

International Reunion of Nairobi High Schools
The Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Canada
9th September 2018 to 14th September 2018

ESS Alumni have organized several reunions in the U.K. and in Kenya. In September 2018, ESS Alumni together with a group of ESS alumni from Toronto organized their first-ever reunion in Canada that also included alumni from various Nairobi schools. Over 130 alumni and spouses, representing about 15 schools, attended the highlight event on September 9, 2018, at the Toronto Hilton/Markham Suites Conference Centre. Almost forty percent of the attendees had travelled from the UK, USA, Kenya, Spain and other locations within Canada.

The evening of September 9th event began with a meet-and-greet reception, with old friends excitedly catching up with each other over drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Some reportedly were meeting their schoolmates after 50 years or more! There was a lot to catch up with and get reacquainted. Groups of attendees posed in front of the Reunion Banner, stylized as a fusion between the Toronto skyline and a Kenyan landscape – designed by Sati Bhamra, ex- Technical High School. The photographer capturing superb shots of happy faces was Mohamed Ashraf, another Technical High alumnus. Check these pictures on the website www.essalumni.org.uk

The Chair of the Toronto Reunion Committee, Nilam Bedi, began the formal part of evening by inviting Elder Michael Cheena to offer the opening indigenous prayer and recognition that the gathering was occurring on sacred lands under the stewardship of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation. In his welcoming speech, Nilam noted the fact that so many alumni had travelled long distances to attend the reunion must be a testimonial to the influence of their schooling. Several ex-teachers from various Nairobi schools were introduced.

Nilam introduced Jayant Tanna, Chair of ESS Alumni who had encouraged the idea of this reunion in North America through his conversations with the alumni like Rajeshwar Luthra in the USA and Nilam in Canada. Jayant spoke about his own recollection of the school and its teachers in the early 1960s. He also spoke about ESS Alumni membership, about its activities including 2016 Reunion and its support for Eastleigh High School in Nairobi. He thanked the 26 members from the UK who made the largest overseas contingent at the Reunion. He congratulated the Toronto committee for organizing the event and for making it such a huge success. Jayant hoped that this event would be a start for many other events in the future in Toronto.

Nilam also introduced Parvin Syal, thanking him for the superb job he and done in overseeing the compilation, editing and production of the souvenir magazine for the reunion, which contained not only profiles of many of those attending but also interesting and insightful articles. Parvin had received huge support from Jayant in writing articles, collecting profiles, pictures and advertisements for the magazine.

Other members of the Toronto Organizing Committee, including Balbir Jandu, Jatinder Chabra and Iqbal Butt shepherded the proceedings of the evening that included a walk down memory lane, a fabulous dinner prepared by Chef Jefry of the Hilton, musical entertainment by Toronto artist Munni and Afzal Subhani. Kenya Airways, the Hilton Hotel, Edward Jones Investments and Yashvir Varma provided prizes for the raffle.

An online evaluation of the 2018 Reunion was sent to all attendees, requesting their assessment of various aspects of the reunion, their suggestions for future reunions and other observations. A detailed compilation of the results is available but in general, the Reunion was very well received and many attendees mentioned their interest in keeping in touch more regularly, whether through formal events or informal get-togethers.

Each table was given sticky notes for jotting down their responses to the following three questions:

- Highlight of their attendance at the reunion
- 3-5 words describing their high school experience
- How the focus of life has changed since high school

Answers to these questions are attached – you may find these interesting!

In financial terms, the event was also a huge success. The accounts show an Income of CA\$17,015.45 made up of entrance fees, goodwill messages, adverts and raffle income. The expenditure of CA\$14,904.78 was mainly on venue and food, magazine printing and entertainment. The surplus of CA\$2,110.67 will be used for organizing similar events in the future as Toronto committee members may decide.

While the evening sadly had to come to an end, the presence of those visiting Toronto for the reunion became a catalyst for numerous get-togethers in the homes of local alumni, restaurants, golf clubs and city tours. These gatherings rekindled old friendships and struck new ones.

Nilam Bedi, Chair – Toronto Reunion Committee

Reunion Committee Members

Nilam Bedi, Jayant Tanna, Nisar Butt, Iqbal Butt, Balbir Jandu, Jatinder Chhabra and Parvin Syal

Questions Posted on Flip Boards – Here's What You Said!!

What has been the highlight of your coming to the Reunion?

- Meeting old friends and making new ones
- Knowing I'm at least 10 years younger than everyone else!
- Reconnecting with people not only from my school but also from other schools
- Dancing
- Have come to know so many new people
- I thought I had grown into an interesting person – almost everyone here seems equally interesting. Why didn't I keep in touch with these people?
- Making lots of connections from Nairobi
- Rekindling friendships
- What a great idea for some to volunteer and pull off such an event – much more enjoyable than I could have imagined
- My first reunion – met lot of new people
- All the lunches, dinners and conversations with hosts in Toronto. We are all “on a summer holiday” a la Cliff Richard
- Some of the quieter classmates have blossomed into charismatic beings while some of the loud and popular guys from then are now serious and sedate
- Meeting a lot of old school friends, some after 50 years!
- Met many local friends I hadn't seen for a while
- Coming across people whose faces and shapes have changed but the voices
- Reconnecting, remembering, reflecting
- Entering more emails and phone numbers into the VIP section of my contact list
- Hearing Kenyan music! (Instead of Bhangra, which we hear all the time in Brampton!)
- Meeting friends and foes! Recognizing old faces!
- Did not meet any classmates or schoolmates; however, met people from Nairobi with common acquaintances and some Toronto friends; discovered what a small world it is. ENJOYED THE EVENING IMMENSELY
- Meeting old friends, some after 50 years

What 3-5 words best describe your high school experience?

- My high school (Duchess) was wonderful
- Hard work does pay off
- Wonderful
- Lasting friendships
- Surprising and amazing
- Having Mr. Shant as my teacher
- Leaving high school
- It was an eye opener
- Coming of age
- Santu's gol gappas at recess

- It was a small world (get into trouble at school, teachers spills the beans to father during their evening stroll together, all hell breaks loose at home)
- Brought me out of my shell
- Scouting, Shan Cinema, Saturday mornings in town
- Friendships, knowledge, focus
- Memorable days
- Lasting friendships and “prefects”
- Learning, fostering friendships, adventure
- Going from a primary school to high school – becoming a teenager
- Memories of a lifetime. Strong friendships
- Being with friends, Intercommunity relationships
- Mischiefs galore, group of friends walking to school, no worries in the world

In what way has your focus in life changed compared to when you were in high school?

- The circumstances changed my focus – establishing myself in a new country I had never dreamt about
- Then life was fun, now fun is life
- That time only to pass exams and try to get ahead – was that worth it?
- It’s called growing up
- It is not the world I thought
- Live life to the fullest
- Then: Gulli danda, zero cost, lots of fun, every one ready to play instantly. Now: Golf Club Membership, very expensive, difficult to find a foursome, mostly frustration
- I should have become a plumber
- Becoming aware of paying my own bills
- Every moment of those years was wonderful and to be cherished, but with the passing years I learnt to accept whatever comes my way
- Not self-conscious anymore, now that I am grown up
- Life centred around friends at that time. Now friends are outside your daily circle of activity. Miss those days.
- From exams to survival – maintaining health and relationships
- From being carefree to being a responsible person
- Volunteering more and more every year
- Had to study harder and change lifestyle when I went to England (Coventry) as a teenager.
- In every which way, for the better!
- More spiritual and connection with friends
- Should have kept in touch with all high school friends
- Days were predictable and endless and had all the time for our friends. 12 hour days long year around; now, even with 16 plus hours in the summer, don’t know where time goes. We seem to have little time for friends. We are busy, busy, and busy!