

Life lessons in Loreto date with slumdog star



Jillian Haslam with students of Loreto Day School, Bowbazar, on Monday. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

The morning assembly at Loreto Day School, Bowbazar, roared in applause as principal Marie Gaspar introduced their special guest on Monday — Jillian Haslam, the real-life slumdog millionaire.

As students of Class VI to XII assembled in the school hall, Gaspar held up the Saturday issue of Metro that carried the tale of 42-year-old Jillian's incredible journey from Calcutta's slums to a life of dignity and triumph.

"How many of you girls have read this article?" she asked.

Almost all hands went up. Gaspar continued: "The lady in the picture is in our midst. And in your lifetime, you not only get to read her true story but also meet the person." The claps that followed were deafening.

A whoosh descended when the Calcutta-born British woman walked up to the stage and smiled. "I was a beggar, who no one gave a dime. But today I read, write and speak, because someone gave their time," she said and repeated her quote.

"Just a few streets away from here where I was born."

The girls listened in rapt attention as Jillian reminded them of the importance of "being grateful".

The millionaire motivational speaker and author told them to feel lucky to "wake up every morning and come to school because there are nearly 7,000 children right now as we speak who could not wake up because of hunger".

"And many die not of disease but from starvation."

Her 20-minute speech was peppered with many meaningful messages: from "understanding your teachers who go that extra mile" and using "your brain and ability to make a choice to better your life" to "attitude that decides your altitude in life".

She also talked about "manners on Facebook" and getting rid of "excusitis, the tendency to make excuses for everything".

"It isn't every day that a nobody becomes a somebody and that too someone not from a remote city but from lanes and alleys we're familiar with. We thought she is young enough for my girls to relate with as much as our children need to meet such role models. It would be good motivation for our girls and we grabbed the opportunity," principal Marie Gaspar told Metro.

Class XII student Lydia Chen was gushing from the motivational talk. "The speech was inspiring. Haslam's story has proved that anyone can overcome unfortunate circumstances. Her words have touched every girl in the hall."

Later, the girls and teachers milled around Jillian for a quick word and photo-ops.

The principal summed up the enthusiasm among the students: "It was truly a date with a star."

JILLIAN SPEAK

- Know the importance of being grateful
- Understand your teachers
- Associate yourself with bigger and better people
- Grow a good attitude that decides your altitude in life
- Use manners on Facebook
- Get rid of excusitis, the tendency to make excuses