

# Rohit Dandiya



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**Health:** Reasonably good for age- usual aches and pains; I exercise regularly-at least 40 minutes of walking & light weights. I also meditate daily.  
I enjoy reading, cooking, travelling and music

## Spouse

### **Bharati Dandiya**

owns Montessori Schools in Jupiter, Florida



## Daughter & Spouse

### **Pia Alag Dandiya**

Business executive at Apple, in Chicago

### **Navneet Alag**

Healthcare investor, in Chicago

## Daughter

### **Sonia**

executive at Google, in New York



**Note:** I am retired from active medical practice and do some consulting work. I am spending a lot of time with my father and discovering that Jaipur is an amazing city that has so much to offer. I am also working on polishing my spoken Marwari.

## My Article about SMS and memories is attached below:



After years and years of hard work and planning, the dreaded PMT (Pre Medical Test) was finally over and we were admitted to SMS Medical College in Jaipur, Rajasthan. A perfunctory and easy interview was the last step. I remember this interview like it was yesterday.

Dr. Consul, an ophthalmologist—a robust and powerful man—was the then Principal of SMS Medical College and Chairperson of this interview committee. Alongside him was the mild-mannered, soft-spoken Dr. ML Gupta, Professor of Physiology. It was a quick and pleasant interview to assign me to one of the five medical colleges in the state, and to ensure that the paperwork was in order. In those days, paperwork was supreme. I was assigned to (Sawai Man Singh) SMS Medical College Jaipur, to my relief.

As I think back, the main college building and the façade of the campus looked quite similar to what it is now. Except for the addition of the library building, there does not appear to be much physical change. Then, as now, there was an easy and casual look about the whole institution.

Before the euphoria of being accepted to the medical college was over, SMS opened its doors to us in September 1971. Prior to that, new books were purchased, many of which were written and printed overseas and therefore were very glossy, heavy and threatening! We were quite impressed with the books, and therefore ourselves. White clothing was also made for us, because in the initial months we were allowed to wear only white as a part of our prolonged initiation to the college and medical world.

Now was the time to face the dreaded ragging, an old English collegiate tradition that had taken its own virulent form here at SMS. The white clothes prescribed to us enhanced our visibility and supposedly symbolized our naivety. Ragging at SMS ranged from simple ridicule and verbal harassment to what could be considered both mental and physical abuse. Somehow these unpleasant months passed and we were slowly allowed to be comfortable in our new environment. The memories of the ragging slowly receded and melted in the stress and merriment that followed in the months and years ahead of us. I hear this form of ragging has been abandoned. It really served no purpose at all, except to cause angst and fear in the new students.



The Terror of Ragging

The first lecture at the college was by Dr. Pathak, Professor of Anatomy. It was in a very impressive, but dull and cavernous, auditorium near the principal's office. I remember sitting there with a heavy heart wondering how I could endure this life for 5 years! Dr. Pathak's lecture was very comforting. He was a very charming man with an informal air about him. His lecture was about embryology, and he described the position of the fetus in the womb as that of a nai bahu, sitting all curled up, while being examined by her new in laws! We all smiled with comfort and happiness, hoping all our lectures would be so folksy and enjoyable. For a moment, I thought that the next 5 years could be bearable.

Dr. Mahesh Verma, another professor of anatomy, was a quick favorite as he was very expressive and descriptive in his style. In one lecture he put his hands out and waved them, 'these are the fallopian tubes and your body is the uterus!' I have never forgotten that analogy! I remember Neelam Bapna for her perpetual smile and a happy countenance. Dr. Jagdish Choudhary was another memorable figure in the department of anatomy. Even in those days he looked like model walking out of GQ! He had a brooding temperament to match, and a heart soft as velvet. I was very fond of him and always thought of him as much a friend as a teacher.



Pathology had the highest per capita of female teachers, always in crisp cotton sarees, we all felt there was an unannounced contest of who wore the crispest of them all. One could not help but think, 'Pathology specimens on the wall who is the crispest of them all...' The professor Dr. Sangal was a great teacher, and like a true professor, gave us concepts more than just raw data. His description of the antibody was unique. He emphasized that it was a protective chemical produced by the immune system in response to any foreign chemical that challenged it, including that from the outer space. A difficult concept presented so elegantly.

While the lecture halls were always a lively forum, the SMS campus brewed with energy of all different kinds. The yearly student body elections were always a raucous affair, with much high-powered political wheeling and dealing. The whole festival lasted two weeks and was followed by many celebrations by the victors; and promises and hopes of victories by the vanquished. Although very political, the whole affair was generally quite fair and honest, and surprisingly free of any political connections with the University of Rajasthan where the student elections were an extension of mainstream state politics. This was an exciting aspect of SMS for all medical students.

With that said, no discussion about life in those times can be complete without a mention of the 'medical self respect', and the bravado that supported it. In those days, no cinema hall could refuse a ticket to any medical student and additionally had to provide a medical discount! If any student felt aggrieved or insulted by an agency or a person, he would report it to his seniors. This would result in a quick retribution of kinds for the hapless offender. All students had a general sense of comfort and pride in being a part of SMS Medical College. This feeling extended to learning and living spaces. The hostels were very happy and loud areas. Simple in provisions and conveniences yet full of bonhomie and joyfulness that pervaded the air. Alcohol was consumed in moderation (perhaps a cost issue!) and the use of drugs was rare and



generally frowned upon. The dhobi also contributed his own flare to the SMS experience. He always had a special significance as he was always late and the few clothes that the students had were always in a circuit with him. This was especially important with the senior students who had started dating their female counterparts. We drank chai almost continuously, a thick sugary syrup that was brewed over and over again till it was reduced to 75% of its original volume! It was generally boiled on a broken, porcelain electric stove which was almost always connected to the electric outlet with bare wires! Its menacing red glow is still vivid in my mind. This carefree lifestyle was interrupted during exams but resumed promptly once they were over.

Reflecting back, the college was, in a way, a big melting pot. Almost half the students were of rural background. The other half was city dwellers. Initially there were some differences between the two groups. Very soon all these misgivings disappeared, and friendships blossomed between students of all backgrounds. Regardless of their backgrounds, students performed equally well in both academic and non-academic pursuits. All students learned from each other and friendships that blossomed have lasted over 35 years and will surely go on for a lifetime.



With my hand on Grey's Anatomy, I thee propose

The clinical years were quite different from the initial years as there were less traditional classes. Students were broken in small groups and clinics. The primary hospitals for instruction were SMS and Zenana Hospital. Rotation at Zenana (Ob and Gyn) was akin to banishment from mainstream student life. But, we learned a lot in those weeks due to the seriousness of the whole program. Trips to Naila, an outpost of the college one hour away, were accepted with mixed feelings as we were "bussed" to the center like young schoolboys and girl. We used this opportunity to get closer to our female classmates, and many a relationship that started there ended in marriages. Clinical rotations were intense hands-on sessions where our fundamentals of medicine were established. My only regret is that we did not make use the full opportunities presented to us and spent more than a fair share of our time drinking tea and 'shooting the wind' at the thadi.



SMS Medical College Hospital

As years went on the boyish abandon and euphoria slowly ebbed. This was replaced by plans and talk of our future. More time was spent on studying and worrying about post graduate studies. Many started planning moving to other countries; the favorite foreign destinations for our class were Zambia due to ease of getting a visa and reliable job possibilities, and of course the UK and USA.

Looking back, could things have been better? Yes, of course. We, as students, should have used more of the opportunities provided to us. The curriculum should have emphasized a more hands-on approach as in other countries where medical students functioned as virtual interns. The clinical professors were just visitors in our lives, with very little contact with the undergraduate students. The latter problem is not unique to SMS. In fact the erstwhile President (Vice Chancellor) of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers recently made a similar criticism of professors of this lofty university. He incurred such wrath of his faculty (he also dangerously stated that women may not have an innate ability to learn math), that he had to resign from his position. So, we must be careful with this analysis.

Anyhow, we graduated in the summer of 1976. Most students stayed behind in Jaipur while many went overseas. Classmate romances matured to marriages. Time took its usual course, but not toll! Almost all stories ended in happiness and success. Whenever I think of my days in college, I get a warm happy sensation in my heart. I think of the free happy times and an eager excitement for the future. But it was not all rosy all the time. We spent weeks huddled in our rooms studying for our exams, fatigued and fearful of bad grades. We were petrified by the subjectivity and randomness of viva voce exams. We were terrified of how a single failure could have a long-term effect on our career. Looking back, in reality, life was not always easy, as it seemed. But the memories are beautiful, the outcome desirable. That is really what matters. Would I go through this experience all over again?

Yes! In a heartbeat. Again, and again...

P.S. I just spent many lovely days at Nawalgarh and Jaipur with SMS classmates and old friends Daulat Haldea, Shiv Harsh, and Dr. Brijena Budania. We all got together after many decades and I am happy to say, nothing had changed amongst us except our age. It was like we had never been away.

I was so full of this lovely time we had together that on my way back to Florida, while waiting at Newark Airport, I wrote this article on my cell phone!