

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF CRESCENT SCHOOL**

by Ismail Ebrahim drafted in 1997 (Lobatse's  
Centenary celebrations)

### **1. The Need For The School**

- In 1961, the construction of the school was completed, and it was officially opened by the then Resident Commissioner, Sir Peter Fawcus on **21st November 1961**.
- The school catered for both day scholars and boarders from the Muslim community which had established itself as the Bechuanaland Muslim Association - formed in 1955.
- There was already an English Medium school in Lobatse which also had a boarding establishment. This catered for the needs of the white community of Bechuanaland. The Colonial Government practiced discrimination by not allowing any non-white child to be enrolled in this school.
- The Indian parents had no recourse but to send their children to South Africa to be educated. The children boarded and lodged with private families, mostly in Zeerust, Rustenburg and Mafikeng.
- The parents realized that this was not a satisfactory solution in educating their children, so the Muslim association approached the then British Government and requested that they build a school to facilitate the needs of the Muslim community. They wanted their children to have both a secular and a religious education.
  - In the meantime, the South African government had exercised its discrimination laws by not allowing any non-white child to be educated in South Africa. This prohibition did not include the white population of Bechuanaland for they enjoyed the privileges of educating their children at primary level in both countries.
  - In 1964 the Botswana Government abolished discrimination in schools in Botswana. The European School, as it was then known, had in the end lost most of its pupils and the boarding section closed down because the parents were now sending their children across the border to South Africa
- Lobatse was chosen for the site to build the school, as it was the most central location for the children coming from the outlying villages such as Moshupa, Kanye, Ramotswa, Molepolole, Digawana, Kang and as far as Bokspits, Francistown and Ramokgwebana.
- The British government agreed to the building of this establishment on a Pound for Pound basis. The total cost at the time was 25 000 Pounds, half of which was contributed by the Muslim community, i.e. 12 500 Pounds.

### **2. The Early Years**

- The first Head Master was Mr. A. C. Naidoo and the enrolment was 49 pupils from standard one to form one. The Headmaster and his wife, Mrs. A. C. Naidoo, were responsible for these classes and they were joined by Mr. R. Thomas, whilst Mrs. Jaffar was the Matron in charge of the hostel section.
- In 1963, Mrs. M. E. McElroy (nee Badsha) took over the headship of Crescent together with Mrs. M. Richards and Mrs. Gush as assistant teachers. It was also in this year that the British Red Cross Society established the Botswana Red Cross Society. The first Junior Red Cross Link was formed by the Crescent pupils with the help of the British Red Cross representative, Miss M. Houghton.

- In 1965 the first Motswana Pupil, Lejaha Tumelo enrolled at Crescent School. Before that all 64 pupils were of Indian origin. Religious classes were conducted in the afternoons in the classrooms until the Mosque was built in 1967. All Eid prayers were also conducted in the school hall.
- Mrs. C. Gunter, a very dedicated and efficient teacher, joined Crescent School in 1965. In 1967, the first white pupil who was enrolled at the school was Veraleen Burger. In 1968 Mrs. Veronica Warrener joined the staff and eventually became Deputy Headmistress of the school in 1974.
- In December 1965 the name of the school was changed from Lobatse Indian School to Crescent Primary School. By 1970 most of the British expatriates had withdrawn their children from the European School and enrolled them at Crescent, the reason being that Crescent had already proved to be an institution of achieving a higher caliber of education for its pupils. The first 11 PSLE pupils passed with straight A's in November 1966.
- In February 1970, the Ministry of Education took over the running of the school for it was too costly for the Local Council to manage. In that year the staff was as follows:
  - Mrs. M. E. McElroy
  - Mrs. V. Warrener
  - Mrs. D. S. Milner
  - Mrs. T. Malherbe
  - Mrs. C. Gunter
  - Mrs. M. Kerr
  - Mrs A. Burnett
- Mrs. A. P. Burnett took over the Deputy Headship from Mrs. Warrener in December 1981. I cannot enumerate all the teachers besides the above ones who left a positive and indelible mark on the growth and development of the school.
- The first PTA was formed in 1984. Mr. R. Fish was elected as chairman and thereafter Dr. Hayat carried on in this position.

### **3. Privatisation of the School**

- Crescent School went private in January 1990, as the Government had decided to close down the school due to the financial burden of running it.
- Twelve members of the Business and Professional Community stepped forward to save the school from closing down and formed a Private Company Limited by Guarantee. These members are the 'Guarantors', and an immense amount of gratitude is owed to them for courageously rescuing the school.
- Mrs. McElroy, who was seconded from the Ministry of Education, resigned in August 1990.
- With all the adversities the school encountered, Mrs. V. Sarpong, a long serving member of the teaching fraternity, served the school with devotion and loyalty. She joined the school in 1987 and was appointed Deputy Headmistress in 1993 until she was given the acting Headship for a year in 1996 to early 1997.
- Since the period of Privatisation, a swimming pool and an eight-classroom blocks have also been added. The enrolment has increased to 480 pupils. There are 25 different nationalities and now the school comprises of 70% Batswana and 30% expatriates, mainly of children from the Sub-Sahara regions.

All these developments, achievement and growth would not have been possible if the members of the Bechuanaland Muslim Association had not made Crescent School a reality. It was their foresight and contribution that has made it possible for the past, present and future generations of children to get a sound basic education and become responsible members of our society.

As a fitting tribute to mark to Lobatse's Centenary celebrations, a plaque will be made honoring the following members of the Botswana Muslim Association with the Ministry of Education:

- The late Mr. M S Ebrahim  
The late Mr. N M Kara
- The late Mr.S Dada .  
The late Mr. B S Abdulla  
The late Mr. A G Khan
- The late Mr. L Gardiner (Ministry of Education)