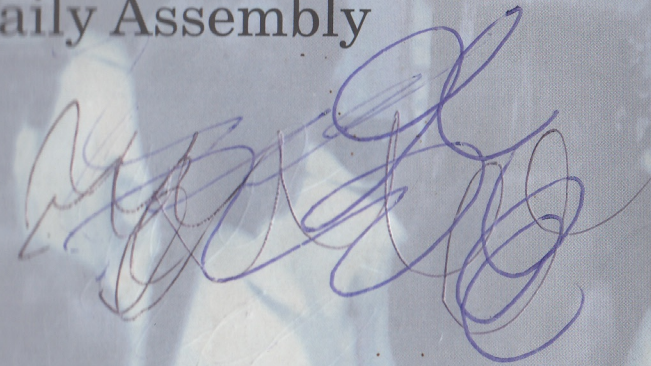


Five Minutes with Mrs Robinson

A Principal Talks to Her Bangladeshi School in Daily Assembly



Angela M.V. Robinson



Angela Robinson

Five Minutes with Mrs Robinson



Bushra



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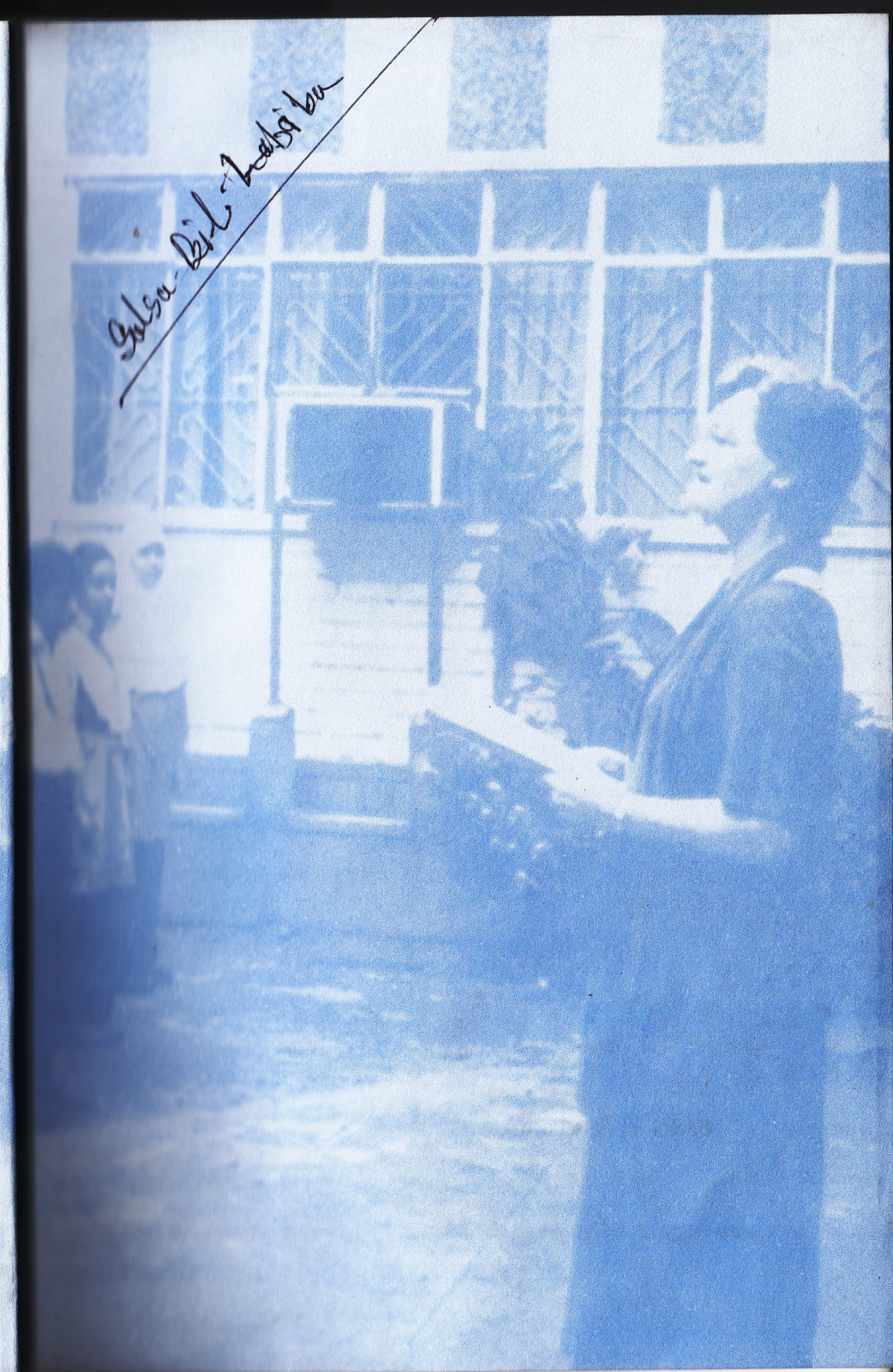
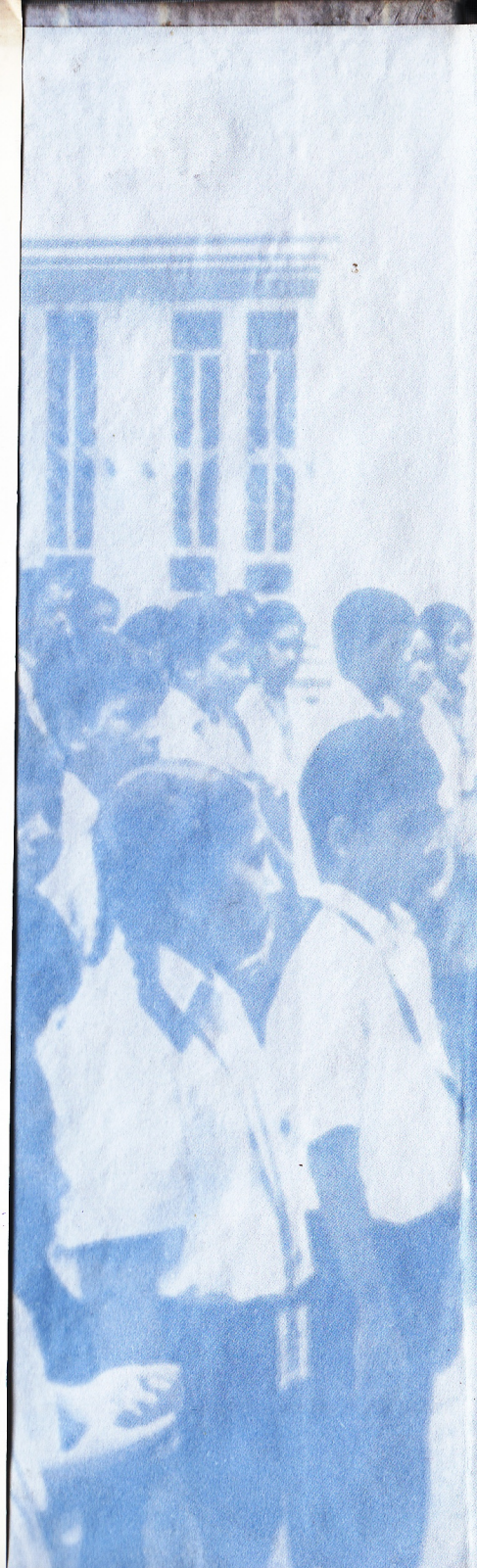


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The author heard Harold Loukes, a tutor at the Oxford Department of Education in 1960, say that assemblies were about 'moral values in a prestige setting'. She thinks that is true and wishes others in education not to ignore the opportunity and responsibility presented to them. Her 5-minute morning assemblies were aimed to provoke the listener to think about the connection between belief and behaviour and, hopefully, choose what is right and true. Now in book form, the aim for the reader is the same.

Here are a collection of 106 assemblies, written between January and July 2003 with topics that include many PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and citizenship issues including current affairs, bullying, racism, friendship, cooperation, feeling positive, making responsible choices and encouraging well-being as individuals, families, schools, nations and world. This book is a must read for any school community.

Tk. 250



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in Daily Assembly

(Volume 0)

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To Professor Hayne
with best wishes

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(Volume I)

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to Mrs Robinson
with best wishes
Angela M.V. Robinson

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*I dedicate this book to all those children whose faces were turned towards me at Assembly time.
May God bless them, indeed!*

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Preface

These talks were given between January 2003 and July 2003 in The British School in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I had arrived in November 2002 and asked for there to be a School Assembly every morning that January (they had not been regular before) simply to create an opportunity for the pupils to get to know me and for me to begin to share with both pupils and teachers my understanding of what it meant to be members of our school. The school lined up – the little Year 2s on the right (6/7 years old) and the big Year 11s on the left (15/16 years old). We said the school prayer together (see the comments on it in Assemblies 32–42), which was a tradition before I came, sang the Bangladesh National Anthem – with those wonderful words by Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore – and then there was my little address for 5 minutes. We later added some physical exercises to start with. When I began to suspect that what was happening was something important, Assembly just kept going. I hope to edit and publish the Assemblies of September 2003 – June 2006, if there is a good response to this one.

The topics I chose were simply those that ‘came up’ as part of school life and of my reading of the Daily Star (the leading English-language newspaper here) and the Guardian Weekly. They included topics covering our school (e.g. 8, 31, 68, 75, 78,) education (93, 101) our world (17a, 73, 79, 83, 96, 97) word study (15.21.43.103) our country (18.24.28) our families (74, 77) and the Millenium Resolution (56-61). They range from incidents in the school to events in other countries, like the story of the conjoined twin sisters in Iran (93). I fear that some of our pupils do not take much interest in the wider world and I have been aiming to motivate them to do so. I tried to follow the great rule, **KISS** (Keep It Simple, Stupid) in both language and content but

not to talk 'down' to them, and not to avoid topics that might be 'controversial'. One of the purposes of education, after all, is to help young people to *think*. I spoke slowly and, not having a microphone, but being blessed with a father who sent me to elocution classes at an early age, I hope I was audible. I was very touched, at a time when we had our Assembly in the ground floor 'garage' of our school, with some of our parents lingering outside the bars, that a father rushed up to me after an Assembly, obviously annoyed, and demanded that the Management should provide a microphone as they could not hear me properly outside!

Some years ago, some research was done, to find out what it was that made a good school. The verdict was: 'leadership and a commonly accepted code of values'. When I shared this with my late brother, Tony Pedlar (Chairman of the family department stores in Southport, Merseyside, UK) he said, "Of course! It is true of all organisations." He used to meet all the employees in the local Arts Centre once a month, and talk to them. I do not know, actually, how anyone can lead any organization, unless he or she talks to those working in it about what are its targets, how, it is hoped, they will be met and what sort of people they have to be to do it! In the case of an educational organization, the target has to be life itself, life in all its fullness. In fact, the school motto is 'Education for a life-time.'

People are always writing to the newspapers saying that the young need moral direction, ethical teaching, visionary direction – and so forth. So who is doing it, I ask? It's a bit like education in reproductive health matters, actually. Everyone is absolutely convinced that someone should be doing it but few are volunteering and those that *are* doing it usually get criticized for not doing it acceptably in the eyes of those who have no intention of doing it themselves! Well, this is my attempt to actually 'do it'!

I remember a lecturer at the Oxford Department of Education, a remarkable Quaker called Harold Loukes. He defined school assemblies as 'Moral values in a prestige setting.' Some of us were shocked at such a modest aim. We had been brought up in

the 1950s in Britain, when all school assemblies included a hymn, Bible reading and prayer and we thought we were going to do something 'religious'! However, the definition stuck with me and I offer it to you as something to think about. I also introduced the British curriculum's PSHE – Personal, Social and Health Education – in the Junior School. I must thank my Junior School for sharing their lives so openly with me that I was able to adjust so much of what I said to their real lives. But then that is one of the wonderful things about teaching. Real teachers do not only work hard and give of themselves, they also receive a great deal from the children. I am especially grateful for this as my husband died 13 years ago and we had no children but, as a teacher, I can say, "I have many children." I am also very grateful to have experienced no prejudice about my being a Christian minister in a school that is almost exclusively Muslim. Many Bangladeshis tell me how much they benefited from their Mission School education and speak gratefully of the Christian teachers they had and those that are still here.

Because I considered my little Assembly talks very important, each one took me more or less an hour to write, five evenings a week. My aim was to make each one as simple and yet as thoughtful as possible. After all, to ask anyone, especially a child, to listen to you, is rather cheeky! When so many seemed to be actually listening, it became both a privilege and a responsibility. Dear Reader, what about curling up on the sofa with your child and trying to share one a day? After all, it is only for 5 minutes....

June 2006

Angela M.V. Robinson (Rev Mrs)

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE
Assembly 1 - January 5th 2003

School Prayer

O Almighty God
Pour down thy blessings upon those who are now here.
Prosper our labours and protect us
From all things hurtful, both to soul and body.
Preserve us from sin and selfishness
And make us generous and brave, pure and true,
In all our work and in all our play.
Amen.

— *The British School in Dhaka*