

Unforgettable Jack Gibson

The legendary principal of Mayo College,
he left an enduring legacy

BY ASHOK MAHADEVAN

I lay in my boarding-school¹ bed, unable to sleep. Never in my 15 years had I faced such a crisis. A few hours earlier, I had been told that I'd been selected to become a monitor of my school, Mayo College², and that the next morning, the principal, J.T.M. "Jack" Gibson, would formally ask for my consent.

Most boys in my position would have been thrilled -- being a school monitor meant a lot of power and prestige. But I was terrified. An insecure teen-ager, I felt I was too short, too dark, too puny to be able to inspire the awe a monitor should, and I was certain my bigger and stronger contemporaries would ignore or mock me. Becoming a monitor, therefore, seemed like inviting endless humiliation.

But what could I do? For several hours I brooded, until I finally came up with a solution. The next morning, lined up before Mr Gibson with the other monitors-to-be, I took a deep breath, and stepped forward. "I don't want to

1 A residential school at which students live.

2 Although it has college in its name, Mayo is actually a school. This is true of many private schools in India and England, for example, Eton College, the most exclusive private school in the UK.

be a monitor," I said.

"Why not?" Mr Gibson asked, obviously surprised. I couldn't very well confess I was afraid, so I mumbled something about not thinking I'd do a good job.

For a minute or two, Mr Gibson stared at me, puffing away at his pipe. Then he said, quietly but firmly: "I'm not going to allow you to refuse. I think you'll be first-rate."

I don't know if he was right, though a couple of decades later, a friend who'd been a few years junior to me at Mayo revealed he'd been scared of me at school because I was so strict. At any rate, all my fears proved groundless -- no one humiliated me, and I rather enjoyed wielding authority.

When I recalled all this on hearing of Jack Gibson's death in October 1994, I suddenly realized why he'd forced me to become a monitor 31 years earlier. He knew I was afraid, but he also knew something that even I didn't know: that I was not that afraid, that given a little push I'd overcome my diffidence. So he gave me that push -- and helped me grow.

AMONG the last of the many Englishmen who devoted their lives to the service of India, John Trevor Mends Gibson was not only a great teacher who brought out the best in his boys. To so many of us, our tall, regal principal was a

dazzling figure, everything a man should be -- vigorous, upright, generous and just. What's more, unlike what happens to most teachers, Jack's charisma didn't fade after we left school. Indeed, the older we grew, the more remarkable Jack seemed. Little wonder then that the memorial services for him in Delhi and Bombay were packed with his former students, many of whom had not met him for decades.

One of the few people to receive both an O.B.E³. and a Padma Shri⁴, Jack's list of accomplishment was staggering. Apart from being a world-class mountaineer and fencer -- he missed representing England in the 1928 Olympics because of flu -- he was good at every sport, from tennis to boxing. He was also, among other things, a first-rate photographer, an ardent birdwatcher, a crack shot, a skilled gardener -- his sweetpeas regularly won first prize at the Ajmer Flower Show -- and a fine writer. Indeed, one reviewer praised Jack's accounts of his mountain-climbing expeditions in his book As I Saw It as ranking "among the most evocative descriptive passages in Himalayan literature."

Perhaps Jack's greatest achievement was his transformation of Mayo College. Established in 1875 for the sons of Rajasthan's⁵ feudal aristocrats, Mayo was on the verge of closing when Jack took over in January 1954. It had less than 150 boys (mostly Rajputs⁶), it was practically

3 Order of the British Empire, an honour awarded by the British government

4 An honour conferred by the Indian government

5 A state in India which, before Independence, was divided into a few big and many small kingdoms, with each one having a ruler.

bankrupt, its academic standards were a disgrace. By the time Jack retired in 1969, Mayo had nearly 600 boys, from every region and every class, its finances were sound, and it was generally acknowledged as the finest public school⁷ in India. It had even acquired an international reputation. After Mayo I went to Tonbridge, a well-known public school in England. The first thing its headmaster said to me was, ``So you come from the famous Mayo College.''

Before Mayo, Jack's Indian career had included being a housemaster at Doon School, Dehra Dun, and the principal of India's inter-services military academy. In his nearly four decades at three elite institutions, Jack taught and shaped thousands of youngsters, many of whom became top politicians, civil servants, businessmen, military officers, professors, scientists and doctors. As Probir Sen, managing director of Indian Airlines, acknowledges, ``Few people have influenced me as much as Jack Gibson. Knowing him has been one of my life's most precious blessings.''

It was the challenge of training Indians to take over from the British when Independence⁸ came that drew Jack to this country. In the winter of 1935, he was on a skiing holiday in Switzerland when he met Fred Canning, an

6 The aristocrats of Rajasthan

7 In India, as in England, a "public school" is actually an elite private school.

8 i.e. India's Independence. India became free on August 15, 1947, but it was clear a decade or two earlier that Britain's granting freedom to India was only a matter of time.

Englishman who was then India's Inspector General of Forests. Canning talked to Jack about Doon School, a new institution being started in Dehra Dun to groom the future leaders of a free India. Jack was immediately interested. A few years earlier, he had briefly met Mahatma Gandhi in Geneva and become convinced of the need for Indian independence. On applying for a post at Doon, Jack was appointed housemaster and geography teacher.

Few men could have been as suited for the job, for Jack was a born schoolmaster. The elder of the two children of an officer in the Royal Navy, Jack was a high-spirited boy, with interests that ranged from stamps to church architecture. His exuberance often got him into scrapes at school, and he once ruefully wrote to his parents: "I have tried my hardest to be good, but it seems impossible..." Many years later Jack confessed that he had "certain advantages as a housemaster, having had most of the problems I have to deal with as a boy myself."

On graduating from Cambridge University in 1929 -- after captaining the university fencing team, ranking third in the British Amateur Fencing Championship and missing the Olympics because of illness -- Jack was offered an excellent job by the famous British company Unilever. To everyone's astonishment, he turned it down, saying he didn't want to spend his life selling soap. Instead, he joined Chillon College, a small school in Switzerland.

Jack never lost his disdain for commerce, even though, after he became principal of Mayo, he regularly got

his former students good jobs in private companies⁹. Once, when one of his teachers left school to join a multinational, Jack tartly commented that the job had "three times the pay of a schoolmaster and one-third of the importance to society."

Jack had joined Chillon College as winter sports coach. But when the school's history master fell ill, Jack was offered his classes. He was fascinated by teaching, feeling that it was similar to another of his passions, gardening. "There is the hard work of preparation and digging; the toil of corrections and weeding; the satisfaction from time to time of good results and a blaze of flowers. Finally students leave, the annuals die and you start afresh."

Jack loved Switzerland, taking part in a number of skiing and climbing expeditions in the Alps, but resigned from Chillon in 1932 because he felt its headmaster had treated another teacher unfairly. Returning to England, he joined Ripon School in Yorkshire as assistant house master of boarders. As always, he did a lot more than teach, playing rugby for a local club, organizing student plays, and exploring the beautiful Yorkshire countryside in his round-nosed Morris Oxford. When he left Ripon four years later, he abandoned the two-seater outside the railway station with a note making it over to the first person who

9 .i.e. corporations

found it. "I was too sad to try and sell it," he said.

Jack arrived at Doon School in January 1937. He was 29, bursting with energy and ideas. Vasant Rajadhyaksha, a Doon student who later became chairman of Hindustan Lever¹⁰ and a member of the Planning Commission¹¹, recalls that rightaway one could tell that Jack was no ordinary schoolmaster. "There was a sense of excitement about him," Rajadhyaksha says. "One day, he took some of us potholing in the limestone mountains near the school. I'd never done this before, and I was terrified at climbing down a rope into a pitch-black hole with only a lamp strapped to my head, and exploring caves without having any idea where I was going. Of course Jack had been there earlier and made sure we'd be safe, though that was small comfort then. But when I finally came out, I was exhilarated. Potholing, in fact, became one of my favourite sports, thanks to Jack. He had a wonderful ability to infect you with his own zest for life."

Indeed, Jack was a pioneer of adventure sports in India. Until the late 1930s few Indians took part in such activities, and it was largely because Jack -- and a couple of other Englishmen teaching at Doon -- took generations of students mountain-climbing, trekking, skiing and river rafting, that such sports became popular in this country. "Today there are around 100 Indian expeditions every year

10 The Indian subsidiary of Unilever, the company Jack decided not to join.
11 A high-powered government body that draws up India's development plans

into the Himalayas," says Sudhir Sahi, secretary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. "When Jack first came to India, there were none."

During his first Himalayan expedition in 1937, Jack unsuccessfully attempted to scale Banderpoonch ("Monkey's Tail"), a 6315-metre virgin peak. His sherpa¹² then was Tenzing Norgay, the first man to climb Everest. Ten years later, the two men once again failed to reach the top of Banderpoonch. Then in 1950, along with four others, they gave it another try. However, while climbing, one of the younger members began having problems and had to be accompanied to a lower height. Since Jack was the leader of the expedition, he decided that it was his responsibility, even though it meant giving up his dream to conquer Banderpoonch. Tenzing, who reached the top the next day with two others, later lavished praise on Jack's unselfishness, adding: "I am proud to have climbed with him."

When World War II broke out, Jack immediately volunteered to join the Navy. "I hold views now described as old-fashioned liberal views," he said, "and I don't feel justified in working for them behind the shelter of those who are fighting." But officials told him to stick to teaching. He then tried to become an Air Force pilot but was turned down because he was too old. Only in July 1942, after

12 A Sherpa is a person from Nepal who assists mountaineers climbing in the Himalayas.

much string-pulling, did he finally manage to get into the Navy. For a year and a half he served aboard a minesweeper, then was posted to HMIS Feroze, a naval training establishment in Bombay.

At Feroze Jack came across evidence of corruption in the officers' mess. He tried to get his superiors to investigate, but they wouldn't listen. But Jack so impressed my father, then a young naval officer, that more than a decade and a half later, he sent me to Mayo. Indeed, many people enrolled their sons there, only because of Jack. "My father was a student of Jack's at Doon," says Ashok Capoor, a vice president of Herbertsons Limited. "But by the time I had to go to school, Jack was at Mayo, so my father sent me there."

After the war, Jack went to England, hoping to persuade an old girl friend to marry him. But she turned him down, saying she couldn't live in India, and Jack returned alone to Doon School. (He remained a bachelor all his life.) Then in January 1949¹³, two years after Indian Independence, he became the principal of a newly established military academy, the Inter Services Wing (ISW)¹⁴. It was a singular honour for an Englishman, for there were several Indians in the running for the sensitive post, and it is believed that Jawaharlal Nehru¹⁵ personally recommended Jack.

13 i.e. two years after India became free

14 Established by the Government of India, it was the first military academy in the world to jointly train cadet of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Today, it is called the National Defence Academy.

Cadets at the ISW immediately took to their principal. N.C. Suri recalls him as being exceptionally open. "I could go to him with problems in any subject and he'd solve them. Not once did he say that I should see the teacher concerned." Suri's admiration for Jack ran very deep. More than forty years later, an Air Chief Marshal and head of the Indian Air Force, Suri and his fellow chiefs, Admiral L. Ramdas of the Navy and General S. Rodrigues of the Army (who'd also been at the ISW), visited Jack in retirement in Ajmer. Security for the unprecedented gathering of the three chiefs was so tight that even Jack's home was searched!

After two years at the JSW, Jack returned briefly to Doon, then accepted the principalship of Mayo. "He really stirred things up," recalls Darshan Lal, a director of BASF Ltd.¹⁶ who was already studying at Mayo when Jack arrived. "He seemed to be everywhere, tearing around campus in his battered maroon jeep, dressed in bush shirt, shorts and pathan chappals,¹⁷ pipe gripped between his teeth, two Labradors panting behind him."

Often working 16-hour days, Jack ran a tight ship. He cut back on the number of servants. He pulled up teachers for not correcting their students' written work thoroughly. He increased the number of scholarships. He reversed the

15 Nehru was the first Prime Minister of independent India.
16 A German multinational which has a subsidiary in India.
17 Indian sandals.

system of each class having its own room with the teachers moving around and made the boys run to their next class while he prowled the corridors shouting at the laggards. ``Soon the whole school was buzzing,`` Lal recalls.

Although, as principal, Jack wasn't required to teach, he took a dozen classes every week, in English and Geography. ``He was an unorthodox, exciting teacher,`` Lal recalls. ``He didn't teach us from textbooks or give us notes to memorize. One day, he came into class and told us, `You have a couple of minutes to find out the real name of the English writer George Eliot.' I didn't have a clue what to do. Then I thought of looking it up in the encyclopedia and rushed to the library. To this day I remember the answer, `Marian Evans.' Unlike most teachers, Jack forced us to think.``

Jack also awakened me to the glory of English literature, especially Shakespeare.

Once, while studying Macbeth with him, we came to the passage where Macbeth, guilt-ridden at having murdered his king, laments: ``Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red.``

"Isn't that beautiful?" Jack asked us, obviously moved. I hadn't really thought very much about those words

earlier. Then I read them again slowly and suddenly was overwhelmed by their heartbreaking loveliness.

In many other ways too, Jack introduced us to the graces of the West. At Assembly¹⁸ every morning, he played a piece of classical music on the gramophone. "I'd never heard such music before coming to Mayo," recalls Probir Sen. "Jack opened a whole new world to me." And at the dinners at his home to which he periodically invited the school monitors, we handled fine crockery and cutlery and learnt how to conduct ourselves in formal situations.

Although Jack never stopped being a true-blue Englishman -- despite more than five decades in this country, he never learnt to speak Hindi¹⁹ properly -- he was, as one of his English friends put it, "stitched into the tapestry of India." He admired much of Indian culture. He tried to learn dancing under Uday Shankar²⁰ and loved listening to Rabindra Sangeet.²¹ He was so impressed by the Bhagvad Gita²² that he felt it should be taught in schools. He staged student productions of Shakespeare's plays like A Midsummer Night's Dream with Indian music and Rajasthani dress. Above all, he retained the traditions of Mayo College, encouraging us to go to temple and making safas²³

18 This is the time when the entire school gathers together in the morning before classes and says prayers. Announcements are also made at this time. Practically every Indian school has an Assembly.

19 The most important Indian language.

20 A famous classical Indian dancer.

21 Songs composed by Rabindra Tagore, an Indian Nobel-prize winner for Literature.

22 The most important Hindu religious text

and band-galas²⁴ compulsory on formal occasions. Jack's sensitivity to their culture endeared him to Rajput aristocrats, and many, including the Maharajahs of Jaipur, Kotah and Bikaner,²⁵ became his close friends.

Jack, indeed, seemed to know practically everyone in India who mattered, from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to millionaire Sir Dinshaw Petit to ornithologist Salim Ali. And he never hesitated to use his contacts on behalf of Mayo. Once, when a consignment of mountain-climbing equipment was held up at Customs, Jack wrote directly to the prime minister and had the gear cleared without having to pay duty. On another occasion, Darshan Lal had gone to Bangalore to take entrance tests to the National Defence Academy²⁶. Unfortunately, the Army postponed his medical examination by a couple of days, thus making it impossible for Lal, a star batsman, to get to Dehra Dun²⁷ in time to play a Mayo-Doon match²⁸.

When Lal's telegram giving the bad news arrived in Ajmer, Jack immediately called Army headquarters in New Delhi and got the quartermaster-general²⁹ on the line.

23 Rajput turbans

24 A coat closed at the throat

25 Three of the most important Maharajahs.

26 By the late fifties, when this incident took place, the JSW had been renamed as the National Defence Academy.

27 Dehra Dun is in north India, Bangalore is in South India. Getting from one to the other by train, as Lal would normally have done, would have taken several days.

28 A cricket match. This will be understood because of the reference to Lal as a star batsman.

29 A senior general who is in charge of accommodation, travel, etc for the Army

``Why's the Army so keen for Doon School to win?'' he joked, explaining the problem. Within hours Lal was on an Army transport plane, en route to Dehra Dun.

Notwithstanding being on such familiar terms with important Indians and his own upper-middle-class background, Jack was a true democrat. He recognized that rigid social hierarchies were the bane of this country and tried to break down his students' feudal attitudes. ``He never let us forget that everyone deserves respect,'' recalls Sunday³⁰ editor and TV talk-show host Vir Sanghvi, ``from the farash³¹ who cleaned our dormitories to a very pucca Brit principal.'' Indeed Jack thought up novel ways to combat our class prejudices. He made one hour a week of manual labour compulsory for all students. And on Gandhi Jayanti³² all Mayo's servants were given a holiday and students performed the chores, from making up beds to chowkidari³³. And that evening, we acted as waiters at a gala dinner for the servants.

Jack was especially solicitous of Tansukh Lal, his cook and bearer³⁴ who served him for 40 years. To enable Tansukh to spend evenings with his family, Jack usually ate by sunset³⁵. He helped Tansukh's sons set up small

30 A well-known current affairs magazine

31 A servant

32 October 2, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi who did a lot to improve the lot of India's underprivileged.

33 Hindi for guard duty.

34 The Indian equivalent of a butler

35 In India normally servants get practically no time off.

businesses. He celebrated Tansukh's daughter's wedding in his home. He built a house for Tansukh. "I couldn't have found a better employer," Tansukh says. "I was treated like a member of his family."

Although he was a tough principal who demanded a lot from his subordinates, Jack cared deeply about Mayo's teaching staff, many of whom came from backgrounds far less privileged than his. He loaned money to teachers with financial problems, visited those who were sick, and regularly had them over for meals. During the 1965 war³⁶, Nahar Singh, one of the teachers, had to rush to Amritsar³⁷ where his brother had been seriously wounded in the bombing. When Jack learnt about it, he scolded Mrs Nahar Singh for letting her husband go. "He has a wife and young children," Jack said. "He shouldn't expose himself to danger. I could have gone and looked after your brother-in-law." Even today, more than 30 years later, Prabha Nahar Singh is moved as she recalls the incident. "Jack was the only one to make such an offer," she says. "He was a great man."

Mayo's faculty, dispirited and leaderless before Jack became principal, were catalyzed by him into a well-knit dedicated team. Many did much more than they were required to. I remember playing a desultory game of hockey

36 With Pakistan

37 A city near the Pakistan-India border

one evening, when G.R. Naidu, the sports master, suddenly appeared. He was then in his 50s, a chain smoker with an awful cough. He watched us for a couple of minutes, then aghast at our laziness, joined in the game. He drove us -- and himself -- hard, and by the time we finished, we were totally wrung out. But never, before or since, have I enjoyed a game of hockey more.

Many successful Mayo Old Boys³⁸ have adopted Jack's leadership style. "Like Jack, I always keep my door open," says Rohit Patel, general manager of Air Freight Ltd. "Anyone can see me, anytime." "Jack liked people with backbone," adds Probir Sen of Indian Airlines. "So do I. I encourage my subordinates to stand up to me."

To help him run Mayo, Jack instituted the College Conclave through which he discussed important matters with the housemasters and the monitors. He consulted the monitors informally too, inviting them to Sunday breakfast at his home where he'd share his views with the boys and encourage them to talk. "Of course it was an excellent way to find out what was going on in school," recalls Ram Piparaiya, a Bombay financial analyst who was Mayo's first scholarship student. "But it also made us become responsible."

Although Jack naturally liked his students to excel, whether at games or at studies, he recognized that not

38 i.e. Mayo College alumni. This is a term commonly used in India and England.

everyone could get to the top. "What he hated was not trying," recalls Rakesh Mohan, a former World Bank economist, who now heads the National Council for Applied Economic Research.³⁹ "But if, despite doing your best, you didn't get very far, he never made you feel bad." "I wasn't a star at school," adds S.S. Javali, now a Supreme Court lawyer. "Yet that didn't matter to Jack. Even after I passed out, he remembered me and always made me feel welcome whenever I returned to school."

Another value dear to Jack was fair play. Not only did he never do anything to anyone's disadvantage, he refused to accept any situation that he felt was unjust, even if it meant forgoing something himself. For instance, soon after coming to Mayo he discovered that his salary was several times that of the other staff. Horrified, he voluntarily froze his wages until the school's finances were in good shape -- it took six years -- and the staff could be paid decently.

I don't want to suggest that Jack was some kind of angel. He was an impatient man, with a short, explosive temper. He could be imperious, even a bully at times. But there was no malice in him. And if he made a mistake, he admitted it immediately.

Sometimes he carried this to astonishing lengths. A believer in corporal punishment -- he saw nothing wrong with

39 A famous economic think-tank in New Delhi.

it if it was not sadistic and was administered quickly -- he once whacked final-year student Matthew Thomas for answering a question incorrectly. A little later, it turned out that Thomas was right. Jack immediately apologized and invited Thomas to hit him. "I was so annoyed," recalls Thomas, then one of Mayo's best boxers and now a senior executive with Colour-Chem Ltd⁴⁰, "that I didn't think. I socked him so hard in the stomach that he staggered and nearly fell. But Jack never held that against me."⁴¹

Such integrity couldn't but fail to leave a lasting impression. A few years after passing out of Mayo, Abhimanyu Singh was keeping wicket⁴² for St Stephen's College ⁴³ in the Delhi University cricket final against Hindu College⁴⁴ when Hindu's star batsman seemed to be bowled.⁴⁵ "The batsman himself started walking back to the pavilion," Singh, now a senior civil servant recalls, "but the ball had actually gone off my pads onto the stumps⁴⁶. I said so to the umpire. The batsman was recalled and went on to score a century!⁴⁷ My team-mates thought I was crazy. Luckily, we won, but what most pleased me was a letter from Jack saying he'd read about the incident in the papers and how happy he

40 A German multinational with an Indian subsidiary

41 I don't know if an American schoolteacher would react in the same way, but in the Indian context, Jack's behaviour is almost unbelievable.

42 A cricketing term

43 A very famous college in New Delhi

44 Another famous New Delhi college

45 A cricketing term that would be understood here.

46 cricket equipment

47 No one in India -- or any country where cricket is played -- would have difficulty in understanding this incident.

was at what I had done.''

Playing fair, of course, cuts both ways, and Jack was no turn-the-other-cheek man. ``Never bend your knee before insolent might'' was one of his favourite maxims, and one that many of us did our best to live up to. Once a Mayo College Old Boy⁴⁸, a senior civil servant,^{*} was, for no fault of his, upbraided by the governor of his state⁴⁹. Extremely upset, he submitted his resignation from the IAS,⁵⁰ even though it would have meant an end to a brilliant career. The newspapers picked up the case and pressure to withdraw his resignation became intense. The civil servant also got a call from a friend who said that Jack, by then in retirement, was worried. ``I'm only doing what Jack told us to,'' the civil servant replied. Ultimately, the governor backed down and apologized.

*Name withheld to protect his privacy

Another unforgettable quality of Jack was his large-heartedness. A liberal host, he loved to entertain and kept open house for his large number of out-of-town visitors -- friends, Old Boys, parents. In fact, one teacher, S.K. Kathpalia, lived in the enormous principal's house -- it had

48 Though he does not wish to be named, it is, in fact, Abhimanyu Singh, the protagonist of the cricketing anecdote in the previous para.

49 This often happens in India, where politicians treat even very senior civil servants like flunkies.

50 The Indian Administrative Service, the cadre top civil servants belong to

ten bathrooms -- for his entire two-year stay at Mayo. "Not only did Jack not accept any money from me," Kathpalia says, "he didn't ever make me feel that I should be grateful to him."

Old Boys who were hard up could always rely on Jack to help. When Samir Bhattacharya, now the headmaster of a school himself, was struggling to make ends meet as a student in England, Jack sent him £200. When Probir Sen, then on his first posting⁵¹, wrote to Jack about how awfully hot it was, prompt came the reply, "Buy a cooler and send me the bill."

Jack's intellectual large-heartedness was just as remarkable. After I left Mayo, I became something of a political radical; and often wrote to Jack about my views. Once I even derided Mayo as an "anachronism." A few months later, I was astonished to learn that Jack had read out parts of this letter at the school's Prize Giving, where the chief guest had been the President⁵²! Later, he explained that he'd done so to prove "that a school like this does not rob its pupils of the power to think for themselves." I am still humbled by his generosity.

For exceptionally deserving students, Jack's liberality had no limits. Deb Barua, a scholarship student at Mayo, head boy⁵³, and one of finest all-rounders⁵⁴ the

51 i.e. his first assignment after joining the civil service.
52 i.e. the President of India.
53 Head of the monitors
54 that is, good at both studies and games

school has ever produced, came from a family of very modest means. When Barua passed out of Mayo, Jack, fearing that his talents would waste away at an Indian university, arranged for a scholarship at Jack's old English public school, Haileybury. "When I arrived in England," Barua recalls, "I had hardly anything to wear. Jack, who'd travelled with me, took me to a department store and we spent several hours buying clothes. I kept wondering how I was going to carry them all, until we went to the travel department and I saw a huge black trunk with my name on it. Jack had ordered it in advance, and of course he paid for everything."

During Barua's stay in England -- after Haileybury, he studied at Cambridge -- Jack regularly gave him money for travel and other expenses, took him on skiing holidays to Switzerland, and introduced him to his vast circle of friends. "He wanted me to lack nothing, socially or financially," recalls Barua, now chief executive officer of Titek Software Engineers in Jamaica, West Indies.

"Everything I am, I owe to him."

Jack's last day at Mayo was January 31, 1969. Although he had originally planned to retire in England, he found he couldn't afford to, and settled down in a haveli⁵⁵ not far from the school. He was offered many jobs including setting up a new public school in Kashmir and advising on

the education of the Crown Prince of Bhutan, but he turned them down. However, he was active as ever, travelling, writing books, keeping up with his enormous mail -- he corresponded with well over 200 people -- organizing social work, and being surrogate father to Old Boys who regularly turned to him with problems.

His advice to us was usually a reiteration of the values he lived by. "Don't give in easily. Be decent to people. Put service before self. Don't be tempted by easy money." But when necessary, he took decisive action. When the father of an Old Boy's girl friend refused to let her marry, Jack, satisfied that the couple was truly in love, recommended elopement and organized it himself.⁵⁶

Only in his mid-70s did Jack start slowing down. He had to have a pacemaker put in, and he was troubled by skin cancer, caused by prolonged exposure to the sun while mountain-climbing decades earlier. But his zest for life didn't flag. When he was around 80, by lying perfectly still on the floor for hours every day for a month, he trained a pair of bulbuls⁵⁷ to eat banana from his hand.

Nor did illness affect his grave courtesy. Every year I'd send him a complimentary Reader's Digest diary. And every time he'd offer to pay for it -- the only one of the many diary recipients to do so.

56 Incidentally, the couple were in their mid-20s. Very few American girls in their mid-20s would have to face such a problem, but it's routine in India.

57 A variety of bird

Jack died in Ajmer on October 4, 1994, aged 86. After cremation, his ashes were buried in Mayo College and in the Garwhal Himalayas, within sight of Kalanag ("Black Snake"), the 6100-metre peak that he was the first man to climb.

I OFTEN ask myself the secret of Jack's greatness as a schoolmaster. Of course his amazing versatility and incredible energy were important reasons. So were his generosity, his unorthodoxy and his integrity. But perhaps most vital was an even rarer quality., It's best expressed by one of Jack's last Mayo College students, Sanjiv Prakash. "He knew how to handle boys perfectly," Prakash said, "because at heart he was a boy himself."