house! “Who are you? Show yourself,” Sammy said. The figure said, “I will.”

Sammy gasped. It was the same voice that had spoken to him back when he was trapped in the cave, just before Fred rescued him. The figure took off its cloak. It was a man with ice blue eyes, whitish-blond hair, and a cruel, malicious smile. “Give the golden candy to me. Right now,” he said. “NEVER!” Sammy shouted, and made a break for it. He knew he could never defeat the figure, but didn’t know what else to do. Sammy ran out of the room, clutching the piece of candy in his hand. He jumped onto a platform and sped up the stairs. He could hear the man behind him. Sammy ran as fast as he could, and took a tremendous leap up and out of the trapdoor. He spotted Fred in the distance. “Fred! Come over here!” Sammy shouted. The man grabbed Sammy. Fred came running. “Put him down, Onyx.”

Onyx laughed, and said, “My friend, please, don’t overreact. I was only hoping to make a deal.” “What is it?” Fred growled. “I am requesting you to help me get the ingredients for the Gem and help me take over the land. You can rule with me,” Onyx said slyly. “Of course not!” said Fred. “Then, I shall take them forcibly from you,” declared Onyx. “Ligadisarm!” he yelled. All the weapons that Fred had were gone. “Now, you will never see the light again. EVER!”

“Ah, my friend, but you have forgotten something. I always have a trick up my sleeve,” Fred said. Fred raised his arm, and produced a new candy cane. “Rigomiordia!” he yelled. A flash of blue light zipped toward Onyx, and there was a huge blast of light. When it faded away, Onyx was gone. “What did you do?” asked Sammy. “Used the same spell that he was going to use on me,” said Fred with a grin. Sammy laughed.

Suddenly, the golden candy from Sammy’s hand flew to the peppermint grass in Fred’s hand. The objects both swirled in the air, and with a blast of golden light, a new, mysterious, blue and green gem was formed. Sammy held it in one hand, observing it carefully. “We need to get it back to the castle,” Fred said. With a wink, he added, “There’s no harm in using a little more magic.” He raised his candy cane, and with a blast of white light, they found themselves back in the castle. Fred said, “Follow me!” They both ran to a room that said ONLY APPROVED CASTLE RESIDENTS ALLOWED. Fred grinned and raised

his candy cane. The door unlocked. They ran inside and saw a treasure chest. They opened it up. Inside, there was a raised platform with a carved spot to put the gem into. With trembling hands, Sammy put the gem into the platform and shut the chest.

There was a flash of white light, and they suddenly found themselves in the throne room. The king of Sugarland was there. “Thank you for finding the stone! Now, there is prosperity everywhere. You shall be rewarded with lots of gifts!” Fred started to protest, but was shoved an enormous treasure chest filled to the brim with Sugarland coins and precious candy pieces. The king said, “For you, boy, I shall give you your very own peppermint cane!” Sammy received a long peppermint cane with his name engraved in cursive on the side.

After thanking the king for their gifts, Fred and Sammy soon left the castle and walked down the path to Fred’s house. Sammy saw that the house had been fixed! “How did you do that?” he asked Fred, “Oh, it’s just a little trick of mine. I used my candy cane to fix it,” Fred replied. As they entered the house, Fred said, “I have some sad news. You must go home.” Sammy protested, “But why? Can’t I stay here?” Fred said, “No, your time here is limited. Visitors can only stay for one day. Besides, it is not good for you to stay here forever. You cannot live with us gingerbread people. You belong in your world. Although you have achieved much in this world, you must go back home.” Saying this, Fred gave Sammy a little jar with an unlabeled drink in it. “Here. When you feel like the time is right, drink this, and you will be re-transported to Sugarland. I will make sure that you are allowed to stay here longer than an ordinary visitor,” he said with a wink. Suddenly, there was an enormous downpour of chocolate rain, inside of Fred’s house! Sammy felt himself rising into the air and being whirled away. “Goodbye, Fred!” he yelled. “Goodbye, Sammy!” Fred yelled back.

Soon, Sammy found himself back in his bedroom, with his peppermint stick in one hand and Fred’s bottle in the other. He looked at the bottle, tempted, but decided not to drink it. He belonged here. At home.

THE END

Sports Report by
Sharhan Kader

Sports Report

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. This proverb has never been more relevant than in today's largely sedentary world. Sports have always been an integral part of the GCKA events calendar. It is an opportunity for members not only to compete against each other but also to socialize (which is important considering that we are still coming to terms with the post-Covid world) and escape from the monotonous mundane beats of day-to-day corporate life. The GCKA 2022-23 Sports Committee comprising of Arun Kanathil, Jaya Uthamanthil, Sharhan Kader and Zacharia Mathew was formed with the view to encourage maximum participation from the community.

The sports schedule kicked-off with the 56-Cards tournament in February at the Apex Community center. Ten teams registered for the tournament. It was a fun filled tournament played with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm. The tournament was won by Dipu's team (Dipu Pappachan, Joel Abraham and Shibu Vachery). Mahesh's team (Mahesh Pillai, Ajith Nair and Santy Mathew) was the runners-up.

Next up was the battle of wits in Checkmate 2023. The chess tournament was held at Kings and Queens Chess Academy in March. There was a record number of registrations for the competition. This was also the first time that a GCKA Chess tournament was conducted by an external arbitrator. The tournament used the Swiss style along with a final between the top two for adults. The U-18s also had a semi-final. Joshua Paulson defeated Zacharia Mathew in the finals of the adult tournament. The U-18 final was won by Bharath Sankar who got the better of Akulnand Sreelesh.

GCKA's Badminton tournament was conducted in March at Perimeter Park. Games were conducted across the categories of Legends Doubles, Mixed Doubles, Men's Doubles, Women's Doubles, Parent-Child and Little Champs Singles. It was a high-octane tournament played with a lot of energy and vigor. There were a lot of closely fought matches and some were unlucky to miss out on a spot in the finals. The winners and runners-up of the various categories are given below:

	Winner	Runner-Up
Legends Doubles	Babu Thomas & Feju Joseph	Satheesh Nair & Vasudeva Rao
Mixed Doubles	Namith Ravi & Namratha Ravi	Ajay Narayanan & Sherly John
Men's Doubles	Nishal Ravi & Namith Ravi	Ajay Narayanan & Muhammad Asif
Women's Doubles	Namratha Ravi & Emilyn Joseph	Sherly John & Helen Roy
Parent-Child	Ajay Narayanan & Jaythri Narayanan	Rohit Poduval & Ria Poduval
Little Champs Singles	Emilyn Joseph	Ria Poduval

In April, GCKA hosted the 28-Cards tournament at the Apex Community center. Even though 28 is the toned-down version of the 56-Cards game played with half the number of pack of cards, there was no toning down on either the fun or the enthusiasm for the tournament. 14 teams registered, and after the group matches and semis, Praveen's team (Praveen Antony, Bino Baby and Abiroop Konikkara) and Bejoy's team (Bejoy Kochuparambil, Anish Dasappan and Subhashkumar Balakrishnan) faced off in the final. Bejoy's ended up winning the final.

Sports need not always be about the competition, participation itself can be fun too!!!! With this in mind, GCKA organized the 5K Family Fun Run & Walk at the New Hope Church Road Trailhead Park. More than 40 people registered for this free event. This was an event for all. We had people from all across the spectrum - young kids to senior members of the community, serious athletes to casual runners and even those who just came for a morning walk plus chitchat with friends. Everyone who participated in the event finished the run/walk. All the participants were felicitated and awarded medals.

June is when summer starts in North Carolina and that means sun, surf, and sand. While the GCKA is yet to organize a surfing competition, the sands on the Green Hope Volleyball courts were getting ready for the GCKA Volleyball and Throwball tournament. As always, the league was divided into two divisions. Division A for expert-level teams and Division B for the ones that play but might not be good enough to be in Division A. Both divisions had three teams. Division B was a clean sweep for Mustangs led by Santhosh Varghese. They won all their games. Mallu Moorkans led by Sanjay Mohandas were runners-up. In Division A, one might think that well begun is half done but Arikomban led by Jinsan Joseph had other ideas. They lost their first match but bounced back to win three games (including the finals) on the trot to be crowned champions. Second place went to Kerala Express lead by Joby Perrappadan.

Throwball was conducted for the first-time post covid. Two teams participated. In the single match face-off, Vikings led by Julia Joy defeated Titans led by Ala Alappatt.

FAMILY 5K FUN RUN

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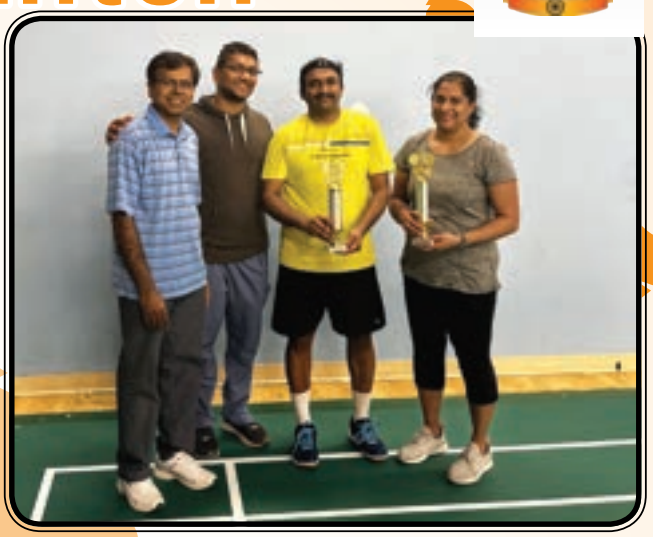
Volleyball

Throwball

Badminton

Badminton



Badminton

Card Games 28

Card Games 28

Card games 56

Card games 56

Chess

Lost in New York

Anne Sebastian

Once lived a girl named Lily. She wanted to go to a concert in New York. But her dad wouldn't let her. That night, she went to New York. The next night, she went to the concert. After the concert, she did not know how to go home! She was very shocked.

She saw a girl and asked her if she could go home with her. And the girl said yes. After a few days Lily and her new friend booked tickets to go back home.

After a few more days, Lily went back home. Her dad was so glad to see her. And she learned a lesson and the lesson is - not to go anywhere without permission!

Culturals

Being the first to step into the post-pandemic world, our GCKA Board of Directors (BOD) witnessed a remarkable enthusiasm among people eager to return to in-person activities. As we entered the fall season, we kicked off with the Spooktacular Halloween Costume Photo Contest in October, followed by the photography contest, centered around the theme "Kaanaam Carolina". The response we received for both contests was truly overwhelming, making it a challenging task to select only three winners from such a pool of talent. The best 12 photographs were further recognized by being featured in our 2023 calendar, showcasing the incredible talent within our community.

Christmas celebrations are never complete without the beloved traditions of Cake Baking and Christmas Tree Decoration Contest. In December, we organized the best-decorated tree, while the cake baking contest took place in January. Simultaneously, our community members were getting ready for our Christmas & New Year cultural programs. As always, the exceptional quality of our programs filled us with excitement, witnessing the unwavering commitment of our members and volunteers making the event a success. We also found a creative solution by offering packed food through a food truck to overcome the challenges posed by the restrictions at Stewart Theater to serve food.

As the sports team remained engrossed in activities like badminton, volleyball, and throwball, we also introduced a wine and dine event to foster inclusivity among all members of the community. This gathering was specifically designed for adults, aiming to initiate a social gathering where they could come together, relax, and enjoy each other's company.

GCKA Cultural Committee

Christmas new year 2023

Christmas new year 2023

Christmas new year 2023

Christmas new year 2023

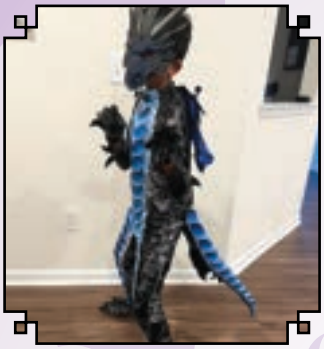
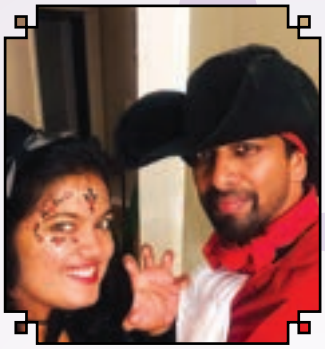
Christmas new year 2023

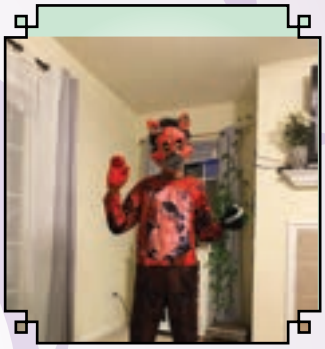
Onam 2022

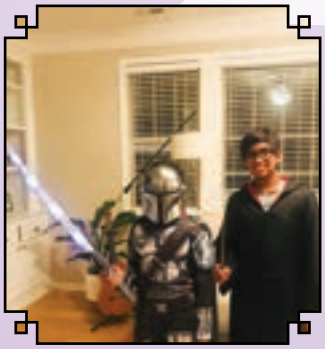
Onam 2022

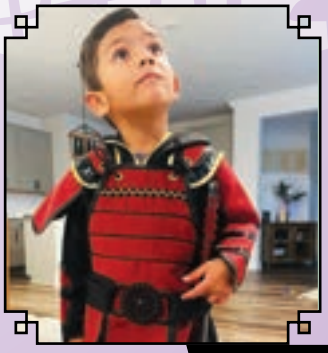
Onam 2022

Halloween Costume Contest

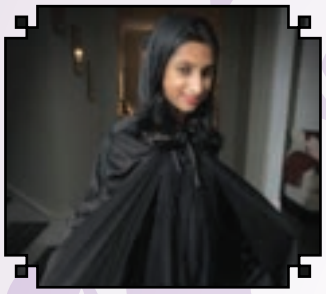



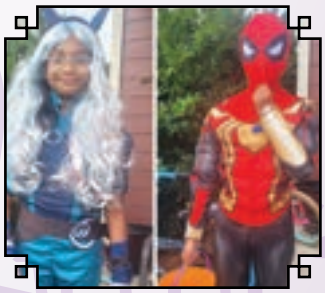






Halloween Costume Contest





Halloween Costume Contest Winners

GCKA Cake Baking Contest

Wine and Dine

Christmas Tree Competition

Christmas Tree Competition

The Cricketing Underdogs.

Abel Benny

It was a sunny day when the local cricket team arrived at the pitch for their first game of the season. They were the underdogs, with a team made up of mostly young and inexperienced players who had never played in a professional league before. And their coach- a PE teacher! The opposing team was a well-established and well-versed team as they won their respective T20 and Test cups! Many players were even at the brink of making their U17 national teams. And with all the scouts watching this game, they were ready. And even though the odds were stacked against the local team, they were determined to give it their all, so don't count them out just yet.

From the first ball, it was clear that these young players had heart. But as the swing from the ball caused the ball to slightly scrape the batsmen's bat, and into the safe hands of the wicket-keeper. They howled at the umpire and…a wicket on the first ball! The local team's morale were crushed, but then saw the smug smile on the bowler's face. And they were back and fired up better than ever. And so even though they were outmatched in terms of experience and skill, they managed to keep the score achievable enough for the bowlers to fight tooth and nail and keep the game close.

In the final over, with the score tied and the city team needing just one run to win, it was the underdogs' turn to bowl. The tension was palpable as the first bowler stepped up to deliver the ball. He bowled a perfect yorker, which the opposing team's batsman missed! And resulted in a bowl-out wicket. The crowd erupted in cheers as the local team celebrated their hard-fought victory. That bowler turned out to be a 14-year old Kapil Dev! As the scouts were pleased with the lads' performance, the older players let go of their maturity and started throwing bats and helmets down to the ground with force, and it didn't help that these players were celebrating like they've won the World Cup!

Despite players much older than them having made fun of and taunted the underdogs, they had proven that with determination and hard work, anything was possible. From that day forward, they were no longer the underdogs, but a team to be respected and admired.

The Stolen Science Project

"OH MY GOD we made it in " I screamed. " Really, no way!!" said my friend Sarah. " Sarah, we are going to New York City for the National Science fair!!". I said happily. We both screamed and cheered smack dab in the middle of the hallway. The whole hallway that was once filled with chatter fell completely silent and stared at us, but we were too happy to care. I was overjoyed. Hi, my name is Lily Rossanene and Today I'm going to tell you the amazing story of how me and my friend Sarah stopped the world from collapsing from a virus and accidentally caught a criminal that the FBI were chasing for years. I'm from San Francisco, California and I'm 14 years old. I live with my parents and older sister Elena. See, me and my friend Sarah love science so when the school science fair tryouts were posted we had to sign up. Then we made this amazing project about preventing this big virus that would impact the world in a few years. The judges were astonished by our work and we went on to the regional science fair and then states and finally we made it to nationals. "Oh we better hurry, 8th period starts in a minute" said Sarah. Me and Sarah rushed to the social studies room. "Phew" I sighed just in time. 45 minutes later the loud bell rang dismissing students after a long day. I ran to the bus station and got on the bus to get home. About 15 minutes later the bus reached my stop and I got off. I ran all the way home and burst through the door and screamed. "MOM, DAD YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED AT SCHOOL TODAY". "Honey, stop screaming and tell us what happened" my mom said calmly. "I made it to the National Science Fair and it's in 2 days in New York City" I said, gasping for air. "Honey, that's amazing news!!" my dad said happily. I smiled. I knew they would be proud of me. "You better start packing and washing up, come down for dinner." said my smiling sister who was watching all the commotion from the stairs. "Okay" I said happily. 2 days later me and Sarah were at the airport about to board the flight to New York City with our science teacher Mrs.Campbell.

My parents hugged me 1 last time and we boarded the plane to New York City. "All passengers please fasten your seatbelts and watch the safety video that is provided. Thank You for flying Delta Airlines and get ready for takeoff" the flight attendant said. I watched

the plane ascend to the sky and saw the fluffy white clouds and my eyes slowly closed until I saw complete darkness. 6 hours later I woke up to the flight attendant telling everyone to unfasten their seatbelts and hoping that they had a safe flight. Soon enough people were starting to get off the plane and Mrs.Campbell, Me and Sarah slowly walked off the big steps of the plane. “AHHHH sweet New York City air” sighed Sarah. I laughed and rolled my eyes. She can be hilarious sometimes. “Alright girls, let’s catch a cab and get to our hotel. Said Mrs.Campbell. I smiled. I couldn’t wait for this adventure. We checked into our hotel and me and Sarah went into our room and took out our science project. We worked on that for a bit and ate dinner with the advisors and judges. Soon we fell asleep excited for the fair. The next day I woke up ready to win the science fair. I saw that Sarah had put on the news, they were talking about some mad scientist who was plotting to create a virus to destroy the world. “Hey isn’t that the virus that we did our project on?” I asked, still half asleep. “Hmm yeah, how odd,” said Sarah. Me and Sarah got dressed and went to the science fair to put our project in its place. The fair was starting in 7 hours. After we dropped off our project. Mrs. Campbell told us that we could do whatever we wanted until the fair started. Me and Sarah smiled. We both knew that we were going to Chinatown. We couldn’t wait to visit that place. We went back to the hotel room to change and that’s when I saw that we left the report part of our project on my bed. Me and Sarah quickly rushed to put it back with the rest of the project at the fair. Although when we got there our project was nowhere to be seen. I gasped in shock and horror “NOO, all our work is gone. We put in all that effort and it’s all gone.” “This

is bad," said Sarah, "really really bad." "We must find that project" I said determined. "No matter what." Sarah suggested looking at the cameras first. So we went over to the security guard to check the cameras. At exactly 10:07 we saw a blinding light and a bit of someone dressed in a black clothes and the second the light flash was over our project was gone. "HE'S THE ONE" Sarah screamed. "HE'S THE ONE WHO STOLE IT". "Sarah, chill out, we need to do everything possible to catch this guy," I said with my voice shaking. We left the camera room and went back to our hotel. "WE HAVE TO HACK THE CAMERAS TO FIND HIS LOCATION" Sarah exclaimed "I know" I said sadly. I didn't want to hack but I had to for my science project. I got out my computer and put on my glasses and got to work. Sarah had gotten the hard drive of that camera footage. So a few hours later I found the culprit's location. "Come on, let's go. We only have 2 hours left and the address is 30 minutes away from here." Sarah said. I nodded. "Let's go get our Science Project." I said. I tried to sound confident but it wasn't working. Sarah sensed my tension and told me to relax. "We can do this," she said, and I nodded. "Let's do this," I said. 30 minutes later we reached the address. "This is an abandoned building," said Sarah. She looked devastated. "This isn't the right address. Then I saw a guy walking into the side of the building. "Wait, isn't that the guy that stole our project." I whispered. Sarah's face filled with hope again. "OMG it is," she said. "Lets go nab him" she said trying to run after the guy. "SARAH shhh let's follow him get our project and figure out what he is going to do with it and call the cops." I whispered. "Great plan," she said. We slowly crept towards the door and followed him into a huge laboratory. The guy put on a lab coat and took our project out of a big box. "Hmmm lets see, a pinch of carbon dioxide and ¾ cups of fluoride will prevent the virus. So I have to do the exact opposite. FINALLY I HAVE GOTTEN THE FORMULA TO START THE VIRUS AND ONLY I WILL HAVE THE CURE TO IT."

he exclaimed. "OH MY LORD don't tell me that he's planning to start the virus with our invention." Sarah said, gulping huge breaths of air.. "Oh he is and we have to stop him" I said confidently. "This is our project and it's our responsibility to save the world and get it back." I said. "So here's the plan. In the beaker he is mixing the chemicals for the virus. You have to go and distract him and hold him up long enough for me to break the beaker and throw the chemicals away. That's when the cops come in and nab him." " That is the greatest plan ever" said Sarah " I know, and I have already called the cops." I said. "When I say go then you go and distract him. The cops

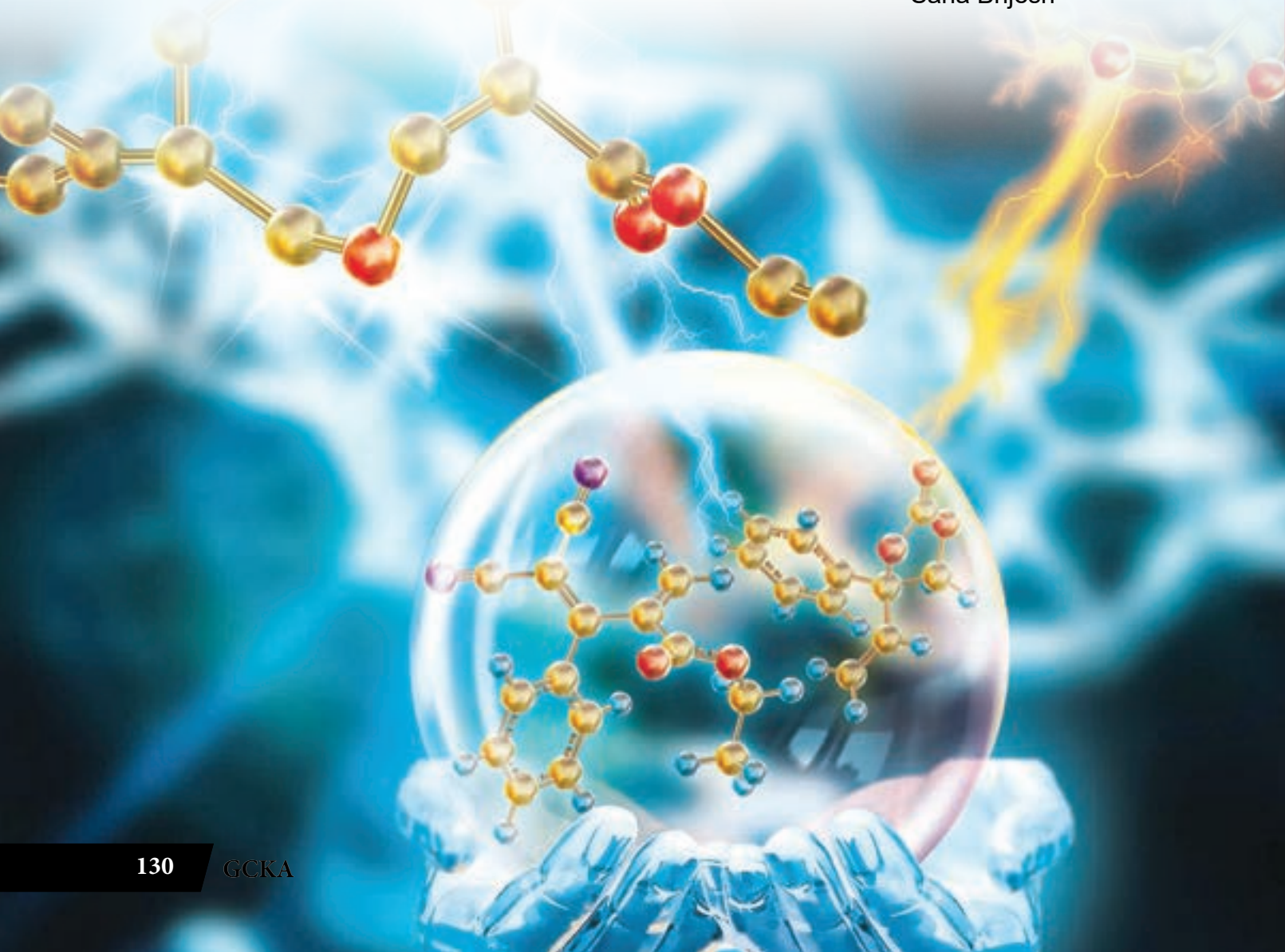
will be here in about 1 minute." I said. "Okay" said Sarah. "3 2 1 GO!!! I shouted." Sarah ran in front of the scientist and started distracting him. I checked my watch, only 10 seconds until the cops come. I ran to the beaker, picked it up and smashed it. The scientist swiveled around and stared in horror as I threw away the chemicals and took back our project. The cops came in and arrested the guy. The cops came up to us and said thank you because we actually caught the criminal that was on the news. I was mind blown that we caught a criminal that the FBI was hunting down for years. "Sarah we better hurry, we don't want to miss the science fair" I said.

2 days later we went back home. We had caught the criminal and saved hundreds of lives. We also won the science fair and I was so proud of the accomplishment me and Sarah made.

So yeah, that's how me and my friend caught the FBI's most wanted criminal and won the science fair.

Crazy story, don't you think, but it happened.

Sana Brijesh

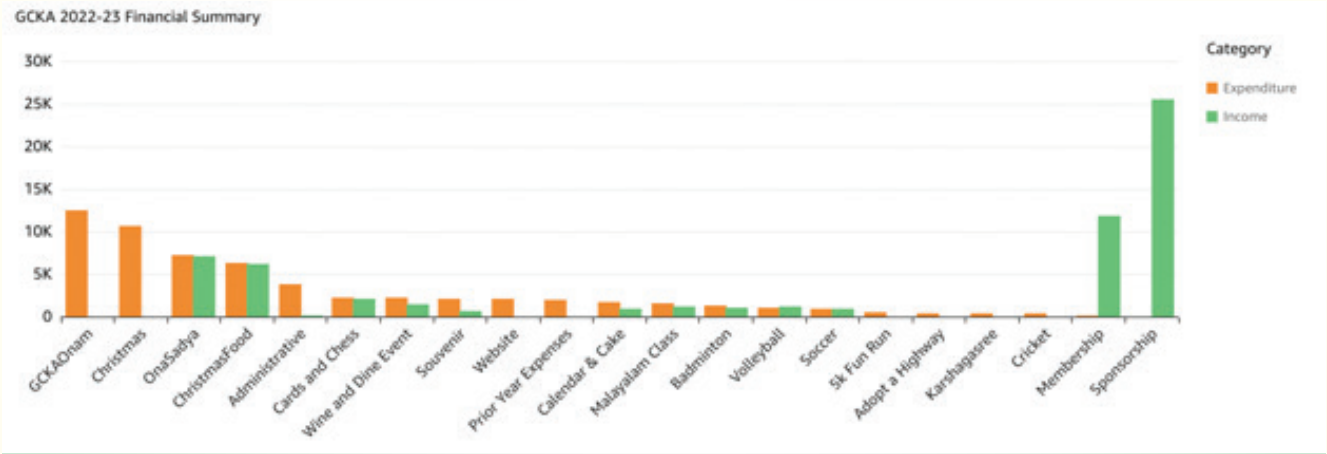


GCKA Financial Report 2022-23

Balu Mathew
(Treasurer)

As the treasurer of GCKA, I am pleased to present the annual financial report for the current year. GCKA is committed to promoting the cultural, social, and economic welfare of the Carolina Keralites and the surrounding community at large. This year our efforts were focused towards ensuring a sustainable financial future for the association.

Paving the Path for a Sustainable Financial Future
GCKA has made significant efforts to ensure a sustainable financial future by focusing on self-sufficiency in our events. We strive towards making our events financially viable, allowing us to continue organizing high-quality cultural and sports events. We have made our sponsorship tiers more affordable to sponsors, encouraging increased participation from businesses and organizations within our community.



*The charts are based on estimated numbers. Audited reports will be available after 10/01/23.

GCKA remains dedicated to organizing high-quality cultural and sports events that bring our members together. In addition to the full spectrum of cultural, social and sports events, we introduced exciting new events to our calendar such as including wine and dine social gathering and Halloween contest for kids. These additions were well-received and garnered enthusiastic participation, further strengthening our community bonds. By continuously expanding and innovating our event offerings, we ensure that GCKA remains a vibrant and engaging association.

A prime example of our commitment was the annual GCKA Onam and GCKA Christmas and

New Year's events. This event not only showcased the rich traditions of our community but also served as a platform for fostering cultural pride and unity. It was a resounding success, thanks to the active participation and immense talent displayed by our members. In addition to the GCKA Christmas event, we expanded our event offerings to provide diverse and enjoyable experiences for our members.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our sponsors, volunteers and members for their unwavering support in making our events and programs a resounding success. Their dedication and enthusiasm have been instrumental in the growth and impact of GCKA. We are truly grateful for your contributions, which have allowed us to continue delivering exceptional experiences to our members. We extend our sincere congratulations to all the participants and express our gratitude to our members, volunteers, and sponsors for their continuous support. Together, we will continue to thrive and strengthen our community in the coming year, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for GCKA.

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