



Alumni Xpress



The Newsletter of the
A ssociation of Medical A lumni

Christian Medical College & Hospital
Ludhiana (Punjab) INDIA

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MARCH 2007

**This Issue is dedicated to the loving memory of Dr. Betty Cowan,
Born 10th May, 1917 / Died 10th September, 2006 Aged 89**

Prayer of Thanksgiving for Dr. Betty Cowan

Especially this day we thank you for Betty Cowan: our sister-in-law, aunty Betty, cousin, & friend- a sister, mother, & mentor in Christ to many. We thank you for Elspeth, Jane, Helen, Pam, The Carers & all family & friends who rallied round to help Betty over her last weeks & months with us. Betty is now free from the frailty & frustration of this world for which we are grateful, yet you know the pain of parting we feel. Draw near to comfort us and all who mourn this day we pray.

We thank you for Betty's days among us: for childhood & youthful days, with younger brother Billy born & brought up in Ingleston Farm, New Abbey, near Dumfries. When her mother died, at 16 becoming lady of the house & on her father's death working the farm with Billy; no stranger to hard work.

For working days: after studying at Skerries College & Glasgow University, serving as a doctor in Dumfries Infirmary alongside Elspeth (1951-1958); called by God to The Christian Medical College & Hospital, Ludhiana, North India, where she saw what Jesus was doing and joined in;



*Death and unto death, a myriad memories arise
Deathless, we thank you friend that once you lived*

in time becoming Professor of Medicine, Head of the Department of Medicine, the Principal, and pioneer in the community health department. For a large part of this time recognized & supported by the Church of Scotland. Officially retiring at 70, unofficially returning year after year, till only recently, to help where she could. Continuing her deputation tours of Scotland for as long as she was able, from Dumfriesshire up to Sutherland & Caithness, to pass on news & points for prayer.

For holidays: along with Elspeth, toeing the caravan to Ulapool, Gairloch & Inverness, visiting the Keswick convention, and touring the mission stations of Cashmere, Nepal & Rajasthan.

For worship-filled days: brought up in New Abbey Parish Church, where she taught in the Sunday School, later encountering the living Christ in a conversion experience at 28 as a first year medical student. One who came to believe implicitly in the power of prayer and desire of God that our whole lives be given over to your service & praise. An inspiration to colleagues, students & patients down through the years and spiritual mother to many.

For the purpose & pleasure Betty found in faith, work, family & friendships we thank you; also for that found: in reading her Bible, Christian books, detective novels & biographies. In Scrabble & cooking a good curry. In watching The News, Neighbours, Doctors, & detectives like Morse & Poirot, on the telly, latterly with help of subtitles. In keeping in touch with friends & family through countless typed letters, which provide the base material for her autobiography. In caring for her cat Minnie.

We fondly remember: How Betty didn't need to sit a driving test to get her licence at 17. How she was fond of animals and reared black lab's on her farm. How Betty was struck by the life of Edith Brown & the words of Aileen Pollock when she spoke of 'how many were interested in coming to Ludhiana but that the few came'. How Betty left Scotland on Burns Day 1958 & sailed to India only to be told that 'there wasn't much for her to do'. How Betty was awarded, for services to the people of India, The O.B.E. How Betty loved to return to Ludhiana but latterly was concerned that ill health might make her a hindrance rather than a help, & how delighted staff & students were to see her back, naming their new staff buildings after her. How the title for Betty's book 'Doctor, may I run with you?' were words from a student Doctor which stopped her in her tracks and challenged her to slow down. How she described the call to work with the needy through Community Health like 'Seeing The Light'. How Betty was a pioneer in this field and inspired many others to share her vision & passion. How she saw many children through school & supported many other students through college, her home an open house where they gathered for prayer, Bible study & sharing. How taxi drivers were intrigued by this white lady who spoke such fluent Hindi & Punjabi. How deputation & representing the college took Betty all over the U.K. & across the U.S. How Elspeth & Betty were like David & Jonathan in the wonderful way they supported each other. How Betty was fond of her sister-in-law Kathleen, nieces & nephews Diana, Richard, Elizabeth, Iain & David, along with her cousins & great nephews & nieces. How, before heading off on deputation yet again, she'd half seriously ask, "Do you think they'll have me?". How Betty had a sharp, dry wit which had you wondering until the smile started to crack from the mouth across her face. How Betty had a tendency to tell her G.P what to prescribe her & was providentially spared back in 85 when, almost paralysed by an operation, she noticed her allergy to a pain killer & diagnosed herself with T.B. How at Fullarton Church Home Groups, Prayer Meetings & services we passed Betty's hearing aid microphone around to include her and how she was often the first to pray!

We can imagine that, on entering heaven, one of the first things Betty has done is throw away her walking & hearing aids to wholeheartedly join in the glorious praise of her Saviour. We thank you for this: Christ centered, constructively forthright, dedicated, determined, focused, fruitful, generous, self-effacing, alert, quick witted, faithful, excellent teacher, doctor & friend. As one Indian colleague said on hearing of Betty's death, surely "The gates of heaven opened wide today!" Gracious God, You knew Betty with all her strengths and weakness, help us to let her go into your hands, and as we come face to face with our own mortality once again, may we find in you Lord Jesus, our Saviour, God and Friend. Amen

Dr. Betty Cowan : A legend of CMC

There were so many aspects of her persona that one cannot do justice to Dr. Cowan by putting down a few lines about her. I came into closer contact with her initially during our internship in Narangwal. She would visit the center weekly and we would discuss all our difficult chest/TB cases with her. She had deep involvement in community medicine and made invaluable contribution in this area. Her concepts of priority child visits, under-3-years girl child care and the family folder system, her in-depth knowledge of the community and their problems, always was a source of inspiration and admiration for all of us. Her subtle and dry Scottish sense of humor would keep us smiling for days after her visit.

The next opportunity to know her better came when I moved in as her neighbor in Lal Kothi and saw another facet of her personality. I came to know of her efforts to look after her family during the difficult times when she lost both her parents, her battle with Measles otitis and a subsequent hearing deficit. To fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor, she took admission into Medical school at a comparatively older age. Her journey from completing her medical education to CMC Ludhiana was motivated by her desire to help the sick and needy and thereby serve God.

Ma'am had great love for all things living. She had adopted a stray cat, Minnie, and made elaborate arrangements for her movements within the house as well as for looking after her during her absence. Despite her fragile skin getting injured repeatedly with cat paws, she continued to look after Minnie. Her quiet contributions to tuition fee of some of the school children, to treatment costs of many a poor patients all were evidence of her concern and kindness for fellow humans. Despite frail health, she continued her annual visits to the institution and always made some memorable contributions, be it the centenary celebrations, setting up the Archives library, updating the alumni addresses or even bringing in monetary help for a new girls hostel.

Ma'am we'll miss you always although we know you are happy and at peace to be with your maker.

Adieu Ma'am

Dr. Jugesh Chhatwal

Batch of 1975

President, Assoc. of Medical Alumni, CMC

Professor

Deptt. of Pediatrics, CMC & H



The Legacy of Dr. Betty Cowan

In September 1971, on my visit to CMCH, I met Dr. Ken Scott, Director and Dr. Betty Cowan, the then Acting HOD of Medicine. A month later, I joined the Department of Medicine. In a way Dr. Cowan was largely responsible for getting me here.

On my second day in CMC (17th October, 1971), Dr. Cowan took me for Blue Unit grand rounds. Dr. David Troughton and Dr. Satija were also in the unit. Within a day or two, I noticed that Dr. Cowan was a hard task-master, an astute clinician, a workaholic and above all a compassionate and caring doctor. She could enthuse her colleagues and juniors and always lead by example.

She could not brook delay in work or laziness. Yet she was full of life and very human with her own sense of humor. She could be caustic and sarcastic but always helpful and never vindictive.

Those days Dr. Cowan had too much on her hands- Hematology, Blood Bank, Medical Research Lab, Staff and Student Health Service, and a whole lot of MD theses. She never walked... she always ran! Often she scribbled a few words on her left palm. She wrote sentences which ran into half a page or a full page with or without punctuation. Often she would verbally explain what she meant to convey.

Acute folate deficiency was an obsession with Dr. Cowan. She was the first to draw attention to this easily curable clinical state. If you forgot or delayed the administration of Injection folic acid, you "had it from her".

Dr. Cowan struck me as a true missionary- simple, honest, outspoken, committed and tremendously concerned about the poor masses of India. I always admired her clarity of mind and incisive analytical capability. She rendered many difficult problems liable to simple solutions.

I had my share of differences with her- on the need for a comprehensive service in CMC and on the imperative need for better remuneration for CMC Faculty. In all fairness I must confess we understood each other and maintained most cordial relations. This is a sign of maturity and dignity which alas many of us lack.

As Principal, she helped me in improving the CMC library. We used her good offices to get help from the British Council in the form of several precious books.

Dr. Cowan was Angrez Kaur to the rural folks as she identified herself with them. Her contribution to the Community Health Department is tremendous. Many senior doctors owe their position and career to her. My humble salute to Dr. Cowan!

God bless her soul.

Dr. K.L.Dhar

Ex. Professor

Deptt. of Medicine, CMC & H



Remembering Dr. Cowan My Teacher My Guide

Looking back, even I feel surprised at what a strong influence this gentle determined lady in Salwar Kameez had on my life. Far away from her motherland, Scotland, the heart that beat within that frail frame was that of a very humane being, with empathy for the excluded. Her thoughts, her writings and her work reflected her concerns and she understood the health needs of the people and the concept of the community health better than a large number of health personnel born here and engaged in similar work. What made her different was her conviction and commitment along with a genuine selflessness that comes very naturally to those who pursue higher goals and live out their faith in the truest sense.

My first reaction and impression of her was of curiosity and part fascination as I watched her go to fro at a fast pace, with a very determined look on her face, most of the time, in simple salwar kameez, the attire of Punjabi women. I watched her cycle to the Gulab Phool Gunj, the urban slum field project, come hail or shine.

As a teacher, she taught us Medicine but added the social dimension whether it was related to nutrition or tuberculosis. She would always ask during the sessions as well as the examinations how the patients would be dealt within the Bush i.e. periphery, where diagnostic and other facilities were limited. She expected proper work up of the patients especially if they were anemic. She would not accept the commonly made excuse "the patient did not pass stools therefore the test could not be done". She insisted that a rectal swab be done to exclude hook worm infestation.

The fact that there was so much of nutritional anemia and neglect of baby girls in Punjab continued to be of deep concern to her. She did a lot of research related to nutrition and wrote about the gender discrimination, the sex ratio and how the girls were called 'Akki' which meant 'stone'. When I read about increasing anemia in children, pregnant women, I recall how much Dr. Cowan emphasized the role of nutrition and the relationship of malnutrition and ill health.

Dr. Cowan was my MD thesis guide. My thesis was labor intensive and time consuming. I spent hours to see the medical records after work and in the process, realized the importance of legible handwriting and good clinical notes. Dr. Cowan wanted me to go beyond what was essentially required from the clinical medicine point of view to include distance traveled, amount spent by the patient and whether the problem was preventable or not, trivial or serious. My thesis conclusion was that a large percentage of patients coming to the MOPD were suffering from 'preventable' and trivial problems. These could have been addressed much earlier closer to their place, at a lesser cost, so that patients coming to the tertiary care center could be given more time and attention.

There were several sessions where I would come to her with my work done, to her house at night, weekdays, and weekends. She would suddenly charge off and come back ultimately telling me to come and discuss it in the kitchen, as she made ginger sweets. I loved to watch her enthusiasm and the sheer joy of involvement in this creative cooking exercise.

Incidentally after my housejob in medicine, I had gone to Landour Community Hospital in 1974 in Mussoorie.

Dr. Prior had helped to organize it. When Dr. Cowan wrote to me to come back and do my M.D., I did not show any interest and was fairly disinclined. Dr. Cyril Dutt, Medical Superintendent replied on her behalf telling me that I would realize the value of the 2 letters (i.e. M.D.) later in life and that I should feel privileged that my teacher was writing to me more than once to come and do my M.D. Long after I did my M.D., I asked Dr. Cowan why she had bothered to write and call me to do M.D. when there were so many people wanting to do it, more so because I was a non-Christian. She looked at me and said that during my posting in Bara Narangwal, I had diagnosed several new cases of TB even though there were interns posted every 3 months and a Rural Medical Officer. She said that it meant I was diligent and did my posting work seriously. Health work is having two components academic and the practical.

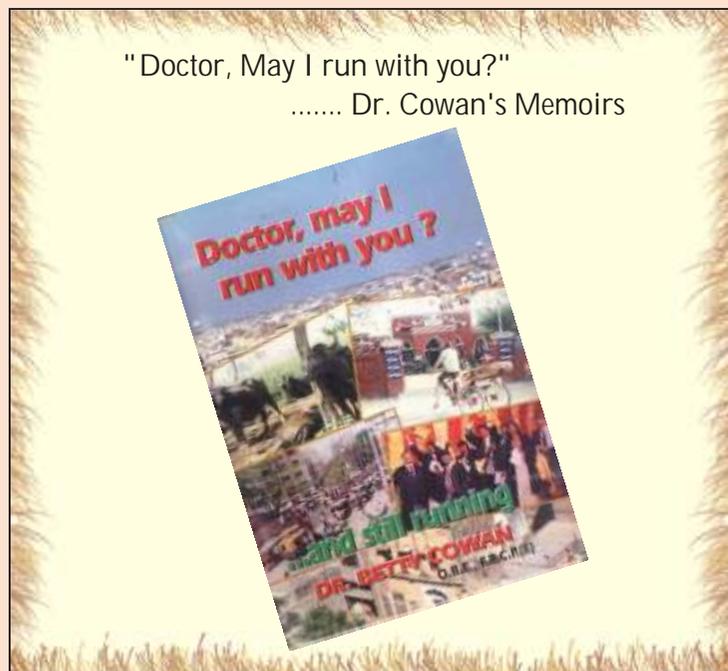
Much later in Bihar, in the coalmine areas in tribal areas, when I saw non-availability of anti-TB drugs and proliferation of irrational drug combinations being prescribed for trivial illnesses, I realized it was because the concern for diseases of poverty had not been deeply ingrained.

My engagement with Rational Use of Drugs, Drug Policy, which included filing and fighting Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court has been because of what I learnt in CMC, from my teacher Dr. Betty Cowan who I called to my close friends as 'Meri Betty'.

Even though I think of Dr. Cowan often, from 'Teachers Day' to whenever talk of my Alma Mater, CMC comes up. I feel proud and privileged having been her student. Whenever the issue of Medical Education comes up, I always emphasize that today's need in our country is not only academic excellence but also the need to take up the cause of the large numbers of people who are marginalized and vulnerable as social and economic inequities increase.

People like Dr. Cowan are special, as they touch the lives of so many, including me. I am proud to have been her student as well as a kindred soul.

Dr. Mira Shiva
Batch of 1968



"Doctor, May I run with you?"
..... Dr. Cowan's Memoirs

Setting up the Archives

During the centenary year, Dr. Cowan and her friend Dr. Elspeth Campbell were on a mission to compile a directory with batch wise names and current mailing addresses of all the alumni. She went about it with the thoroughness she was known for. Gradually and painstakingly, the directory was typed. It was to be kept in the Archives Exhibition so that visiting Alumni could add to it.

Putting together the Archives was a mammoth task, but Dr. Cowan worked untiringly and persistently. She involved the junior doctors from various departments, to whom she affectionately, and with a gentle touch of Scottish sarcasm referred to as her 'Army of slaves'.



I was one of those junior doctors and along with Dr. Ashish Maseeh, Dr. Premeeta Rawat, Dr. Anita Ramdas, Dr. Jennifer Samuel, Dr. Mathan Mammen, Dr. Sangeeta Mohan, Dr. S.C. Gupta, Mrs. Ninan, and senior doctors like Dr.(Mrs.) Sybil Singh and Dr. Arin Chatterjee.

Through many afternoons, we assisted Dr. Cowan and Dr. Campbell and added our own creative touches to assemble the pictures that tell the wonderful story of our Alma Mater. Dr. Cowan could identify almost everybody and date the pictures!

Dr. Arin Chatterjee's skill in calligraphy was utilized to add legends to the pictures and excerpts from the book 'Voice of a Stranger' on "Dr. Brown's board".



During the centenary celebrations the display was exhibited in the present Reading Room on the 1st floor of the Main Library. It has now been shifted to the Archives Room in the Library Basement. Anyone who visits CMC would find a

storehouse of memories and history there, and even a younger version of themselves in the group photograph of their batch!

The collection of the furniture from the rooms of Dame Edith Brown, her very own Bible and scores of photographs of the early days of Dr. Brown in England, her work in Ludhiana and faculty and students through the years since the inception of the institution is a treasure trove for history buffs.

Dr. Cowan inspired us with her many qualities as she created, piece by piece, the 'Archives' she had envisioned, and for us youngsters it was fun to help her in this endeavor. Needless to say, she did the major chunk of the work herself.

The Archives is a beautiful gift from Dr. Cowan to all the generations of CMC students and faculty!

Dr. Sheena Singh
(Batch of 1983)
Professor & Head
Dept. of Physiology
CMC & H



Dr Betty Cowan O.B.E

Dr. Betty Cowan, daughter of Mr. William Cowan, was born in Kirkcudbrightshire, Dumfries, Scotland on May 10, 1917. She died at home in Kilwinning, near Glasgow on September 10, 2006, aged 89 years.

While still in school she met Dr. Aileen Pollock in 1946, and that meeting left a lasting impact as it made her determined to become a doctor and to serve at the Christian Medical College in Ludhiana. Dr. Aileen Pollock was then the Principal-Director of this institution. Dr. Cowan obtained M.B.Ch.B from the Glasgow University in 1951 and the M.R.C.P from Edinburgh in 1955. She came to India in 1958. As was the custom, she attended the language school in Landour, Mussoorie to learn Hindi and Punjabi.

She joined the Department of Medicine on the 17th of February 1958, as a clinical assistant. In 1969, she became Professor and Head of the Department of Internal Medicine. She also became drawn to the health problems of rural India and started attending the Community Health Department. She regularly visited the rural outreach centers in Narangwal, Lalton Kalan and Jamalpur and the urban health center in Field Ganj. This gave her a ring side view of the 'real' health problems

of the poor. She started to work with underprivileged mothers and malnourished children, especially the vulnerable 'girl child'. She developed strategies to improve the nutrition of malnourished children. She also did work on the causes of anemia in rural Punjab. She was one of the pioneers of community medicine and many of the models developed by her in CMC were adopted by the Punjab Government.

She also held the post of Principal, Christian Medical College, Ludhiana for a period of two years (1982-84).

For her various contributions, she was awarded the O.B.E by Her Majesty the Queen. She often joked that this was given to her for 'old Betty's efforts.'

She officially retired in the late 1980's but continued to provide services on a voluntary basis, to the Department of Community Medicine. She also set up the archives and insisted that anyone connected to CMC had to pay a visit to the archives. By this time, her health started to fail and she developed multiple medical problems. She had to spend more and more time in Scotland especially during the summers, but always returned when the weather improved.

Dr. Cowan was a mentor to many in this institution and was always willing to guide anyone. She was not only a brilliant teacher, but a demanding one at that. She made sure that lessons were not only taught but also learnt. Her home was open to students. Many of us would take up her challenge of playing scrabble with her and sharing a meal after the game. An extremely disciplined person, she was industrious, and expected the same from anyone who worked with her. Theses would be corrected at 5:30 a.m. Humility was one of her endearing qualities. She lived simply, with few luxuries. She had an old record player, and loved to listen to her favourite hymns and Highland music. She was very compassionate and tried her best to help, be it a poor patient or a student in trouble.

She had a great sense of humor, which she probably got from her Celtic roots. She enjoyed reminding us that she was Scottish and not British, especially when someone did not introduce her appropriately. She loved CMC and till the end this institution was always in her thoughts. She will be remembered by many who had the good fortune of having their lives touched by her.

Dr. Basant Pawar
(Batch of 1973)
Professor & Head
Dept. of Nephrology
CMC & H



The Betty Cowan Apartments and the CMC Creche



Named after Dr. Cowan, this complex of six well designed houses in the campus is nestled between the landmark Gol Kothi and the Brown Road. The foundation stone was laid in 1997 by Mrs. Margaret Smith, the then Secretary of the Friends Of Ludhiana. The building was CMCH's tribute to the lady who gave the best years of her life to a place that she had made a home away from home. A large chunk of the funds for the construction was obtained due to Dr. Cowan's efforts.



Ever alert to the needs of her fellow workers at CMCH, in 1997, Dr. Betty Cowan took the initiative to open a Creche in a two room area of the Gol Kothi. Young children of parents who worked in CMC were cared for in the Creche for a nominal fee that was used to meet the daily expenses of the set up. The Creche was another example of her thoughtfulness for the needy who could not afford to have more costly and cumbersome alternative arrangements for their children while at work. Another one of her touching, caring acts that Dr. Cowan was known for! Sadly, the creche is not functional anymore. It may remain like this till one day, maybe.....another "good old Betty" might come along!

My Tribute to Dr. Cowan

My first contact with Dr. Betty Cowan was in the Medicine wards when I was a final year medical student. Her sarcastic comments confused me but her charming personality made me her admirer and follower. I had joined a movement called the 'students voluntary missionary movement' and later realized that she was a living example among us. Every Sunday we went with her to serve in the leprosy colony to distribute medicines and treat seasonal ailments.

Dr. Cowan was a wonderful teacher, researcher and physician and at that time made us aware of community based learning. She was a missionary and visionary, understanding the health problems in developing countries. She worked tirelessly to uplift health standards in rural Punjab.

Dr. Cowan adopted Indian attire and even learnt Punjabi to be an effective doctor. I can't forget her first sentence addressed to a patient, "Bibi kithe dard hundi"? ("Where is the pain, madam?")

She contracted tuberculosis while working in Ludhiana. One morning my husband (Late Dr. CM Singh) received a call from Dr. Mary Mathews that Dr. Cowan was not well. He rushed immediately. I had never seen him in such a hurry before. After receiving treatment she became well. Later, she sent a beautiful card thanking him (her student) for his services.

She was a friend and counselor as well. She came to my help when I had the added responsibility of looking after my family with my husband, a busy surgeon and gave me a part-time job in the staff and students health service. As my children grew older, I was able to do my post graduation in basic sciences, and I never looked back. I am grateful to her for finding a way for me to serve my Alma Mater when it was not easy for me to work full time.

Teachers like Dr. Betty Cowan were role models and were an embodiment of the qualities of love, service and dedication. It is these values that bind us together. CMC is richer when the Alumni join hands to serve and teach.

As I think of Dr. Cowan, these lines come to mind.....

*"As a tree eats not its fruits
Nor does the stream drink its own water
So also saints incarnate themselves
Not for self but for welfare of others."*

Dr. Mrs. Sybil Singh
Pioneer Batch of 1953



Dr. Betty Cowan ... the Journey



Photographs from " Doctor, May I run with you?"

Dr. Betty Cowan - Tributes

"Sad to hear that Angrez Kaur is no more"

"One of the best teachers we had"

"Excellent bedside clinician, teacher par excellence and above all an honest and fair minded human being. Her sense of justice and fairplay were exemplary. I feel a sense of personal loss on her departure to heaven."

"Selfless life of dedication"

"Outstanding physician and teacher but an amazing human being"

"She is no less than Mother Teresa for CMC"

"She had a great passion for teaching & a wonderful sense of humour. She deeply loved her students & tirelessly worked for CMC, even when she had become frail. She is one of the greatest persons who walked through the portals of our great Alma Mater, and will be remembered by all of us. We are all indebted to her, for her work was truly for HER King!"

OBITUARY

A teacher passes away!



Dr. S.D. Khanna, the Head of Department of Pathology at CMC Hospital, Ludhiana from 1974 to 1984, passed away in Dehradun on 19th February 2007. A teacher par excellence, he was a stickler for discipline, punctuality and meticulousness. All the students taught by Dr. Khanna and his colleagues had great respect and reverence for him and he left a deep impression in their minds. He was an excellent teacher of Pathology and would make the subject crystal clear to his students. They don't make teachers like him anymore. May his soul rest in peace!

Contribution for Alumni Xpress



We express our gratitude to Dr. Praveen K. Khosla, Batch of 1974 for his generous contribution of \$450.00 towards publication of the *Alumni Xpress*, at CMC, Ludhiana. We appreciate his concern and this kind gesture to support the bridge between the Alumni and its Alma mater.

Honour



It is a proud moment for all of us to know that Dr. Nirmal S. Mann, Batch of 1956 has been bestowed the honour of Master of American College of Physicians in 2006. This is a rare honour, even for American Physicians. Dr. Nirmal Mann has dedicated this award to all his teachers at CMC & Hospital. Sir, we are proud of you!

Please note a change in Contact Nos. :

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Just a Thought : If you think you can and if you think you can't, you are absolutely right

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