



## Youth Connections:

- ◆ Level One (Ages 5-7): Shireen Gandhi and Natasha Patel
- ◆ Level Two (Ages 8-10): Shireen Gandhi and Yezdi Kharas
- ◆ Level Three (Ages 11-13): Bepsi Sanjana
- ◆ Level Four (Ages 14-18) Shernaz Minwalla

The spring and summer months were filled with wonderful celebrations for our ZAOM community. We ate, played games, danced and enjoyed graduation, Navjote, and wedding festivities. Amidst all of the excitement we were able to squeeze in a Religion class or two and some great events. Enjoy reading about these classes and events in the articles written by our very own Youth Connections members.



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## A Search for Personal Identity

On April 14, 2013, the Michigan youth class gathered for another fun day at religion class. The topic of discussion for the older class was brought up because of well-known author Thrity Umrigar, who came to the Metro Detroit area to speak to many people. Among the people in the crowd were a few from the Zoroastrian association of Michigan. They all had nothing but great things to say about the lecture and were gleaming with joy as they walked out of the lecture. Teacher, Shernaz Minwalla, was in attendance and had a thought. The thought was to incorporate some of the topics from the lecture and present them to the kids in a way that challenged the students' thought process.

The main topic of discussion was about one's search for personal identity. To get the discussion rolling, Mrs. Minwalla read three passages from three different books. (Thrity Umrigar's *First darling of the Morning*, and *Bombay Time*, and Beverly Tatum's *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria*) These passages were meant to spark conversation about generation gap and identity status. One question that brought up a lot of discussion was how Parsis in America think differently than their Parsi counterparts in India. The consensus in the room was that even though both sides had restrictions in

different aspects of life, and had different cultural structures, both sides would see no irregularities in their daily lives. Avvan Sanjana said about the class, "I learned a lot about how we generally think about ourselves and how much different we are than our counterparts in school. But I also discovered how much similar we are to them and how much we relate to them."

So in the end, the discussion driven class was a great atmosphere to be in, with students pouring in thought after thought, and contributing to the overall good of the discussion. The class loved every bit of the discussion and would easily want to have more discussion-driven classes in the future.

## Educational Games Day

The Youth Connections group met for the last class for the academic school year on May 19, 2013. While the younger students read stories, the middle school and high school classes studied their notes for around 15 minutes. All of the age-groups were then combined into two teams and had an exciting class.

Shernaz Minwalla explained the rules of the game. She would ask a question on the various Zoroastrian topics, for example: What does Ahura Mazda mean? They would discuss the answers amongst themselves, run up, and then whisper it in her ear and run back. Upon their return, an adult would give them an activity to do, such as 10 jumping jacks, hop on one leg, or jump rope. It was kind of a mini-games day since we were unable to have one this summer.



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We all had an exciting time, and it was a brilliant method of helping the students remember what they had learned over the course of the year. They cannot wait until religion class starts again in September so they can have more discussions about Zoroastrianism.

## Parsis at Comerica Park

On the evening of Friday, July 12th, the Parsi community went to Comerica Park to enjoy the Detroit Tigers' Game. Because Bepsi Aunty was able to organize the event, we were all able to sit together. Three generations of Parsis sat in one of the top sections of the stadium right behind home plate. Within moments of the game, the Tigers had a 5-0 lead over the Texas Rangers. The entire Parsi Clan was on their feet, cheering, screaming, and rooting for their own Detroit Tigers. "Going to the Tigers' Game was one of the highlights of my summer. It was so much fun for everyone," said Armaity Minwalla. Even more exciting events were taking place on that day; it was a member's birthday, so thanks to Bepsi Aunty, her name and the Z.A.O.M. Community showed up on the jumbotron at the ballpark. The Parsi Press wanted to find out from the Parsi Clan, "Who is your Tiger?" KT says, "Cabrera...Triple Crown." Darayus Sanjana says, "My Tiger is Prince Fielder because he is a superstar and I like the fact that he chose to come to Detroit to play baseball. Plus he can hit the ball a mile which I like." Not only did the Tigers get a 7-2 victory over the Rangers, the Parsis ended their evening with Friday Fireworks.

## Let's Celebrate Navroz and Khordad Sal

The Parsi Community had its last summer event at Gino's Surf to celebrate Navroz and Khordad Sal. Along with the wide variety of delicious food at the buffet, the community gathered to give thanks to the Z.A.O.M. Executive Community and to recognize and award the many seniors that have completed their years in our Youth Connections Program. Students were presented with a plaque and a scholarship for recognition of their participation in the Youth Connections Program. These graduates have actively participated in many Parsi events, have demonstrated leadership in Religion classes, and have invested time and initiative in writing and editing articles for the Parsi Press. The Community thanks Aaresh Bilimoria, Sabrina Bilimoria, Simone Kapadia, Armaity Minwalla, Avvan Sanjana, and Jasmine Sholapurwalla. After lunch and the recognition event, we were able to enjoy the sunshine and a great view of Lake St. Clair outside on the balcony to take photographs and start the New Year on a gorgeous day.

## Rewarding Reflections

By: Avvan Sanjana

It's still hard for me to grasp the fact, that this fall I will not be attending ZAOM Youth Connection classes at the Unity Church on 13 mile road. For the past nine years of my life one Sunday a month would be devoted to religion classes. These past nine years have been half my life. Tomorrow I'm leaving my house...for nine months. I'm moving out to attend college. This



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means that I'm not going to see the ZAOM community every weekend, or monthly or at "random parties". And frankly that makes me sad.

Let's take a flashback about ten years ago to our very first impromptu religion class...it was held at the Bugli's house on a cold fall day in 2003. About twenty children sitting on the ground in the living room with all the parents behind the children piled on the couches listening intently as if they were attending the class too. We listened as Sherry aunty and Neville uncle enthusiastically talked about our ancient religion. The response after that day was unanimous. Religion class would now be the norm for the children of the community.

Starting with the new year in 2004, religion classes started on one Sunday every month. Some people think "how much can one learn in nine years?" Trust me, I learned plenty. From the ancient times, to the legends, to the Shanemeh stories, to famous Parsis, to ceremonies, even Parsi cuisine, and Gujrati believe it or not! But all of this knowledge would not be with me if it weren't for some very special people. First, these classes wouldn't be possible at all if it weren't for the three special ladies that started them; Mrs. Shireen Gandhi, my mom Mrs. Bepsi Sanjana, and my teacher for the past nine years Mrs. Sherry Minwalla. Sherry aunty has pushed the critical thinking skills in the classroom. Not only has she just "taught", but our class is the highest level of classes which means we think, search, present, debate and learn more about ourselves than we thought we would ever know. Each and every one of us

in class is different in our opinions, in our thoughts and ideas and that's ok, it's supposed to be like that. I can honestly say some of my best memories from the past nine years have been from religion classes, hands down, no doubt about it. I've never laughed so hard or yelled so loudly in life until I was in the classroom with one of my favorite teachers ever, and some of the best peers around.

So as I leave now to go pack my bags, I would like to thank all of you in the community for being there for the youth connections. Your support is what fuels some of the best thinking in your children's mind. If it weren't for ZAOM I know I wouldn't be the person I am today! I credit a lot to who I am to this community. It's great to know that I have an extended family of about 120 people.

## The Village that Raised Me

By: Armaity Minwalla

The past year has been filled with a lot of "lasts" for me, my last Christmas concert at Masonic Temple, my last meeting with my various clubs and student organizations, my last day sitting at the same lunch table that I've been at every day for the last four years with ten of my closest friends, and of course my last religion class with ZAOM. Over the years I have participated in almost every class, every game's day, every apple orchard trip, and every Novi Hall function. The community is really my family, with all the other members of the youth connections being my younger siblings and the members of the "adult" community are all my aunties and uncles. As I journey on to other things I know that some things will change, maybe I will become



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interested in new things; I will definitely be making new friends, traveling to new places, and learning new things about the world and my place in it. With all these changes I know that family, my Zoroastrian upbringing, and my education will remain the most important pieces of my life. I will take with me the principles I learned from the community including respect for others regardless of their differences in gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and background. I also know how to speak to my professors, employers, upperclassmen, and fellow students with professionalism, respect, eloquence, and dignity. I have been told on multiple occasions how difficult college academics can be, and honestly I am not worried because I have been taught to put academics above all other aspects of school-life. I also know that I have a huge community of the biggest fans and supporters anyone could ask for to support me if I ever need a little help. The encouragement I have received from everyone in the Zoroastrian community has been constant and unlimited. If I say I am interested in a certain college chances are there is a Zoroastrian we know who has been there and can talk to me about it. So thank you to the entire community for all of your love and support over the last eighteen years.

Middle school, high school, college applications, exams, making friends, keeping friends, dealing with peer pressure, getting out of difficult situations, SATs, ACTs, choosing the right place for you; these are all huge steps in life that everyone goes through. I made it through all this and will continue to go through more amazing and sometimes difficult

steps. All of my younger siblings in the community will be going through one or more of these steps fairly soon. To all of the members of Youth Connection, I have been there and done that, so please do not hesitate to talk to me about any of this. You all helped me by being great friends and supporters so now I would love to return the favor. I have got your backs, because that is what big sisters do. Thank you for all the great times at Games days, Birthday parties, Novi Hall parties, religion classes, and other ZAOM related events. I know there are more great memories to be made, I am not going far and I plan to come back for some of these great functions. I am truly blessed to have such a big family always there for me.

I would like to especially thank Mom, Bepsi Aunty, and Shireen Mami for teaching the classes that make us kids such amazing, respectful, focused, hardworking, and loving people.