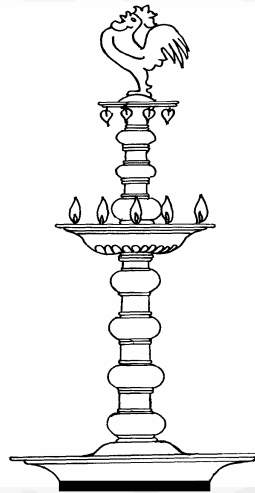


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL



There's nothing like a first hand account to dredge up collateral information, and most interesting at that. Two articles in J 41, Earle Forbes' one on his sojourn in Samoa and Douglas Ranmut-hugala's one on the German battle cruiser "Emden" have interesting post scripts. You can read them in Letters section of this issue. Such tidbits as it were, add spice to the original article and brings about a sense of sharing in its content.

In this issue we revisit a theme carried in a previous one: "schooldays in the 40 s". One member who writes under the *nom de plume* A Music Tragic recounts his dreams to be another Liszt while bombs were falling about him, the other is by dear departed Darnley de Sousa. Both recount their days in school during WWII. Not many real life accounts of this period have surfaced among our membership and must be recorded for their intrinsic value as contemporary record. Whilst the environment was common to both, their experiences were poles apart. We must record our thanks to previous contributions from Barbara Misso and Tony Peries who started the ball rolling on the subject.

Judging by the Synopses of meetings, all three Chapters of CSA have had excellent presentations in the last quarter, which included two book launches. Isn't it nice to belong to a Society which can boast of published authors? On this occasion we have had Chandra Senaratne of Sydney and Colombo Chapter Convenor /Local President Somasiri Devendra launch two very interesting and readable books. Review of Somasiri's book appears in this issue and Chandra's book was reviewed in J 41.

Editor/Librarian Sumane Iyer has stocks of Somasiri's book for purchasers in Australia while Chandra sells his books direct. Full details are on page 23.

19th Century Images



Tamil Females



Tony Peries's interesting article on life in Ceylon as a schoolboy in the 1940 s prompted me to cast my mind back on my life around this period. It wasn't quite packed with the excitement Tony describes, most certainly, because our family evacuated to Gampola in December 1941 and then to Kandy in June 1942 where we remained until mid-1940 s. However, I do recall nights of searchlights piercing the night sky around Kollupitiya where we lived, hiding under tables when air raid sirens sounded, glass windows cross hatched with diagonal strips of paper to prevent shattering in the event of explosions and even the odd drunken British soldier staggering down our front garden causing us to hide inside locked rooms (there were a number of young girls at home!). Perhaps events like the latter prompted the decision to evacuate in 1941.

Life in Kandy by contrast was quite peaceful. Each morning my two sisters and I would walk down Trincomalee Street to our new school, Dharmarajah College (Primary). I used to wear a hard khaki hat which I would doff politely at the approach of a member of the fairer sex! Trincomalee Street as everyone knows is quite long, with many shops, three of which stand out in my memory. The first was KVG de Silva and Sons which belonged to an uncle of mine. He was a kind, benevolent man who many years later presented me with all the Anatomy and Physiology texts needed for my first two years at medical school, a magnanimous gift. He sported a moustache and wore a grey flannel cloth wrapped many times round his lower torso, a dress favoured by many older men of his generation. My aunt was energetic, sharp and definitely the brains behind the business. Of their two sons Justin lived in Colombo while the younger one Newton, lived with them. Both were unmarried at this stage. KVG s was at that time mainly into drapery, their later expansion into the book trade occurred after the war. Our two families were very close and I recall once when some of my elder sisters went down with chicken pox, we three younger ones

were packed off to live with the de Silvas while the former were being given their baths usually during the second week of the illness. This was the prevailing practice of the time (perhaps even of today?) as it was felt that the danger of cross- infection was greatest at this time. Considering the actual dynamics of spread of the virus, this actually is the least infectious time of all! None of us contracted the illness (suggesting obviously good isolation during the first week of illness) but no doubt proving to all how right they were in isolating us when they did. Near KVGs was Nelson's clock and watch repair shop which greatly fascinated me, but best of all was Banda's Boot Works, at the top of the street, which always oozed the delightful aroma of fresh leather. This would give me a sort of early morning 'kick' which would put me in just the right mood for school! Shortly after this we would turn left on to the road leading directly to our school situated quite close to the *Dalada Maligawa*. (Temple of the Tooth)



The Dalada Maligawa - early 20th Century view

This road had a bus terminus and then a very important landmark which however had no significance at all for us kids. This was Kings Pavilion, the official residence of Lord Mountbatten well guarded by a sentry. He must have spent a lot of his time here during this period with the war at its height, but we never actually

saw the great man (what would it have meant to us anyway?) Two other shops in Kandy are worth mentioning from a kids' viewpoint. The first one was halfway down Castle Street which sold delicious pastries and best of all; four inch long candy sticks and then the shop of shops, one beyond compare, the bookshop at the top of Castle Street that sold COMICS! These were always laid out on long tables – Film Fun, Radio Fun, Champion, Hotspur, Beano, Dandy etc a veritable Aladdin's cave! They were around 12 to 16 pages each printed on thin paper, without covers, and cost I think around 35 cents each. This was a lot of money in those days, especially for a kid and we had to be satisfied with perhaps one at a time and often not every week either. One could exchange comics with friends to overcome this problem. What never ceased to amaze me is that with the war at its height around this time, with half the world from London to Darwin being blown up or on fire, ships with hundreds of military personnel aboard being sunk, these little treasures seemed (to me anyway) always to be there week after week on those long tables for sale! Surely a minor miracle if ever there was one.

From a child's point of view life in Kandy around this time was delightful. There weren't many people on the streets and few cars. Our family used to go for walks some evenings to the Kandy Lake, buying delicious piping hot *ulundu vadais* (lentil cakes) from the vendors there and sometimes going up the hill to the lovely park there to take in the vista of the beautiful lake, the *Dalada Maligawa* and the surrounding hills. The war never really registered on my consciousness, although I recall seeing my elders gathered around the radio from time to time, no doubt listening to the news bulletin. My only interest in this was the little man inside the box who never seemed to stop talking! One war related incident and the only one I know of, is perhaps worth recounting. Our servant boy returned from the market one evening to say that a Japanese man dressed up as a monk, chanting and beating two small rounded drums suspended by a cord in front of his chest had been arrested as a spy when wireless transmission equipment was discovered inside the drums. Fact or fiction? I wouldn't know but how come an "undesirable alien" was allowed to roam the streets of Kandy with impunity?

Life at Dharmarajah College was pleasant. Each afternoon before breaking up at 1.00 pm, we had to assemble on the front lawn, put our hands together in prayer and recite some

Buddhist verses whose meaning I knew not. I received two class prizes, one of them was a thick, hard cover boy's adventure yarn entitled "the Lost Empire". I also painfully recall two canings, no doubt for some terrible misdemeanours. (two to four cuts delivered on little hands with a cane by the Headmaster- OUCH!!). Another memory from this period is being with a crowd of boys and girls one morning (opposite Queens Hotel I think) cheering the last Governor General of Ceylon, Sir Henry Monck-Mason Moore, as he drove past in his Rolls Royce at a stately pace in ceremonial dress looking very impressive. Perhaps we even waved little Union Jacks as well! Was this a show intended to impress the natives or a last hurrah, as a cynic might say?

In mid 1945, I found myself one night, walking down Trincomalee Street deliriously happy, with the rest of the family and hundreds of other excited men and women: something called the 'war' had ended. Soon we were on the night train to Colombo where I spent the next few months at Ladies College again, with the dear Opie sisters, famous Principals of Ladies College. I do remember Rita Opie. Later, I sat a competitive test for admission to Royal College, a requirement I discovered many years later, was not applicable to Royal Primary boys. The test was followed by an interview with Mr E.L. Bradby, the last British Principal of Royal College both of which I must have passed as by January 1946 I was enrolled at Royal College.



Royal College - early 20th Century

We first formers (around 100 of us) were housed in Carlton Lodge down Turret Road. The rest of the school was housed in three larger houses, also down Turret Road. But a term later we relocated to the original site of the college, which had fewer buildings than now. The all important grounds at the back looked like a

wasteland after the military occupation, heavily overgrown with shrubs etc. Soon this was all cleared enabling us little boys to get on with the important job of playing cricket. Our batch of 1946 was I suppose no different to any other. We all had an almost instinctive understanding of which teachers could be 'tormented' with impunity and which had to be treated with the greatest of respect! This was all good humoured and never malicious, of course. Most of the staff was dedicated, long term teachers greatly interested in the education of their charges. Discipline was exercised when called for, but overall a sense of freedom prevailed.

The highlight of the year was always the Royal - Thomian cricket match, which we won many times during our stay at Royal and gave us plenty to cheer ourselves hoarse. During this period two international cricket greats visited the school and addressed the boys at special school assemblies. One was in today's language, a genuine superstar. He was Sir Learie Constantine the great West Indian all-rounder, and the other Bill Oldfield, the famous Australian wicket keeper. Also around these years one of our own boys, Gamini Goonesena was included in the group of cricketers from which the team to play Don Bradman's legendary 1948 team was chosen. This was a significant honour for a schoolboy. For the princely sum of one rupee I was privileged to see this match.

During the second decade of my life, much of it as a student of Royal College, I developed a growing interest in Western Classical music. I recall at ten years of age pestering a kind sister of mine to play Schubert's Marche Militaire on the piano, over and over again. Then at around 16 years I remember being mesmerised on first hearing the famous Hungarian Rhapsody by Liszt on the radio. This interest grew until very soon it was something of an obsession, with the well known works of the masters going round and round in my head most of the time. In particular Beethoven's Violin Concerto and I were best mates for many years! This obsession led to an interesting experience. I was travelling in the upper deck of a double-decker bus whistling an extract from a Beethoven violin sonata; oblivious to the rest of the world, when the gentleman in the seat ahead of me turned round and asked me whether it was from Beethoven's Spring/Kreutzer sonata (I forget which). Soon we got talking and it transpired he was a Mr Samuel from the editorial staff of the Daily News. He invited me to visit Lake House sometime. I accepted the invitation and enjoyed my visit but our short acquaintance came to an end there. Along with my obsession of western classical music I developed a strong antipathy to-

wards the 'other type' of music, much beloved of the youth of my generation- a sort of "music fundamentalism"! I recall writing at least one letter to the young writer's page in the Daily News deploring this preference of my contemporaries.

Some years later, I began to wonder why this passion for music should have appeared, out of the blue, to consume me so completely. A simple explanation occurred to me, which requires going back to my early childhood and a quick look at some prevailing social and cultural attitudes of the 1930 s. I came towards the tail end of a large family. My eldest four siblings, all girls, were 14-18 years older. They were approaching a 'marriageable age'. Young girls in their late teens onwards, at that time were meant for marriage, they were never to be sacrificed at the altar of higher education. Marriage was, of course, a very serious business never to be left in the hands of the individuals getting married. Parents were equipped with infinite wisdom and limitless experience and so eminently qualified to make the right decisions in this all important matter. To this end, many factors were taken into consideration, many non-negotiable. These included the social standing of the other party, caste, compatibility of horoscopes, attractiveness (of the girl), job or relative affluence (e.g. property owner) if a boy, etc. There remained another potential asset in the case of a girl; an ability to 'tickle the ivory', which scored fairly heavily. Catering to this were the two schools of music from London, the Royal School of Music and the Trinity College of Music. There was practically a small industry of music teachers, particularly in Colombo and to a lesser degree in large towns like Kandy and Galle helping girls go up the difficult grades of the two schools with set pieces at each grade, making them more and more proficient at playing the piano. One amusing aspect of this was evidenced when visitors dropped in. The young girl would then be asked to play a piece on the piano to the admiration of her beaming parents (it mattered not that quite often they couldn't tell Ludwig van B from Devar Surya Sena!). Of course the main performance was reserved for the visits of prospective bridegroom's party - a sort of inspection tour. These 'arranged marriages' (as they were called) gradually waned with time and in these more 'liberated' times, not much in evidence.

With at least one or two sisters 'marriageable' at any given time during my early childhood, you can imagine what a feast of Bach, Chopin, and Mozart etc I was being fed all day? This material then must have been seeded in my subconscious, month after month to re-appear with a vengeance some years later as a consuming passion. A simple explanation: Q.E.D. Post hoc However, much later I realised

that there was just one problem with this simple theory; the two sisters closer to my age never demonstrated any such leaning in later life.

Most of the material in this article had to be dredged from the deepest recesses of my memory, some with considerable difficulty. Errors and omissions are thus to be expected and are definitely not intentional. For these I sincerely apologise.

AMT

To be concluded in J 43

Schooldays 1942-1946

by Darnley de Souza

As Tony Peries was inspired by Barbara Misso to write of his schooling and other reminiscences during the War, so have they inspired me to do the same. I was at St. Joseph's College at Maradana when the war broke out. Our air raid drills had one precaution that seemed bizarre to ten year olds. It was the insistence that we bite on a pencil during the drills. This was supposed to minimise the effect of the bomb blast on our ear drums.

St Joseph's was taken over in March 1942 by the British Forces and converted into a hospital. The 'Black Out' was already in force from August 1939 with street lights banned and severe restrictions on domestic lighting. Headlights of cars had to have a metal cover with just a small hooded rectangular slit to let the beam shine through. My contribution to the 'war effort' was helping to glue the home window panes with strips of paper to prevent the glass turning into deadly projectiles. That fateful 5th April 1942 saw me as an altar server at Easter Sunday Mass at All Saints, Borella. The sirens went off at about 8 o'clock and I took it in blasé fashion as another practice air raid drill, but soon learned differently and hurried home.

There we had a trench partly covered with corrugated galvanised zinc sheets. On hearing the dogfights and anti-aircraft fire I wanted to be out there, but was unceremoniously bundled under the dining table. We had our close encounter when a piece of anti-aircraft shell about 3 inches in length came through the roof just missing a servant girl. I kept it assiduously for many years as a vivid reminder of our 'brush with death'.

Evacuation was on the agenda as soon the raid was over. It had been arranged that our bolt hole would be a relation's coconut estate at Kandawala, 8 kilometres from Negombo and near Katana, and off we went by car. It was a pitiful sight to see people fleeing Colombo, even on foot, with whatever possessions they could carry. Panic was very much a visible fever.

Not much later some of my mother's relations joined us. For children below the age of 12 it was an idyllic existence – no school, cousinly companions and new horizons to explore. A small stream on the property provided us with our fishing opportunities, marred at times when the sinister head of a *Kabaragoya* (Water Monitor) appeared in the water displaying its long evil-looking forked tongue. Fishing, I regret to report was not a roaring success. Worms on bent pins at the end of sewing thread tied to a piece of stick were scorned. Even fish have their standards.

The two male parents continued to live and work in Colombo and we waited with anxiety and hope to see which car would be first sighted driving up for the week-end. And the goodies they would carry.

This happy rural existence for us children came to a premature end with the advent of more relations to the adjoining estate. They set up a school for us, no doubt, on the insistence of our parents. Indicative of the fear of Japanese bombing raids and the possibility of an imminent invasion they had decided to move all the way from Negombo!

Eventually, towards the end of 1942 the parents decided it was safe to return to Colombo. But my budding scholastic career, now in disgraced tatters, deemed it necessary for me to live with my Aunt's family at Burulapitiya, near Minuwangoda, where St. Peter's College, Colombo had set up school. Tony Peries almost made it to Burulapitiya where our paths would have crossed instead of doing so six years later at St. Joseph's. The girls from the evacuated families also attended the College which had about a dozen boarders. Why Burulapitiya? I think because it was within commuting distance of Colombo and it had a strong Catholic community. There was also enough land in front of the Church for cadjan class rooms to be built. To get all this co-operation from the village must have required a very persuasive parish priest negotiator. A seeming idiosyncrasy was that the Church was dedicated not to a Saint but to Blessed Hugo. I wonder whether he has by now reached the top of the celestial ladder.

I hardly remember attending classes, as there was a case of measles in the family and that meant four weeks at home. Paddy fields were just behind our house with a stream of considerable size flowing

through them and this became our adventure playground. In these circumstances school was a breeze.

The College at Burulapitiya closed at the end of 1942 and in 1943 St. Joseph's commenced at St. Bernard's Seminary (now Aquinas College), next to the Archbishops House in Borella and I was back at St. Josephs. There was another Branch of the College at Homagama which was essentially a boarding school. The one at Borella had a hostel for the senior students further down east on Kynsey Road where the priests also lived. Whilst the science laboratories, library and chapel with some class rooms were in an upstairs building, and the offices in another building, most of the class rooms were under cadjan. It was a great temptation during a storm to poke holes in the roof and hope a 'rain holiday' would come our way. And so it was back to a more permanent school life for me.

We lived in Borella right next to the Ananda/Nalanda sports ground. Whilst we were in Kandawala this was occupied by Australian soldiers under canvas. On arriving late home one night, in a storm, my father found some of them occupying the veranda of our home, as they had been flooded out. With my father's blanket permission this became a routine refuge for them. When I was back after my evacuation sojourn it was the Indian troops bivouacked there. It was a particularly grisly sight to see them skinning and carving up slaughtered goats, hanging them off our mango tree.

When the Indians left their camp it was abandoned to a sea of empty tents. The opportunity was not to be missed and we adapted the scenario for acting out 'Cowboys and Indians' - the Red ones this time. Next to the sports ground was the Nathanielsz Technical School and this was converted into a Royal Navy Wireless Station in about 1944 and the sports ground now sprouted masts and wires. Our schoolboy gang chummed up with the Royal Navy guards, innocently persuading them to show us the workings of their .45 revolvers. But other than that the Station did not exude any excitement for us, faced as we were with a heavily fenced and sterile one-time sports ground. But a legacy of the war that remained for some time was the concrete pool that was built close to our fence. It held water for fire-fighting purposes and comforting as its presence was, it sadly turned into a cesspool of stagnant water breeding mosquitoes. In its early days it gave us an unexpected opportunity to try out our embryonic nautical skills, as toy crafts were experimented with. All of them were, sadly, only a crudely shaped

piece of wood driven by a twisted rubber band propeller. Mine had the accidental distinction of showing a submarine-like propensity by nose diving into the water and re-appearing two feet away.

1945 saw imported consumer goods appearing and with eager anticipation and constant cajoling of my parents I became the owner of a Hercules bicycle. Wartime stringencies still held their sway and the bicycle was a picture in all black. Not a glimmer of chrome was there to mar its ebony-like perfection. One almost expected to see a New Zealand haka heralding its appearance. But how proud I was of it!

School at Borella settled down to normality, except for the occasional air raid drill. With the official end of the war in September 1945 we were scheduled to be back at Maradana in time for the first term of 1946. To get the desks and chairs back into position a band of us called 'The Trolley Boys' went into action. 'Trolley' because that was how we moved the furniture. Fr. Peter Pillai in his gratitude took us to dinner at Fountain Café and in his speech at the 1946 Prize Day he said "I must make mention of a small band of boys who rose to the occasion with a generous devotion that was at once a revelation and inspiration", referring to the effort of getting the College back on its feet.

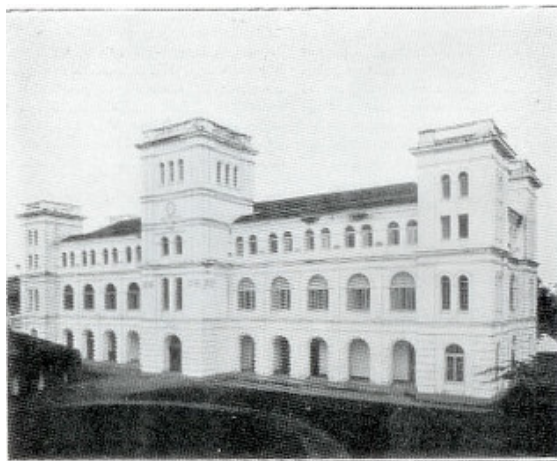
On the 4 Feb 1946 we assembled at the Borella

site to say farewell with a token bonfire of cadjans. Then with a lot of flag waving and noise staff and pupils marched from the Borella site to Darley Road. So with a triumphant flourish four years of banishment ended.

Darnley had submitted this article early 2007 soon after I had carried a theme of 'schooldays' in one issue. Subsequently he sent me "My Portfolio of Characters" which I published in Journal # 40, our tenth anniversary issue. That was the last bit of prose he wrote for The Ceylankan. I had held over this one until the same theme could be revisited with other companion articles. Ed

If you bungle raising your children I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much.

Jacqueline Kennedy - First Lady of the US 1961-63



ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

My Father, the Elephant Hunter

by Rex Olegasegarem

The heated debate, charges and counter charges currently raging between the Japanese and the rest of the world about the killing of whales “for scientific reasons” draws a lot of media attention. Today, the information superhighway brings the news live almost in real time to a worldwide audience and engages diverse people and groups of people who show concern for these mammoths of the great oceans. In Australia the culling of kangaroos for no other reason than preservation of feeding grounds for domesticated animals and man has its supporters and opponents.

Down the ages man has conquered animals by sheer ingenuity which makes up for his lack of size. From primitive weapons to high powered guns man has at his disposal, managed to keep the “beasts at bay”. Men have killed for food and for protection of property. In the last century, untrained Sri Lankan villagers who tried to protect their crops using shot guns or hurling spears and fire brands usually did more harm than good. Their kill rate was not astounding but the injury rate was. Result was that many a wounded elephant became an outcast from its herd and turned ‘rogue’ with devastating consequences to itself and the villagers.

This is where my father, Wilson Olegasegarem came in, back in the 1920’s in Sri Lanka. Wilson, a man of courage imbued with a spirit of adventure, yet compassionate towards the hapless villagers was a noted shot with rifle or gun. He was sought after by villagers and authorities alike. His substantive duties as Irrigation Superintendent took him off the beaten track and he became very adept at tracking wild beasts, particularly elephants that were on the rampage as man progressively invaded its feeding territory. Colonisation and the spread of human habitat into primeval jungles had to have its adverse consequences on both man and beast. Wilson was requested many times to tackle the marauding elephants mostly along the Batticaloa-Badulla road and in the vicinity of Punani where extensions to the railway line were in progress. The work gangs had unpleasant encounters with these elephants which led the authorities of the Colonial administration to intensify their efforts to have the “rogue” elephants destroyed.

The two newspaper reports that I reproduce below, found among my father’s belongings tell an on the spot story, with all the current excitement and some justifiable hyperbole.

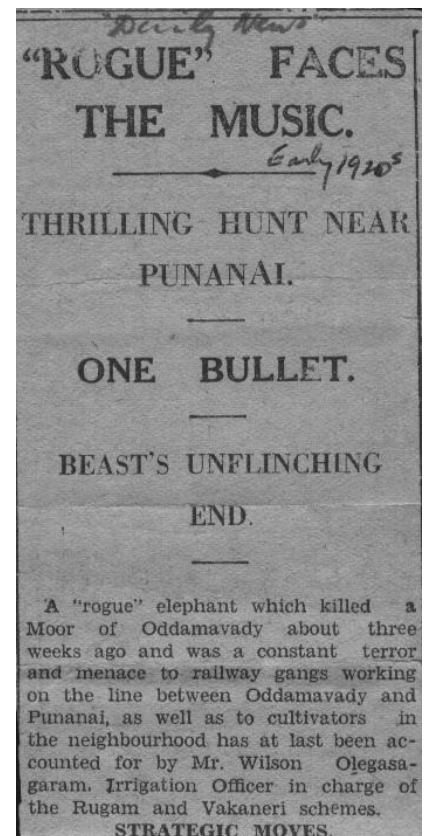
“ROGUE” Faces the Music – Thrilling Hunt near Punani – One Bullet – Beast’s Unflinching End.

A “rogue” elephant which killed a Moor of Oddamavady about three weeks ago and was a constant terror and menace to railway gangs working on the line between Oddamavady and Punani as well as to cultivators in the neighbourhood has at last been accounted for by Mr Wilson Olegasegarem Irrigation Officer in charge of the Rugam and Vakaneri schemes.

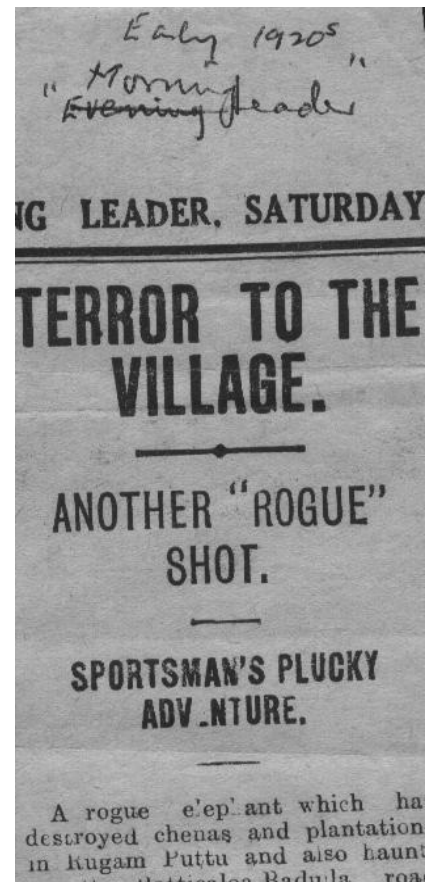
Strategic Moves:

The animal which was declared a “rogue” about a month ago since when free licences for its destruction had been issued by the Government Agent had successfully evaded all its trackers. It constantly shifted its field of activities thereby giving hunters the slip.

The Last Encounter:



Two of the news clippings of the day, early 1920 s



Early on Saturday morning Mr Olegasegarem set out with some men and before long came across the “rogue’s” fresh foot prints in the jungle adjoining the fields of Santhiathuvveli where the cultivators appeared to have passed a very anxious night. The party pushed ahead and soon came to a river called Savu-Aru where there were signs the beast had crossed over only a little earlier.

Granite Figure:

From this spot onwards regular tracking began. Mr Olegasegarem and two veddah trackers who had been out elephant hunting before went ahead. They had hardly covered quarter of a mile when one of the veddahs suddenly stopped and pointed right in front towards a huge object which at first glance looked more like a huge rock. The animal “rogue” that he was had apparently scented the pursuers were on his track and was standing absolutely rigid and staring at the sportsmen probably with the intention of making a charge.

A Gallant Passing:

Mr Olegasegarem decided not to risk a frontal shot. Having ordered all the men except the two veddah trackers to retire to a place of safety he veered to a side and when he had got within 50ft of the animal he fired. The bullet found its mark the huge beast dropping on the spot even before the sportsman had time to lower his rifle from the shoulder.

Scars of Battle:

The elephant measured about 11 ft and had eight gun shots most of which had not healed. These shots are said to have been fired by some cultivators when the animal entered their fields and destroyed crops. It was only nine months ago that another “rogue” elephant was shot down at Vakaneri by Mr Olegasegarem and Mr I T S Crowther.

Batticaloa Cor. June 24
Daily News early 1920’s



Wilson on the left with the downed ‘rogue’. The village headman in the middle is there to bask in reflected glory along with a tracker.

TERROR TO THE VILLAGE ANOTHER “ROGUE” SHOT SPORTSMAN’S PLUCKY ADVENTURE

A “rogue” elephant which has destroyed chenas and plantations in Rugam Puttu and also haunting the Batticaloa-Badulla road between the 80th and 82nd mileposts was shot down yesterday morning by Mr Wilson Olegasegarem, Irrigation Superintendent Rugam and Vakanery schemes, about quarter mile west of the 81st milepost.

The animal measured 10ft and is said to have been a source of constant terror and worry to the villagers of Rugam, to the cattle keepers kraaling their animals in the vicinity of Rugam tank and also to the carters and pedestrians going along the Batticaloa- Badulla road.

In thick jungle:

Mr Olegasegarem appears to have had considerable difficulty in getting at the “rogue” as it was in the midst of thick jungle in close proximity to the village in the security of this jungle he had slept during the day for the past three or four weeks. In spite of the trackers dissuading the sportsman from following up the elephant into such jungle Mr Olegasegarem appears to have pushed forward. He had got within 50ft of the beast when the latter scenting danger had lifted his trunk and was about to charge when the sportsman’s rifle spoke promptly and accurately bringing the animal down on the spot.

It was just a month ago that another “rogue” elephant which had killed a Muslim near Od-damavady railway line, was accounted for by Mr Olegasegarem.

Morning Leader early 1920’s
Batticaloa Cor. July 24

If my father was alive today, I doubt he would raise a rifle to these majestic animals. In fact he gave up hunting altogether soon after he got engaged to my mother as he knew it would cause her distress. He certainly saved a lot of grief to the animals by making sure he got a clean kill, perhaps more surgical than the kangaroo cull and whale harvests that goes on even today.

Mankind’s true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view) consists of its attitudes towards those who are at its mercy: animals.

*Milan Kundera 1929— Czech writer in his most famous book
“The Unbearable Lightness of Being”*

Sri Lanka to Australia via Samoa I Sisifo

Part 2

by Earle Forbes

The hot tropical climate of Upolu and Savai'i soon brought Willie to Western Samoa. Willie did not come for a holiday in the salubrious climate.

He came there as an expert entomologist. Like most hot and humid locations Western Samoa had its own problems with mosquitoes and mosquito borne diseases. During his tour of duty in Western Samoa, Willie set up a control and management system for the problems of mosquito infestation in the country.

At the Department of Inland Revenue my career was going well. I soon moved up from Senior Investigating Officer to Chief Investigating Officer and then to be appointed as

Advisor to the Commissioner. In mid 1977, I was appointed Acting Commissioner of Inland Revenue.

The overall picture during the years 1975 to 1979 showed that Sri Lankans were in high government positions in Western Samoa. They were the decision makers in the allocation of foreign aid, collection of revenue, construction of new public works, the progress of higher education, some aspects of public health and in keeping the national carrier in the air. There were hardly any Sri Lankans employed in the private sector in Western Samoa. This is in contrast to Fiji at the time where there were many Sri Lankans working as accountants and senior executives for 'South Sea Trading Companies', such as Burns Philp.

Away from all the official positions, what was life like for the Sri Lankans in Western Samoa during these years? After the initial shock of being so far away from home and in an almost completely different environment wore off, life for most was wonderful. Western Samoa in the late seventies was as close to an earthly paradise as

one could get to. The climate was tropical and warm; the people were friendly; the lifestyle laid back; the international school and the Catholic school were excellent; there were no traffic lights or traffic jams; commuting distances were short and most of life's necessities were in plentiful supply.

As Government housing was good and education excellent, most Sri Lankan workers had their families living with them in Apia. Monday to Thursday was pretty much routine with work and school taking up the daylight hours. However, unlike in some other locations, it was not unusual for a Sri Lankan to drop in at a friend's home for a drink and dinner any day of the week.

Weekends, which started early Friday afternoon, were periods of fun and relaxation. It was usual for office workers to go down to the hotels on a Friday afternoon for a few drinks. The married ones went home, or to a friend's place, at around 8.00 or 8.30 pm. The younger and more adventurous would migrate from the hotels to the 'nightclubs'.

There were a few nightclubs in Apia where there was dancing, music and romance up to the small hours on a Friday night. The nightclubs kept going on Saturday evenings too but only to 12.00 midnight. No nightclubs were open on the Sunday, nor was public consumption of alcohol permitted. Saturday morning was usually shopping time in downtown Apia. The shops in Apia afforded a tantalizing array of New Zealand, Australian and American made goods. If one went down to the local market there was breadfruit as big as coconuts for ten sene (cents) each and whole Spanish mackerel fish of eight to ten pounds for two to three tala (dollars). Saturday afternoon was siesta time followed by an evening swim in Cecil's backyard Pacific Ocean pool. Of course, Cecil and his wife would expect the Sri Lankan visitors to stay for a drink or three and dinner.

The whole of Western Samoa stopped on a Sunday for Church related activities. On one occasion I asked my Samoan friend what he did on a Sunday. He replied in a very succinct and accu-



Opening ceremony of workshop project. Large roast pig being carried by four stalwart Samoans. Photo by Cecil.



Cecil's backyard saltwater swimming pool - the mighty Pacific Ocean. Just open his gate and hop in the pool.

rate manner. *'On Sunday', he said, 'we go to church come back and eat. Later we go to church again and we come back and eat again'.* For the Christian Sri Lankans it was, go to church and then drive out of Apia to one of various spots by the sea for a picnic.

One of the favourite spots for a picnic was Lefaga Village. In 1952/53 the famous movie, *'Return to Paradise'* starring Gary Cooper, was filmed at this location. Lefaga was a most idyllic spot with a palm fringed beach of white sand and shallow waters dotted with several rock pools. This spot was great for family outings as it was relatively free of high surf or deep water near the shore. Several of the Sri Lankan adults in Samoa at the time were not good swimmers and they felt at home in the sparkling shallow rock pools of Lefaga beach.

If one was interested in an overnight trip then either American Samoa for duty free shopping or a journey to Savai'i was the way to go. The flight to Pago Pago was of about 30 minutes duration. Pago Pago had excellent accommodation and the shops stocked a wide range of top quality imports all of which were available at comparatively low duty free prices. To get to Savai'i one had to drive down to the ferry embarkation spot near Faleolo airport and get on a 'rust bucket' ferry. In spite of all its shortcomings, the ferry was given the nickname, 'Love Boat'. Savai'i which was larger than Upolu but far less developed offered miles of beautiful desolate beaches, petrified fields of lava from a bygone volcanic eruption, several cascading and sparkling waterfalls and similar examples of unspoilt natural beauty.

If you did not feel like getting out of town or being outdoors there was always Aggie

Grey's Hotel. This beautiful hotel is said to have had its beginnings in the early nineteen forties when Aggie Grey started out selling coffee and sandwiches to mostly military personnel. In the mid to late seventies it was the most relaxing and comfortable place to spend an evening or for a longer stay. The staff at Aggie's were so friendly that when they served you a drink, they would stay and chat about themselves and their Aiga (extended family). Friday and Saturday nights was Fiafia time. The Fiafia is a singing and dancing event. The legendary Aggie used to join in these parties on occasion. One most memorable event was Aggie's 80th birthday (in 1978), when she danced the famous 'siva' in a style that was still the epitome of grace and sensuous motion. All in all the Samoans are excellent dancers and singers. A group of Samoans will get together casually and sing in harmony as if they are members of a highly trained choir. Samoan ladies will dance with movement of hands and hips that is a delight to behold.

One of the few Sri Lankans who was unmarried when he arrived in Western Samoa, was Hugh. Hugh soon fell to the charms of a beautiful Samoan lady. It was not long before Hugh and his Samoan fiancé decided to get married. As far as my knowledge goes, this was the first Samoan/Sri Lankan marriage to be celebrated on Western Samoan soil. To mark Hugh's marriage appropriately the Sri Lankans in Apia organized a ceremony and reception. By this time we had the benefit of another Sri Lankan joining us in the person of Father John. Father John was a Minister of the Christian Church who had come to Western Samoa to tender to the religious needs of the local community. Father John had a deep religious commitment but it was his charming personality and quick wit which won so many over to his Church. At Hugh's wedding reception Father John was asked to bless the newly married couple and to welcome the guests. He got the guests to a roaring start when he said, *'I wish to welcome the Acting Director of the PWD, the Acting Commissioner of Inland Revenue, the Acting Head of the Development Bank and also their Acting wives'.*

In this modern day Paradise there were no major law and order problems. Even security conscious Sri Lankans soon got used to securing their homes in a very basic and casual manner. Devices such as burglar alarms and

deadlocks were unheard of here. There were of course petty thefts. Sarath lost the hubcaps from his new Datsun. A complaint to the Police brought no result. However, a Samoan Matai (Chief) who worked with Sarath spoke to the village elders near where the hubcaps were lost and the goods soon surfaced to be returned to Sarath with a sincere apology. In appreciation Sarath donated a couple of cases of beer to the Chiefs who had helped to get the hubcaps back. This incident pretty much sums up the way many small problems were solved.

Sam, 'the New Zealand Sri Lankan', was involved in another episode of petty theft. Sam who had got used to the Samoan way, very often left his house unlocked or very basically secured. Sam was a widower who lived by himself, as his two grown up daughters were settled in New Zealand. On one occasion he came back home to see a young woman inside his house collecting all the food and drink from his fridge and putting it into a bag. Sam went out quietly and was able to raise the alarm by notifying a Samoan who was doing work in a garden next door. As Sam entered the house for the second time with his Samoan helper the young woman ran out the back door abandoning her food and drink bag. The young woman darted across to the fence at the rear of the house and attempted to get over the fence. However, her effort was not quite successful as her lava lava (a traditional Samoan garment akin to a three quarter length sarong) got entangled in the fence. Sam and his helper were now closing in on the intruder. The young woman was not to be outdone. She proceeded to rapidly yank the lava lava off her body and was soon quite naked from the waist down. Sam and his helper were rooted to the spot while the thief made off across the street and out of sight. It was said that thereafter several expatriates stocked up their fridges, left the doors unsecured and hoped for a burglary.

No trip to Western Samoa is complete without a visit to the gravesite of the 'Tusitala'. The word 'Tusitala' in Samoan means the 'story teller', and is used to describe the great 19th century author, Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson was already a famous author when he first took an interest in Western Samoa, he lived in San Francisco until about 1887. He then took to sailing the South Pacific. Some attribute this to his love of the sea and to his love of adventure. However, it may have also been due to a more practical reason. Stevenson was stricken with tuberculosis and is said to have been looking to live in a tropical environment in the belief that it would be of benefit to his health. In 1889 Stevenson and his much older wife Fanny, purchased a

plot of land on the high ground overlooking Apia. With great difficulty Stevenson and his wife set about building a house for themselves. The setting was ideal. The house was built at the foot of a small mountain (Mt. Vaea) and in proximity to the building there is a river and waterfall.

The house, a two storey building with verandahs and lovely open gardens, was occupied by Stevenson, Fanny, Stevenson's mother and Fanny's children from a previous marriage. It was called 'Vailima', which literally meant 'five streams'. This name was adopted by Stevenson and his family as at the time small streams were thought to have run through the property. At Vailima, Stevenson continued his writing in the shadow of Mt. Vaea. By the time Stevenson arrived in Samoa he had already written several famous novels such as Dr. Jekyll and



R L Stevenson's house "Vailima", a two storey building with verandahs and lovely open gardens

Mr. Hyde and Treasure Island. At Vailima he wrote David Balfour, The Beach at Falesa and a few other works. His unfinished work, Weir of Hermiston, was also written at Vailima.

Stevenson spent just over four years in Western Samoa. He died in late 1894 at Vailima. The loyal chiefs of Apia and the surrounding villages saw to it that his last wish to be buried at the top of Mt Vaea, was carried out. The biggest and most modern hotel in Apia in 1975 (the Tusitala), was named after the great story teller.

I am not sure of the position-today, but in 1977 a visit to R L Stevenson's gravesite was not your Sunday afternoon picnic. It was a fairly strenuous trip of four to five hours. One Saturday morning, eight other Sri Lankans and I, made the climb to the gravesite. We set off from Apia at about 8.00 am. The first part of the trip was a short 15 to 20 minute drive from Apia past the official

residence of the Head of State. We had to turn off the main cross island road and drive to the base of Mt Vaea. Having parked the mighty Wolsley and the other lesser vehicles (Datsuns and Toyotas) we prepared for the ascent. In true Sri Lankan style we were laden with food (beef cutlets, boiled eggs, and boiled potatoes) and drink (iced coffee and Samoan brewed Vailima beer). The track was rough, steep in parts with vegetation overhanging. Stones and boulders were strewn on the ground and the roots of trees crossed the path. After nearly two hour climb, interspersed with several short stops, we emerged on more or less flat ground atop the mountain. There laid out in fairly humble fashion was the grave of the famous author R L Stevenson. His wife Fanny, though much older, outlived him by nearly 20 years and died in America. Her ashes were brought back to Western Samoa and scattered at the top of Mt Vaea.

From this spot one has a panoramic view of Apia Harbour and the mighty Pacific Ocean. In 1977 the gravesite was pristine with little done to alter its original state. If you wished to be buried in a peaceful yet majestic spot, this had to be it. On a simple tombstone is inscribed his epitaph:

**Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie,
Glad did I live and gladly die
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me.
Here he lies where longed to be.
Home is the sailor, home from the sea.
And the hunter home from the hill**

Although Samoa was Paradise and the final home for R L Stevenson, it was soon to be my Paradise Lost. The lure of affluent Australia was looming on the not too distant horizon and in early 1979, we as a family, decided to apply for Permanent Residency in Australia. Initially there were problems. Australia did not have a diplomatic representative office in Western Samoa. The diplomatic mission in Fiji covered Western Samoa as well. We were accordingly in true Canberra bureaucratic style asked to apply through Colombo. At the time (unlike now in retirement) I had high level contacts and our application was soon directed to the Suva Diplomatic Office. As history would have it our application was only partly processed when Australia sent its first

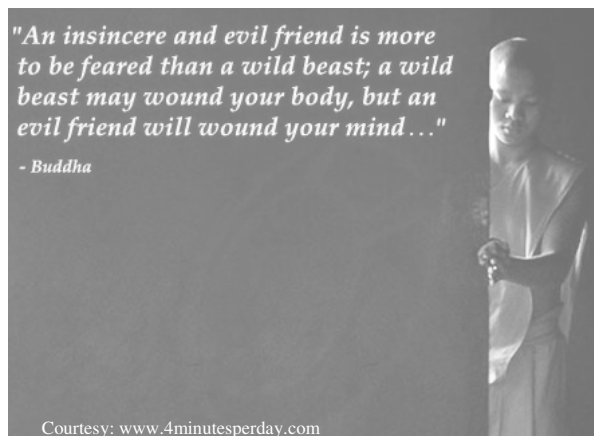
diplomat to Apia to open a representative office in Western Samoa. The temporary office of the Australian Diplomatic Representative was opened in mid 1979 in two rooms at the Tusitala Hotel. We had our final very informal interview with the young First Secretary in his temporary office at the Tusitala Hotel. We were I think, the first Sri Lankans to be granted Permanent Resident status in Australia, through this office.



Earl, Rosemarie and Rochelle at Stevenson's tomb

As a post script, I must add that The Independent State of Western Samoa is no longer known by this name. Just as the name Ceylon was changed to Sri Lanka, so too the name, The Independent State of Western Samoa, was changed in 1997 to The Independent State of Samoa.

concluded



Medical Misadventures and Cochin Capers

by Tony Peries

Conversationally describing my late 2007 misadventure to the Editor of this esteemed journal led him to suggest—and I can but hope he does not regret it—that I set it down for publication as there are some salutary lessons for those travellers overseas, especially those of advancing years.

It all started late in Sept '07 when I fell heavily on the road, not 200 metres from our house (in daylight, sober!) while walking rapidly for exercise. My upper left arm was badly bruised and painful, and I had a good collection of abrasions too but I did not think my arm was broken and thus resisted all efforts by my wife, Srini, to get me to our doctor. Three days later, with unabated pain and bruises turning black, I phoned the doctor's surgery for an appointment to find nothing available for four days, it being the start of a long weekend.

By the time the doctor saw me it was a week after the fall, his raised eyebrows said more than any words, he ordered an immediate x-ray which confirmed a break, quite close to the shoulder joint. So it was off to an orthopaedic surgeon, a specialist in arms and shoulders only, who to my relief said no surgery or plaster cast was required but only a "collar and cuff" i.e. a sling. He also said that I ought to be sufficiently healed to fly off to India and Sri Lanka on 26th November, a long planned trip. After about a month in the sling, the surgeon said it could come off but intensive physiotherapy was essential, which I underwent (three times weekly, at \$50 a pop, having no insurance) and did the prescribed exercises exactly as required. We were able to board our flight to Mumbai on 26th as scheduled.

Barely two days after our arrival, I found my left leg going numb and by the time of our next flight four days later, I needed a wheelchair to board, readily provided by Jet Airways who were ultra helpful and even upgraded us to First Class. Mumbai is a huge, badly congested city, so we thought Cochin a better bet for our medical consultation closer to Colombo and relatives. On arrival at Cochin hotel, The Brunton Boatyard, we summoned the hotel's on call doctor who checked my reflexes etc., and said he thought I had experienced a mild stroke. He had me carted off by ambulance to his own private hospital, The Gautam, where head x-rays and a scan revealed my fall had caused a subdural haemorrhage: the pressure of the clotted blood on my brain was caus-

ing the stroke-like symptoms. That hospital has no neuro-surgical facilities so after two days I went off again by ambulance with sirens blaring, much to the amusement of my wife, to the Ernakulam Medical Centre, an enormous private hospital in the busiest part of Central Cochin. The neurosurgeon there, a Dr. Srinivass, recommended immediate surgery, (it actually was done next day) which he said in calm, measured tones, would take but an hour and effect a

Brain surgery was not unpleasant in these surroundings



cure. I was in truth relieved by this diagnosis as I had feared the onset of something horrid like muscular dystrophy.

The hospital's finance and administration section told us if we had adequate medical insurance that would cover all expenses. We had insurance from "One Cover" (Mondial) underwritten by Allianz and with a 24-hour emergency toll free number to call Brisbane from anywhere in the world. We have all read of the Indian companies who provide back room phone services for organisations like American Express and some big banks but for an ordinary caller out of India the service is woeful: sadly we had no mobile, not being addicted to it anyway much to our regret, the upshot was our insurer was not contactable for two whole days. Indian bureaucracy is impregnable and the hospital would not lift a finger without an Indian Rs. 60,000 (about \$1750) deposit in cash, credit cards unacceptable. Fortunately, we were carrying sufficient cash and travellers' cheques and the hotel got Srini cash advance on her credit card.

Brain surgery patients are necessarily kept in intensive care for 24 post operative hours and I woke up there with an intravenous line in each wrist, a "thing" to monitor pulse and blood clipped to a finger and a drainage tube in my head, 75 per cent of which was covered with sticking plaster. The Intensive Care unit (ICU) had enormous windows for

anxious relatives and friends to view their connections like fish in an aquarium. So I was able to wave to my dearly beloved who was outside conversing with local women, most of whom were waiting for sisters and daughters having Caesareans. Actually, I had no headache or other pain but the lack of daylight in the I.C.U. was a bit eerie and coupled with, no doubt, the after effects of anaesthetic, made me feel disorientated.

A day later, a Thursday, I was back in my private room on the sixth floor: Indian hospitals make provision for a relative so the room had an extra bed, a TV, an attached bathroom, fans and air-conditioning. The place was clean though not with the spit and polish of an Australian private hospital, and the nursing was top class. The surgeon, a most dedicated man, came to see me three times daily including Saturday and Sunday. Foreigners in Indian hospitals are required to produce a copy of their passports, which are passed on to the Police, who routinely notify the foreign missions of the patient's country. When the surgeon came round on the Friday, he told me the Australian High Commission from New Delhi had called him to inquire as to my progress etc., so your taxes are useful!

I had to lie flat in bed, with as little movement as possible, not even reading, till Saturday evening but a (pretty, female!) physiotherapist came each day to exercise my injured arm and legs. The surgeon told me I would regain feeling in my numb leg 48 hours after the operation and he was absolutely correct. My TV had only Indian language programs, so I was bored out of my mind. The hospital did not feed patients but has an on site canteen, the food being quite unpalatable to me, so I mainly subsisted on biscuits and bananas—the latter too, being barely edible. There was no accessible McDonalds or K.F.C. either. The only decent meal I had was on the Saturday evening when Srini bought an egg buriani and chicken curry from a nearby *Kaddai* (café) - we both shared it, cost being Rs. 80 (less than A \$3).

On Saturday evening I was allowed to get up and told I could go back to the hotel on Sunday, but not to fly to Colombo on 12th December, as planned because the stitches had to come out that day. The surgeon approved travel on the 15th. After all that time in bed I was a shade unsteady on my feet, so Srini rang Sri Lankan Airlines (S.L.A) to ask for a wheelchair, knowing from our own experience with Jet, and hearsay from others that we had only to ask—or so we thought! S.L.A. said we would have to go to their city office, get the appropriate form which the surgeon would then have to complete, and return it to the office. In good Sri Lankan fashion we applied pressure in Colombo but to no avail. So we said “in your dreams” to the airline, adding that we would sue

them if I fell, incurring injury.

The hospital's Finance Manager told us that there was no problem with my Sunday discharge as he knew I had to come back for removal of stitches and we had deposited most of the money too. However, after a final check up on Sunday morning, we again encountered the inflexible Indian red tape as the nurses “station” on my floor could not contact the Finance Manager and no one else would suffice. I was left fuming while Srini ran around trying to get clearance. Finally, we located the Assistant Manager, who said we could pay by credit card, so we were at last free to go. Our actual departure was greatly enhanced by the driver of the taxi Srini had engaged for the morning, who had come in by the “out” gate, incurring the wrath of the security men despite whose abuse he insisted on driving out of the “in” gate!

The Brunton Boatyard hotel was once a boatyard, now superbly converted into a boutique hotel right on the banks of the estuary leading to Cochin Port, Navy base and oil refinery. By the hotel is the wharf for two public ferries, which ply from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., leading to a constant stream of passengers and vehicles as big as trucks, while the boat traffic on the estuary itself is constant, ranging from one man canoes to passengers, liners, oil tankers and the beautifully turned out vessels of the Indian Navy. The remainder of my Sunday I spent sitting on our ground floor private balcony, not 50 metres from the water, watching the river traffic.

The hotel is very comfortable, with three restaurants and magnificent service. The staff from reception to back office, not excluding room cleaners, treated us like family, sending flowers and cards to the hospital and some even came to visit: on my return (ambulant, as they say!) I had a hero's welcome perhaps because they did not expect the guest they last saw carted off in an ambulance, walking in, albeit with 60 per cent of my head still covered in sticking plaster. The staff gave us royal treatment for the rest of our stay, the kitchen in particular making huge efforts to please our palates, not totally accustomed to Kerala curries, which normally do not contain *pol kiri* (coconut cream).

Cochin, now known as Kochi, is a very historic place, being the point at which the Portuguese first made contact with the East in search of spices, around 1495. As I felt quite well, though using a walking stick for safety, we spent the rest of our stay doing the tourist sights. Taxis are cheap, and gadding around from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. cost about Rs. 550 or A\$ 16. The small Indian made cabs are air-conditioned but the seats are hard as are the vehicle springs, so travel on the pot-holed, hideously



congested streets is not pleasant.

Once we had made contact with our insurers, they were very helpful and solicitous, phoning frequently to check on my progress. As I had paid the medical bills, the insurers agreed to reimburse me for I felt that if they paid the hospitals it would take forever to get back what I had paid them. Our final encounter with Indian bureaucracy, when I went to have my stitches removed, was also unpleasant. The surgeon had told me to come to his clinic in the outpatients department and we turned up as instructed, presented my patient's card to one of the smartly uniformed (in saree) young women, at reception, who told us the surgeon was at a meeting and to wait. So we did, and repeated inquiries over an hour or more elicited the same reply until fortunately, the Assistant Finance Manager happened to be passing by, saw us, and took us to the surgeon's office where he was seated at his desk, as he had been all morning! Stitch removal was a matter of minutes; all was said to be healed and I went on my way with an admonition not to wet my head for three more days.

Our Colombo flight on Sri Lankan Airlines was due to depart at 10.30 a.m. and airport security being what it is nowadays, we arrived at 7.30 a.m., completed the formalities – and waited.....and waited. Around 11.30 a.m. we were told the aircraft was late arriving, the time being put back every half hour. Luckily, a tourist conscious India now provides comfortable lounges and clean toilets. By midday, having breakfasted lightly at 5.45 a.m., we were hungry and irritable causing Srinu to give the ground hostess, a good Aussie "serve" whereupon a box lunch was provided. The flight finally left at 3.20 p.m. resulting in a few passengers missing the S.L.A. Colombo-London connection. Cochin-to-Colombo is advertised as 80 minutes but the pilot must have realised there were a score of irate passengers behind him so we arrived in an hour!

Nothing more went wrong and my insurers paid in full quite soon after receiving my claim, which included three extra nights at the hotel. In spite of the few hiccups it was a happy conclusion.

Flying Angel Club Colombo

by Malcolm Abayekoon

In 1950 I worked as assistant to Commander Chas Hammond of the Royal Australian Navy who was Chaplain & Superintendent of the Missions to Seamen (Flying Angel) Club in Colombo. That was not the best paid job I have had but it was possibly the most interesting.

The Mission had been established in Colombo in 1946 to look after the social, moral and spiritual welfare of all Seafarers irrespective of race or religion. Before that The Ceylon Merchant Services League, which had been established in 1941 had looked after merchant sailor's welfare. The club was situated on the top floor of the National Bank building near York Arcade. There was a billiard table, newspapers and magazines from abroad, a cafeteria, a small chapel and Mr Salim had a jewellery stall where he sold what was called tourist jewellery, which meant the gold was nine carat and not sovereign as favoured by the locals. His stock was rings, broaches, chains and bracelets. He kept a book in which his customers wrote comments about what they had purchased from him, all favourable of course. He took great pride in showing that book. Many years later his son either owned or worked at a very up market jewellery shop in the Oberoi Hotel.

The food at the club was excellent and cheap. Steak and chips with fried tomatoes cost under two rupees, a bottle of Elephant House soda pop a few cents. Beer was also sold but no hard liquor. There were a few instances when a sailor got boisterous after having hit the bottle, the doorman a Pathan had to expel him, usually that was not a big problem but on one occasion it was, when several sailors from the Netherlands got very drunk. The Pathan announced that he would fetch someone from the nearby Harbour Police; by the time he got back with a cop, the Dutchmen had flown.

Sailors from all over the world visited the club. One in particular I remember well, he was a Polish-American who was ashore for some weeks. I am now not sure if that was because he had missed his ship or had been hospitalised. During that time the agents for the shipping line that he worked for paid for his accommodation at a hotel near the harbour. He referred to himself as Ski, short for some Polish name no doubt. He was an affable man who loved to tell stories about the ports he had been to.

Ceylonese mariners were not supposed to use the club as they were in their home port, but a few did occasionally get in, having got past the security man when he was having one of his many forty winks. Some of the local sailors had been without a



Missions To Seamen staff outside the entrance to the club in Church Street. Photo from the 1960s

ship for years; one of them was called Bomber Joe. The reason for that name was because he apparently smoked ganja; a bomb was slang for dope. Joe carried a battered briefcase stuffed with discharge papers from ships that he had worked on. He claimed to have a wife in Rio, I hope he found work on a ship and got back to her.

Part of my job was to visit ships that entered the port of Colombo, except buggaloes from the Maldives and the MV. Chidambaram which was, as far as I can recall, the only ship to tie alongside the jetty. That small vessel carried cargo and perhaps also passengers to and from a port in South India. I have no idea why we did not go on board that ship or the Maldivian craft. The purpose of our visits was to invite sailors to visit the club and occasionally when on board the padre administered rites of the church to those in need. He also said a prayer over the bodies of dead men who, on American ships, were stored in a cold room on their way home. On other ships if a crewman died, the body was interred at the first port the vessel reached. In Ceylon, the funerals were usually at Kanatte Cemetery, A. F. Raymond was the undertaker. I recall one burial after sunset, the headlamps of the hearse was used as illumination. It was quite eerie.

In the 1960s the club moved to the annexe of St. Peters Church within sight of the old passenger jetty. At road level was the office and Mr Salim's shop. Now that he had more space meant proper showcases instead of a box with a glass top. The

showcases were illuminated with florescent lights which he turned on the moment he spotted someone showing interest in what he had for sale. On the first floor was the library and bar and a door that led to a balcony with views of the harbour. The equipment relocated included a large antiquated ice shredder which did not work and a refrigerator which looked like it had been made in the 1930s. The Warden organised the annual Sea Sunday service at the church next door. The chief guest was the head of one of the branches of the armed forces. Among the congregation were diplomats from many nations. The service was conducted by the Bishop of Colombo. Near to Christmas, there was a dance held at the Taprobane to raise funds for the mission. Among those present were executives from shipping companies.

The club was open from about nine in the morning to late in the evening, but unlike in the old days, few sailors visited when I was last there in the early nineteen eighties. They were now better paid and preferred to blow some of that at the five star hotels near the harbour. The night watchman told me the place was haunted and was of the opinion that the ghosts were from the graves inside the church next door. Among those buried there is James Twistleton, D.D., the first Archdeacon of Colombo and Captain Dawson of the Royal Engineers who is known for the work he did in the Kadugannawa area. Also in that church is a tablet in memory of Sir William Cook, Puisne Justice, which is supposed to be Dutch Governor Hulft's tombstone reversed. The watcher was a tough old

boy who had served in the merchant navy, not the sort of man who would be scared of the ghosts of the Raj in Ceylon. The Flying Angel Club is still there, but the Missions to Seamen is now called the Missions to Seafarers.

Remember When:

... the worst thing you could do at school was smoke in the bathrooms, fail a test or chew gum. And the banquets were in the tuck-shop, and we danced to a gramophone later, and all the girls wore fluffy pastel dresses and the boys wore 'longs' for the first time, and we were allowed to stay out and watch a 9.30 p.m. show at the Liberty, the Majestic, or the Savoy....! **And the biggest thrill was holding hands...**

... a Sunbeam Alpine or an MG was everyone's dream car, to cruise, peel out, lay rubber. And people went steady and it was a great treat to go to the Galle Face Hotel's 'Coconut Grove' with the Jetliners, or to Ceylinco with the Spitfires or to the Little Hut with the Amazing Grace or to the Akasa Kade with Sam the Man!

... no one ever asked where the car keys were 'cause they were always in the car, in the ignition, and the doors were never locked, and you got into big trouble if you accidentally locked the doors at home, since no one ever had a key.

... lying on your back on the grass with friends and saying things like "That cloud looks like a..." and playing cricket with no adults to help kids with the rules of the game.

... cricket was not a psychological group learning experience - it was a game!

... when stuff from the store came without safety caps and hermetic seals 'cause no one had yet tried to poison a perfect stranger? And... with all our progress... Don't you just wish... just once...you could slip back in time and savour the slower pace... and share it with the children of the 80s and 90s?

...being sent to the Principal's office was nothing compared to the fate that awaited a misbehaving student, at home. Basically, we were in fear for our lives, but it wasn't because of terrorism, drive by shootings, drugs, gangs, alcohol and road rage...

...our parents and grandparents were a much bigger threat! But we all survived....because their love was greater than their threat. Didn't that make you feel good? . Just to go back and say, "Yeah, I remember that!"

Was it really that long ago?

Geoffrey Bawa The 'Rolls-Royce Maharaja' of Ceylon

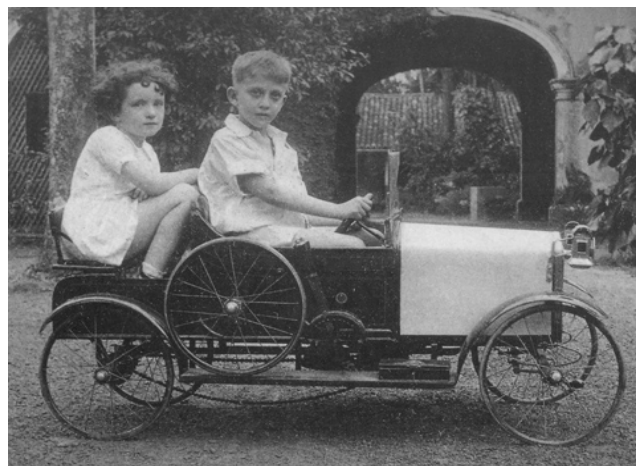
by Roger Thiedeman

Unlike neighbouring India, where the former maharajas' and princes' colonial-era collections of exotic Rolls-Royce motor cars were the stuff of legend, Ceylon/Sri Lanka has always hosted only minuscule numbers of 'The Best Car in the World'. Even more recently, with a modest influx of relatively modern examples, the total number of Rolls-Royce motor cars in Sri Lanka has struggled to reach double figures.

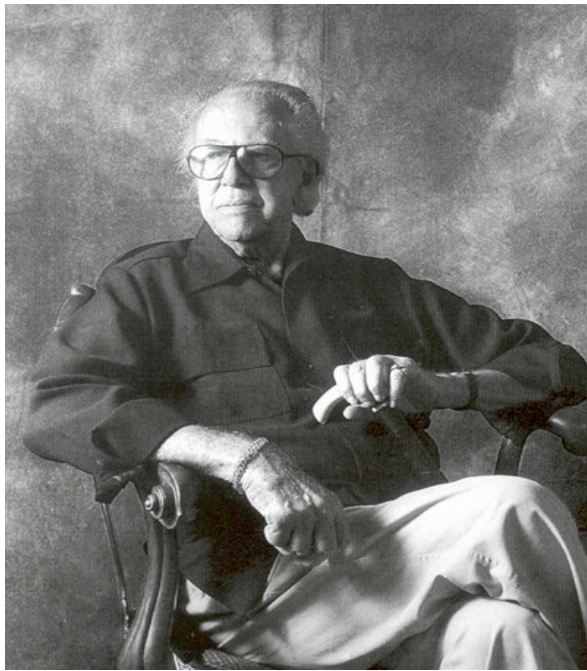
Which makes the subject of this article even more remarkable. Because the late Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's celebrated architect, owned at least five Rolls-Royce cars at various periods during his long and illustrious life—albeit not all of them in Sri Lanka itself.

Geoffrey Manning Bawa was born in Ceylon on July 23, 1919. His father was Benjamin William Bawa, a King's Counsel of Ceylon Moor extraction, while his mother, Bertha Marion Campbell Schrader, was a Burgher. The Bawas' elder son, Bevis—Geoffrey's only sibling—was born in 1909. Benjamin Bawa was also a Lieutenant in the Ceylon Light Infantry (sometimes unkindly referred to as a sort of "non-European Dad's Army"!) and later served as A.D.C. to Sir William Manning, the Governor of Ceylon from 1918-1925.

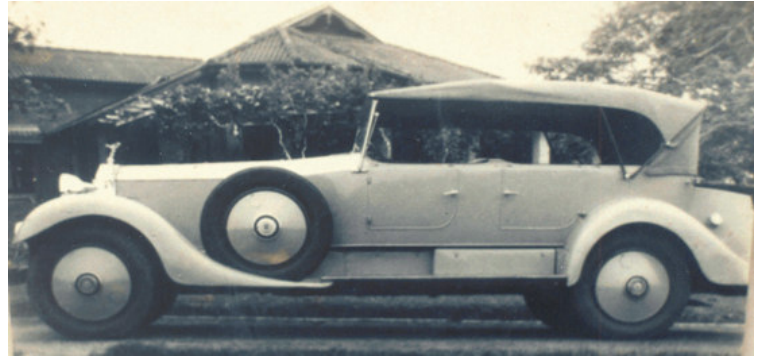
Bevis and Geoffrey grew up in an affluent environment, lacking nothing in the way of luxuries and nice things, including mechanical toys like Meccano sets, Hornby railway layouts, expensive and sophisticated pedal cars, model cars and aeroplanes, etc. As Geoffrey Bawa's biographer Professor David Robson has written: "Motor cars became something of an obsession with the Bawas, probably prized more as sym-



Geoffrey aged about nine with female passenger



Geoffrey Manning Bawa
1919-2003



1925 Rolls-Royce 40/50 hp Phantom I, Barker tourer
with Ceylonese registration X 4857

bols of status and modernity than as objects of convenience. Benjamin Bawa's first car, a Sunbeam tourer, was bought in 1915...In 1928 Mrs Bawa returned from England with a bright yellow sleeve-valved (sic) Daimler tourer. Bevis became the proud owner of the Sunbeam until 1930, when his mother gave him a new six-cylinder Humber as a twenty-first birthday present. Both brothers became automobile enthusiasts and both, over the years, owned a succession of exotic cars."

In 1939, Geoffrey was offered a place at Cambridge University, to read English and Law at St. Catherine's College. But before commencing his university studies he went to Paris, staying there with a maternal cousin named Georgette Camille before embarking on a tour of Europe. In Venice when World War II broke out, Geoffrey managed to rush back to England just before the invasion of France.

Despite the war, Geoffrey Bawa launched himself lustily into Cambridge life, participating in all the aesthetic and social aspects of the scene. According to Robson—whose tome *Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works* was published in 2002 shortly before Bawa's death—it was during that period when Geoffrey purchased his first Rolls-Royce, a "Phantom One (sic) tourer" that he used in Britain and later took back to Ceylon. But that information is at least partially contrary to my research, which suggests that if, in fact, Bawa owned and drove a Rolls-Royce while a student at Cambridge, that unidentified car never made it from Britain to Ceylon.

Geoffrey Bawa returned to Colombo in 1946 after qualifying as a lawyer. Local registration records

show that in December that year he became the owner of **1925 Rolls-Royce 40/50 hp Phantom I, Barker tourer, chassis 122HC**, with Ceylonese registration X 4857. But this car had been in Ceylon since 1934, and Geoffrey was at least its fifth successive local owner, so it could not have been the "Phantom One" to which Prof. Robson refers. After only two months, ownership of the Phantom I tourer

was transferred to Geoffrey's brother Bevis. (The car later played a prominent rôle in the 1954 movie *Elephant Walk*, and remains in Colombo with the family of the late Mr. H. C. (Chitru) Peiris, a pioneer of Sri Lanka's veteran and vintage car movement.)

In late 1947/early 1948, while passing through London *en route* from New York to Italy during an extensive world tour, Geoffrey Bawa purchased **1925 40/50 hp Silver Ghost, Park Ward tourer, chassis 60EU**. Originally registered in Britain as KL 4474, the car was shipped to Colombo and registered there, as CY 9614, in late 1948. Although the fate of this Silver Ghost is unknown, I have established that after Geoffrey Bawa sold it in the early 1950s, the car was owned by a Mr. F. Siggers (reportedly an officer in the British Army) who in turn sold it at auction in Colombo before moving to South Australia with his family.

In June 1954, seeking a change of profession, Geoffrey Bawa returned to the U.K. to study architecture at the Architectural Association School in Bedford Square, London. But before then, in November 1950, he had bought **1934 Rolls-Royce 20/25 hp, Connaught drophead 'foursome' coupé, chassis GKC4** from Paddon Bros., a pre-owned Rolls-Royce dealership in London. David Robson describes this as the Rolls-Royce "that still sits in the porch of (Bawa's) Colombo home"—which is correct—but in yet another puzzling passage he quotes Geoffrey's recollection of having bought the car from "a lady in Brighton", further implying that this occurred either in or after 1954.

The 'chronology' denoted by the car's Ceylo-



Geoffrey Bawa and the author in December 1991 with 1934 Rolls-Royce 20/25 hp, Connaught drophead 'foursome' coupe. Note the jacks supporting the car.

nese/Sri Lankan registration number, CN 5375, suggests that it was first registered in Colombo in early 1951 (probably *in absentia*), which tends to disprove a purchase date of circa-1954 as claimed in Robson's book. Further muddying the waters, this car's Sri Lankan registration certificate reveals that it was "re-registered" in Ceylon in June 1954, while retaining the number CN 5375.

A likely scenario is that Bawa bought the Rolls-Royce from Paddon Bros. in 1950, had it registered in Ceylon in 1951, but kept the car in the U.K., perhaps using it during visits to that country and, more regularly, after he went to London for architectural studies in 1954. By then, the validity of its Ceylon registration may have lapsed, so Bawa had the car re-registered at the Registrar of Motor Vehicles office in Colombo in June 1954. But exactly when the Rolls-Royce coupé was landed in Colombo also remains unclear, because Geoffrey Bawa did not return to Ceylon as a fully-fledged architect until 1957.

Over the next 46 years, it was this 1934 Rolls-Royce 20/25 hp car with which Geoffrey Bawa was synonymous amongst Sri Lanka's motoring *cognoscenti*. Locally, his burgeoning architectural portfolio encompassed such prestigious projects as a new Parliamentary complex, numerous luxury residences for wealthy locals, breathtakingly beautiful and cleverly conceptualised hotels and beach resorts, as well as schools, universities, and office buildings. Bawa was in demand overseas too, designing and landscaping properties in Mauritius, Bali, and India.

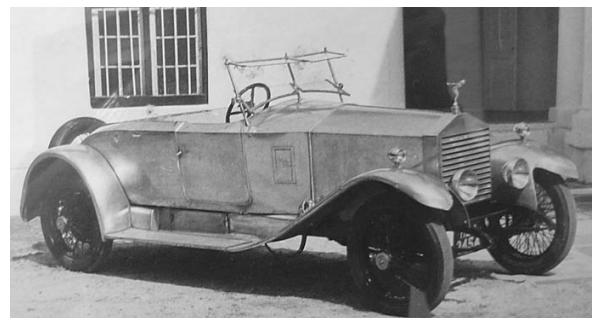
In the mid-to-late 1970s, while working on a large-scale hotel project in Madras (Chennai)—where he bought a mansion named Keith Lodge and took up residence for an extended period—Geoffrey Bawa purchased two more Rolls-Royce motor cars, both previously the property of Indian princes. They were: **1923 20 hp, Hooper two-seat tourer, chassis 85K6**, originally owned by H.H. Nawab Azam Jah of Hyderabad (eldest son of the fabled seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan); and **1949 Silver Wraith, Hooper saloon**,

chassis WGC31, delivered new to H.H. Maharaja of Mysore. But Indian and/or Sri Lankan bureaucracy thwarted Geoffrey Bawa from taking the cars back to Sri Lanka upon completion of his work in Madras. So, in some disgust, he sold them before returning to Colombo.

During the 1980s/1990s, when Sri Lanka's roads began choking with excessive and unruly traffic, Geoffrey Bawa was forced to 'retire' his Rolls-Royce 20/25 hp coupé, storing it on jacks (*kota uda*, in the Sinhala vernacular!) to keep its tyres off the ground. In a 1991 letter to me, Bawa expressed fears that if he "took it out (for a drive), as everyone drives so recklessly...it would almost certainly be banged into—and that would drive me to madness." So, parked in the enclosed front porch of his 33rd Lane (off Bagatelle Road), Colombo home and design studio—next to his 1950s Mercedes-Benz 300 cabriolet—the vintage Rolls-Royce continues to serve as a strikingly attractive piece of automotive 'architecture'.

In late 1997, by then very frail and a victim of several falls, Bawa suffered his first stroke. Whilst recovering and remaining professionally active, in February 1998 Geoffrey Bawa was visited at his outstation property 'Lunuganga', near Bentota, by architecturally-savvy H.R.H. Prince Charles, Prince of Wales—an example of the mountain coming to Mohammed! But on March 1 that year he was felled by a second, more serious stroke. Paralysed and unable to speak, Bawa was cared for by a team of nurses, although he continued to take an interest in the latest designs and work of his partner architects, one of whom was Channa Daswatte. A dynamic man whose talents Bawa had fostered, Daswatte devotedly looked after his mentor until Geoffrey Bawa passed away on May 27, 2003.

Today, CN 5375—Bawa's last Rolls-Royce, and the one he owned for the longest period—remains in the guardianship of the Lunuganga Trust, which was established by Geoffrey Bawa and various friends, business associates and other luminaries, to administer in perpetuity the Lunuganga estate, his cars, and other property.



1923 20 hp Hooper two-seat tourer originally owned by HH Nawab of Hyderabad

SYNOPSIS OF MEETINGS

Sydney 17th February 2008

Following a brief introduction from President Sunil de Silva, the first guest speaker Mr. Neville Turner, renowned cricket writer and commentator, padded up with gusto to the subject *The History, Literature and Culture of Cricket in Sri Lanka - a foreigner's point of view*.

Explaining his love affair with cricket in Sri Lanka, Neville established his connection with the island while listing the numerous ovals he's been to during his regular visits there from 1992 to 1998. He particularly mentioned the first test series when Sri Lanka, just raised to Test-playing status, had a three-Test match encounter with Australia at home. He went on to describe the first Test, played 18 August 1992 on the SSC grounds, when Australia were bundled out for 255 in the first innings. By the third day, Sri Lanka had amassed a massive 547 runs for the loss of eight wickets with Kaluwitharana notching up a magnificent 132 not out and Mahanama, captain Ranatunge and middle-order batsman Gurusinghe making big scores. Sri Lanka, however, could not maintain the strangle hold and lost the Test by a paltry 15 runs. He knew then that Kaluwitharana would achieve success as a wicket-keeper batsman for his country. Since then, Sri Lanka has beaten Australia only once in Tests, and that, at home in Kandy.

Referring to various cricketing terms for the uninitiated, Neville quoted an amusing excerpt from a speech the late Lakshman Kadirgamar gave to Sri Lankan cricketers touring the UK, stating that, as Foreign Minister, he had to explain about his cricket-playing countrymen to heads of non-cricket playing nations thus: "In my travels I have a hard time explaining to the non-cricketing people - in America, China, Europe, Russia - that a googly is not an Indian sweetmeat, that a square cut is not a choice selection of prime beef, that a cover drive is not a secluded part of a flower garden, that a bouncer is not a muscular janitor at a night club, that a yorker is not some exotic cocktail mixed in Yorkshire, that a leg break is not a sinister manoeuvre designed to cripple your opponent's limbs below the waist".

Neville was also of the view that Sri Lanka should be given a five-Test status instead of the present three, something he found difficult to understand.

In regard to the literature aspect of his talk, Neville drew our attention to a book by Sri Lankan Dr Michael Roberts that paid great tribute to Murali. Neville stated that Murali dominated spin bowling and was "the Bradman of bowling and the Redeemer of cricket". Murali is twice ahead of any bowler in capturing five wickets in an innings, with the exception of New Zealand's Sir Richard Hadley.

Mr Turner stated that he first met him when Murali played for the Tamil Union versus the Colts CC on the Nondescript CC (strange name, he chuckled) when he bowled a modest first over. He gave the ball a lot of air and Neville had been proved right when he voiced the feeling then that Murali will be a great success in Test cricket.

Neville further stated that a book by Channa Gunasekera entitled *The Willow Quartet* referred to four entirely different types and style of cricketers namely, SS Jayawickrema, FC de Saram, M. Sathasivam and CI Gunasekera whom the author equated to four types of music. He also likened CI to the swashbuckling Keith Miller and mentioned that when an Australian XI visited Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1932, they played a combined game and Miller and CI batting together were each heading towards a century almost neck-and-neck. Miller sportingly let CI reach his hundred first and then followed suit soon after!

Neville said that cricket ran in the veins of the Sri Lankans. A legacy from Colonial days, Sri Lankans took to it with passion. In the early days when Australian, English and West Indian teams made tours overseas and shipping was the main form of travel, they played stop-over matches against the local teams in Colombo on The Oval and this reinforced the inherent love of cricket in Sri Lankans. Cricket was played everywhere, on any open place, even on parts of the Galle Road and popularly, it found its way to inter-school contests, where there were more spectators at times than at first class matches. Cricket broke race barriers too, when almost every community had their own cricket club such as the Malays and Moors who became unlikely converts and entered teams in first class competitions.



Neville Turner speaking at the Sydney meeting

Tracing the history of cricket in the country, Neville interwove his talk by playing recorded music typically heard at cricket matches. In Sri Lanka, much of the rhythmic music and dancing which goes on at cricket matches is of a religious significance. These activities are often led by a cheer leader who is always on the lookout to encourage and secure a maximum level of crowd participation and support for the home team.

The balanced commentator that he is, Neville Turner also referred to the role (even though in a small way) played by Australia, New Zealand and the UK in getting Sri Lanka Test status. Firstly, due to pressure from India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka received Associate membership with the International Cricket Council (ICC). Then with the World Cup victory over Australia in the 1975 final at Lords, Sri Lanka received many favourable reports and eventually with the strong support of one-time head of the Australian Cricket Board, Bob Perrish and the Prahan Cricket Club in Victoria, who championed the cause, Sri Lanka was finally accepted as a Test-playing country by the ICC.

Chandra Senaratne – *Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go from here?*

President Sunil de Silva, introducing the second speaker, said that guests were in for a thought provoking talk from our Social Convener Chandra Senaratne. Chandra did not disappoint.

The subject of his talk was the sub-title of his new book *The Joy of Sharing* written under his pen name Charles Boyd. Chandra was also afforded the opportunity to launch his new book. Further details of *The Joy of Sharing* by Charles Boyd can be obtained by logging on to www.lifebeforeandhereafter.com. An excellent review of the book by editor Sumane Iyer was published in J41.

Doug Jones

Colombo 1st March 2008

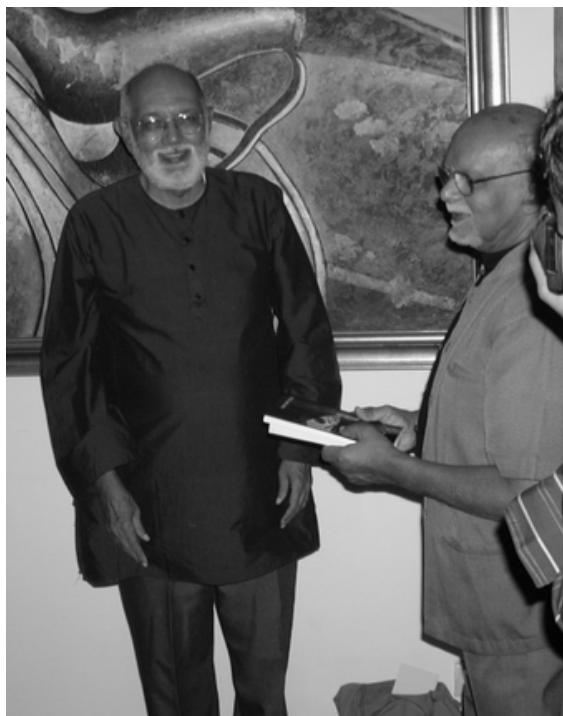
As the event for the day was the launch of a book. **“Yesterday is another country”**, by the President, Somasiri Devendra, the meeting was chaired by the Treasurer, Mike Udabage. Explaining his role on that day, Mike welcomed the 140 attendees, spoke a few words about the President and introduced the main speaker for the day, Emeritus Prof. Ashley Halpe, speaking of the lesser-known aspects of his career. He then in-

vited Prof. Halpe to address the gathering. Prof. Halpe’s opening remark was:

“This is a magnificent gift to us – this sharing of a rich life totally transformed into art.”

Continuing, he said that “The personal is most certainly present in these narratives..... a core of intimate experience.... the glimpses of (which) makes the reader aware that ‘what happened’... has been richly pondered and subtly shaped.... without any suggestion of conscious art.

“How could I ever have expected this extraordinary experience?... An old classmate and sometime comrade in ‘fresherhood’ rings me up out of the blue to announce with charming diffidence his authorship of a book of stories...(and



Author Somasiri Devendra with Prof Halpe on his left at the book launch

invites me to preside at the launch. I accept...(expecting) no more than a pleasant meeting with old friends ... A copy of the book arrives... and I put it aside to dip into closer to the day.

“...Just four mornings ago, I flipped the book open for a few casual glimpses before settling down to a read. The deliberate use of a cliché for a title made me inquisitive – “He was a good boy”. Why had Somasiri done that? The deliberate use of a cliché was strange. I felt my way in, looking for a pointer. I was arrested by:

(Continued on page 25)

BOOK REVIEWS:



Yesterday is Another Country: A Collection of Legends of Life by Somasiri Devendra, 160pp softcover Published by Sridevi Publications Sri Lanka

Do not expect too much of this collection of stories. You will find here, no words of wisdom, no message, no moral.

Says Somasiri Devendra, in the Preface to his collection of stories "Yesterday is Another Country". Contrary to this warning what a rewarding experience "Yesterday....." proved to be! The stories and anecdotes are drawn from Somasiri's varied experiences as an undergraduate at Peradeniya, teacher, naval officer, corporate executive and maritime archaeologist; combined with an open mind and an extraordinary interest in people.

The stories are set in Sri Lanka with an occasional departure from the familiar, in scenes drawn from London, Bombay and Hawaii. Glimpses of Sri Lanka's socio-cultural evolution are evident from the immediate post-independence era "when it was a joy to be alive", to the darker days of the eighties when the country was blighted by civil war. This is incidental to the main focus of the collection which is its human interest: profiles of individuals, varied relationships and an insight into the human condition. If Somasiri happened to be in the most uninspiring place, he would still find someone interesting to talk to and something different to say about the place.

Through Somasiri's eyes, we see familiar scenes in Sri Lanka. A villager "sitting on his haunches staring at the floor", a homeless woman "camped by the side of the road" a Buddhist monk on his "alms round" and a temple by the sea.

The variety of content is striking. "Suburbs of the Mind" captures treasured memories of a youthful relationship bordering on romance, recollections that follow and a chance meeting of the two people concerned, many years later. This could have been a sentimental journey into the past but is far from it. Rather it deals with the complexities of the human condition and the subtle inter-play between the workings of the mind and action.

"The Cross on my Shoulder" is a personal experience of a different kind. The character of Wimal evolves through the compressed dialogue; an unusual bond is formed and continues into the next narrative "Vultures! Vultures!" which deals with the question of right and wrong, ethics and justice, without being judgemental.

In complete contrast is the "Raven". The tone changes significantly. *Violence had replaced the*

BOOKSHOP AND WEB RESOURCES

BOOKS/MAPS/COLLECTIBLES

This column is a regular feature for the benefit of members who publish works, and others who wish the Society to sell material on their behalf. No charges apply to members but donations will be gratefully received. Others pay a handling charge. Please e-mail the editor if you wish to take up this offer.

Yesterday is Another Country: A Collection of Legends of Life by Somasiri Devendra, 160pp softcover Published by Sridevi Publications Sri Lanka. Available in Australia at \$ 10 + P&H from CSA Librarian Sumane Iyer. Contact: sumane@pacific.net.au . Other countries contact Somasiri Devendra—details on page 30.

"Kaleidoscope: An Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature" by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke (ed.), Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2007 pb US \$ 4.95 SL Rs. 495 ISBN 978-955-1266-70-7 Available online www.vijithayapa.com Postal address: Unity Plaza, 2 Galle Road, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka. Email: vijiyapa@gmail.com

The Joy of Sharing: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go from here?

by Charles Boyd, 2007, Published by AuthorHouse, Bloomington IN USA. 184pp, \$ 31.50 Hard cover, available from Chandra Senaratne ph 02 9872 6826, e-mail: char-boyd@iprimus.com.au

Blossoms of Wisdom on Peace and Environment – by Erika Dias. This is an anthology of 123 poems, illustrated with 39 colour photographs. Hard cover with dust jacket ISBN: 955-599-403-X; 133 pp.; Published: April 2005; US\$ 30.00. Available from Wisdom Gift Publications, email: hideva@sltnet.lk

Also by Erika Dias

A Wisdom Gift, (Jointly with Pierre Wittmann), Amarin Printing Group Co., Ltd., Bangkok, Thailand; December 1993 (book of poems), First Edition - December 1991, Third Edition - December 1993; ISBN 974 887 1681; Price US\$10.00

Oneness In Duality, (Jointly with Pierre Wittmann), Amarin Printing Group Co., Ltd., Bangkok, Thailand; November 1993 (book of poems); ISBN 974 8361608; Price US\$10.00

Presents de Sagesse (French translation of 'A Wisdom Gift', book of poems; jointly with Pierre Wittmann); Contact Pierre Wittmann pierrewittmann@wanadoo.fr

Meditation: Many Methods Through Watching the Mind, First Edition - 1997, Third Edition; Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha Publishers, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka; May 2003; ISBN 955-599-320-2; Price US\$6.00

*tranquillity that had marked our days in Service. The sheer
butchery being inflicted upon people in border villages....."*
The solution to the problem and the rather unusual
ending makes this compelling reading.

Equally confronting are disturbing images of
Sri Lanka in "Inhuman Rights". These are images
of violence and anarchy in a country on the brink of
civil war. *Anger begat hate, hate begat vio-
lence.....overnight houses of Tamils in the South were
torched.....overnight we had lost our right to call ourselves
one people.*

The enduring charm of the collection is the
sense of empathy that is easily established. Several
stories are drawn from everyday life, each with an
unusual twist. In "Home" the seemingly ordinary
image of a homeless woman takes on a new dimen-
sion through the exploration of a particular set of
circumstances. In the "Hat", Somasiri captures the
excitement of an 18-year old leaving home for the
first time, to embark on a four year adventure at Sri
Lanka's newly established university at Peradeniya.
The events that follow, the lessons learned, are fa-
miliar to anyone who has been through the under-
graduate experience.

"He was a Good Boy" is my personal fa-
vourite. The profiles of Sudubanda and his son
emerge through the recollection of recent events.
The narrative is in the old man's "voice" and untu-
tored prose. Through skilled economy of language,
a level of complexity is created as the story pro-
gresses; the tragedy of death combined with pride
felt by the old man at the attention he was receiving
for the first time, by the local community.

*From the school and the Services they all came - and the
Nuns and the Buddhist Priests also. At other times you can
hardly find one priest to come to our house. And this time,
fifteen came. He was a good boy.*

Somasiri Devendra is a natural story teller
with a finely honed eye for unusual detail. Scenar-
ios from the complex, to simple everyday events,
are given a different dimension through his gift of
narrative. The stories are humane, individual and
honest.

Shalini Dantanarayana

Kaleidoscope; An Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature

Edited by D.C.R.A Goonetilleke

Published by Vijita Yapa Publications

Available on-line at www.vijithayapa.com Paperback
US\$ 4.95

Having lived with Fawn Anderson for two
days now I feel I know her better than I know most
of my friends who have been around me through-
out my life. She smiled when I told her of the meet-

ing between Aunt Carolina and Prema at the hotel
because she was not there to see it herself. "Prema
waited. You didn't speak when Aunt Carolina was
present. You waited. That was an established tradi-
tion. "So", said Aunt Carolina. It was only one word.
It came through lips that hardly parted to let it
through, but it said everything. It was a question. It
was a comment. It was also a judgement." I agreed
with Fawn whole heartedly when she said Sri Lankans
can "smile from their hearts, cry like children at funer-
als, hustle up a meal for a friend at any hour of the
day or night, fall on their faces in worship before a
tree. They had all the innocence of paradise." I could
not, however, agree with her about her views on
women; "Most women were rich in dignity and poor
in love. They grew grey and grubby and old and ca-
ressed the memories of their might-have-beens", or of
what she said about men "any man can make love but
only a few can make it memorable". I would have
liked to continue talking to her, but alas, now that I
have started to write about her, she has disappeared;
returned to her rightful abode within the pages of An-
andatissa de Alwis's short story - "Star Sapphire" in
Kaleidoscope; an Anthology of Sri Lankan English
Literature, edited by Professor D.C.R.A Goonetilleke.

What distinguishes Kaleidoscope from other
poetry and prose anthologies (apart from the manner
in which most of its characters and events come alive
on the pages) is the fact that when it comes to English
literature in Sri Lanka, this is the first anthology of its
kind, covering all the genres, fiction, poetry, drama
and non-fiction. The vast and diverse mix of new and
established writers, from Carl Muller and Yasmine
Gooneratne to Destry Muller and Nihal de Silva, is
the result of Professor D.C.R.A Goonetilleke's at-
tempt at mirroring the changing patterns of our nation
through its English literature. Thus, one of the most
striking features of the anthology is the manner in
which the prose, the poetry and the drama reflect "the
vivid images of both urban and rural milieus, the
South and the North, nationalism, class and race con-
flict in the post-colonial society, insurgencies, the tsu-
nami and terrorism".

The transportation from place to place (both
physically and emotionally) takes the reader on a jour-
ney of discovery that includes a visit to Godfrey
Gunatilleke's "Garden", where a serpent literally and
metaphorically enters the protagonist's paradise and
Priyanthi Wickramasuriya's An Old Fashioned Book-
shop, Vijita Fernando's deeply moving "The Home-
coming" and Sunethra Rajakarunanyake's "The
Third Party Guest" depicting perhaps for the first
time in Sri Lankan English literature "casual love" in a
"bold, vigorous, totally unconventional and earthy"
manner, followed by the extract from Suvimalee Ka-
runaratna's The Vine". Meanwhile, the fluidity of the
poems is enchanting; the way it moves from the sim-

ple, beautiful "Boat Song" of Patrick Fernando to

Lakshmi de Silva's deep-felt remembrances of Tangalla, 9th April 1971, to the witticisms of Regi Siriwardena to Lakdasa Wickramasinha's Don't Talk to me about Matisse to H.L.D Mahindapala's Landscape - "In the mountains the weeping rains come so often/Beating down with a ramshackle rattle."etc.

Each piece of writing attempts to capture how Sri Lankans "thought and wrote from Colonial times to today", and as we read on, we begin to understand that all the poems and prose as well as the two dramas (H.C.N de Lanerolle's Fifty-Fifty and Ernest MacIntyre's The Loneliness of the Short-Distance Runner) form a kaleidoscope of life in the past and the present.

The different structures provide important gaps, often allowing the reader time to contemplate what has been read as the balance of the excerpts from the two novels and the short, pithy stories like Kamani Jayasekera's "Outsiders", and the diverse content and style reflect the scope of English literature in Sri Lanka. As the book shifts among different poetry prose and drama styles, from the Tennysonian lines of W.S Senior "For high in my highland valleys/And low in my lowland plains/The ride of the past is pulsing/Hot, in a people's veins" to the intricate, utterances of MacIntyre's Perera "Circulation of 100,000. Can you see they are making fools of hundreds of thousands of people? Don't talk, don't read and the chances are you won't go insane" we move with the written words, both optically and textually. But we also bring with us what we have just read and felt in a previous story or poem so that the work in question gets deepened in meaning.

An active anthology, Kaleidoscope has made me come in close contact with writers I have hitherto known only by name, and as I reach the last few pages where there are brief descriptions of each writer, and close the book, I take with me their varied voices and give them room to resonate and elaborate within my mind.

D.C.R.A Goonetilleke, Emeritus Professor of English, is the leading anthologist of Sri Lankan literature who has edited seven anthologies such as Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People (1917-2003), Modern Sri Lankan Stories, Sri Lankan Literature in English 1948-1998 etc. In his new anthology, Kaleidoscope, he includes not only material selected from books but also from journals and newspapers as well. Having thrown light on material which has hitherto been almost unknown to readers interested in Sri Lankan literature in English through this anthology, Professor Goonetilleke emphasises the importance of creating an anthology at regular intervals to harvest new work that enters the literary arena.

by Aditha Dissanayake

(Continued from page 22)

...Under the initial impression of benevolence there's a hint of unquestioning, non-combatant resignation in the sunken eyes. No, it's nothing new – just the landscape of the face at rest...

I began again, drawn in by the sense of place and mood in the opening:

Trincomalee. A hot April afternoon. Far up, near the ceiling, the fan whirrs busily, impotent in this stifling heat. The heat and glare are a smothering blanket: hostile, claustrophobic.

I walk across to the Commanding Officer's office..... He is seated in an armchair, listening and absorbed. Nearby, stands a figure I recognize: Sudubanda, the carpenter from Diyatalawa.

And then finding myself yielding unresistingly to the unhurried pace, the sureness of touch and tone with which the gentle resignation of the father was rendered as he spoke of the drowning of his fifteen-year-old son.

"Not a story of surprises and strange events but I was completely gripped and profoundly moved by the quiet pathos of the old man's voice as captured by the controlled cadences of the narrative. I mulled it over, living with those resonances – and as I did so I realized that a good part of my response was to the *karunawa*, the compassion, of the writer as he chose with quiet skill and tact the moments of the story and the phrases of the father to bring out the tragic pathos of the tale... That tact leads him to efface himself from the scene, though he is present everywhere in the quality of his sympathy.

"Somasiri tells us in his prefatory notes (...so modest, yet so true and to the point) that these stories are "basically true; built upon events that I made happen or had been wished upon me." However, in the selection of the events, the notation of forms and features and the phrasing he shows that he has mastered the 'art that conceals art', for as we look back over the whole we see that he has, to use his own words, *challenged (him)self to find the right words to catch the 'feel' of each event, to capture the rhythm of (his) voice at each of those times.*

"The first story, *The Hat*, has a particular appeal for me, for it takes me back to days and moods that I too experienced in those days of arrival at Peradeniya to become its first born children – our discoveries, explorations and encounters which Somasiri feels had "the wild exultant peal of the jazz trumpet", as well as the

slow, tentative experiments in relationships. Somasiri gives the story focus by building it around the matter of the Hat... a set of events that also drives him to the discovery of unsuspected moral resources within himself.

"In another Peradeniya story, *Suburbs of the Mind* uncovers another area of the Peradeniya experience, that of deep personal relationship with a woman that acquires a specificity of resonance as it hovers on the brink of love without becoming a love-story. The aftermath, many years later, brings 'disturbing reverberations' and questionings of himself and of the truth of the experience.

"*Inhuman Rites* takes us to the dark days of '58, '77 and '83 and *Raven* takes us to a solution that must have suggested itself to many of us, though with a quite unpredictable twist in the tail. What do you think *Home* is about? And *Tap on the shoulder*? Dip and try – there are so many experiences here to savour or to vibrate to.

"Experiences of the recesses of the soul and the perceptions available to the eye that truly sees, the ear that truly listens, the heart that opens itself to many sorts and conditions of our species.

"My friends," concluded Prof. Halpe, "we have here a fine writer and a great human being. Thank you, Somasiri, for the extraordinary gift of yourself to us all; thank you for drawing me back so wonderfully into your life."

The author, Somasiri Devendra, followed with his thanks to Prof. Halpe, recalling their days together in Peradeniya, the different paths they took after graduation; and his own decision not to accept a position on the campus which led to his many faceted life and, ultimately, to the stories in the book.

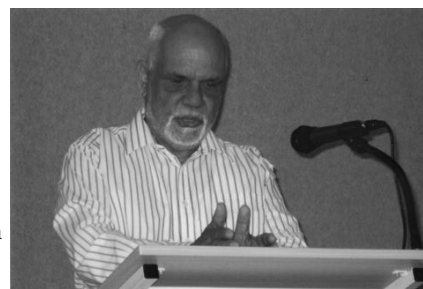
Daya Wickramatunga, Secretary, thanked the large gathering present and those who made the event possible and invited all to share a glass of wine and other refreshments. The fellowship that took place, amid the colourful paintings and antiques was very rewarding. Nearly a hundred books were sold and there was a long queue before the antique table to get their copies signed by the author.

Daya Wickramatunga

Melbourne 24th February 2008

The Chairman Dr Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker Mr Victor Melder as a person with an expansive knowledge of the railways of Sri Lanka. He said that Mr Melder who joined the railways at the age of 21 continued to work there for 12 years before

migrating to Australia. The railway was a veritable second home to Mr Melder as his father before him and other members of the family also worked in the Sri Lankan Railways.



Victor Melder, addressing the Melbourne Chapter

Mr Melder of course is well known in Australia for his unique library of Sri Lankan books and ephemera which he has so selflessly made available for use by the public. The Governor of Victoria recently presented a community award to Mr Melder in recognition of 40 years of service to the community. Mr Melder's presentation for the evening was titled "Will 'O the Wisp and other kindred spirits – anecdotes, yarns, humour and vignettes of railway life in Sri Lanka."

In a talk laced with anecdotes and humour Mr Melder kept the audience engaged and entertained. Among the many stories that he related, he referred to Will O the Wisp – a name given to an almost eerie streaky blue light that suddenly appeared beside trains travelling between Ambewela and Pattipola and which caused some consternation among drivers and guards working that sector. Many had speculated that it was the ghost of some coffee planters wife run over by a train long years before but there was no logical explanation for the frequent appearance of the streaky blue Will O the Wisp. Careful analysis however put paid to the supernatural theories as it was found that methane gas produced by the peat in the soil in that area was kindled by sparks from the steam engine to produce the gaseous blue flame. There were many other tales from the Sri Lankan railways that were retold that night and lapped up by an eager audience. Mr Melder also gave an insight into the practices and methods of the railway in a long lost era of steam engines and tablets since replaced with diesel locomotives and colour light systems. His presentation was acknowledged by an appreciative audience with generous applause.

The customary raffle brought the meeting to a close – the winning ticket being drawn by Mrs Tulsi Karunanayake and won by Dr Yves Christopher. Proceedings concluded with those present joining in for tea, refreshments, and fellowship.

Dilhani Kumbukkage

Letters

A member who wishes to stay anonymous to the readers writes to another:

Dear Douglas,

My copy of the latest "Ceylankan" (Journal # 41) arrived yesterday & as usual, I read it all immediately -thought your contribution was the BEST. I have read some of your articles before but this was particularly interesting for two reasons -I was at school with some boys named Andrado (burghers) who came from Hambantota where their father was a clerk in the Kachcheri -his father in law -a de Zilwa had also been there even in L Woolf's time & they owned a lot of property in the area having lived there for a couple of generations. Mrs Andrado recalled seeing Engelbrecht when she was young, driving his "Cape Cart" around. Many of Mrs A's generation felt Engelbrecht DID supply fresh meat to the "Emden" as villagers reported seeing a great heap of buffalo carcasses deep in the jungle & some even said boats came ashore from a vessel but no one was willing to give evidence. I think they feared retaliation as E was a tough customer. I think too he had a village wife and some kids by her.

Also, in the early 50 s I was a volunteer officer in the Ceylon Artillery (previously known as the CGA) but left about '58, luckily, as the Commanding Officer (Derek de Saram) and several others were jailed as accused in the infamous coup. There was a story in that regiment which I don't think ever got out that Colonel (ret'd) Mervyn Joseph was in charge of the Galle Face battery during WW1 when the "Emden" came in range but being unsure of its origins dithered until it was too late. The Colonel, in my time, lived in Bandarawela where he was employed by the CEEF being a proctor. He came to all volunteer mess nites in Diyatalawa where he was not loved as he was a crashing bore & would stay for hours drinking the free booze given a mess guest. It was after such nites that the Emden tale was retold many times. When I first went to camp I got in hot water for sneaking off to bed while the Colonel was still in the mess -apparently it is unpardonable to leave while a guest is still there.

I don't think we have met, but maybe soon.
Best Regards

Hi Sumane,

Congrats on yet another interesting issue of 'The Ceylankan' (no. 41/Feb 2008).

I have yet to read it all (I like savouring a little bit at a time - like a fine wine or a gourmet meal!), but one article I have enjoyed so far is the one by Earle Forbes about his days in Samoa. The type of aircraft to which he refers (but doesn't name) on page 24 and also illustrated on page 15, is of course the Hawker Siddeley 748 twin-turboprop (or 'Avro' 748, as it was known in Ceylon when operated by Air Ceylon).

Not only that, but the 'Joe' mentioned in the last para on page 24 is Joe Ginger, a very distant relative on my father's side of the family. He is a member of the Ginger family from the Ratnapura/Balangoda area, who I believe owned rubber estates and also had a couple of cars (which would be considered vintage cars today) that, as I seem to recall, may have been operated as hiring cars.

Joe was, for many years an aircraft engineer with Air Ceylon at Ratmalana, working on the Douglas DC-3s (Dakotas) and later the Avro 748 and Nord 262. I lost contact with him when we migrated to Australia in 1972, but we caught up briefly when I visited Ratmalana Airport during our first trip back to Sri Lanka in 1978.

I later heard that Joe had gone to work for Polynesian Airlines in Samoa and met him again very briefly, when he was passing through Melbourne. I am ashamed to admit that I am only guessing that Joe is still alive (although I haven't heard anything to the contrary). One of his sisters, my 'Aunt' Joyce, was married to Fred Barthelot, an engineer with the Irrigation Department in Ceylon. Joyce and Fred are both deceased but all four of their children - two sons and two daughters - are living in various parts of suburban Melbourne.

Small world - even in Samoa!

Kind regards

Roger Thiedeman

Hi Sumane

Here is one for your Journal. Got it from the Sydney Morning Herald a few days ago...

... In India the boot of a car is called the Dickie... When we arrived in Australia 30 years ago my husband was given an office car. One day the boot jammed and he went to his maintenance manager and shouted " my dickie is stuck, I can't open it..."

Since the word dickie was also used in Ceylon, I wonder whether anyone can remember how the term was derived from the Brits?

Regards

Dilo

...anybody wants to take a stab at this? Email me, Ed.



Wilpattu at Dusk

by Dong Jones

Of all the beautiful places that Sri Lanka has to offer, the Wilpattu National Park hankers after my own heart.

I visited Wilpattu more than once many years ago, but what I always want to see again and again is the unforgettable spectacle of Wilpattu at dusk. Not always possible because, unfortunately, exploring the sanctuary after daylight was prohibited to visitors at that time (I don't know about now) but my opportunity came fortuitously as it were. Delayed in returning to quarters after official business, I coaxed Divisional Game Ranger Wickramasinghe into driving us around, which he did with the utmost reluctance.

I remember the evening ever so vividly – the drive through the dimness of jeep-track canopied by thick overhanging foliage, into to the sudden bowl-like expanse of the villu. The lush jungle had terminated abruptly into a glistening ring of low sandy soil, almost white, as it sloped into a fine oval of grass surrounding the placidity of a lake. In the still of the lake there mirrored the pinky oranges of the evening sky.

In the subdued glow of evening, when the pulse of the jungle seems to slacken and the world stands still, and one can barely hear the gentle rustle of a breeze wafting the leaves, life in these wilds throbs undiminished. And I have seen its grandeur and gazed spellbound; deep in its serene harmony, its charm, its ethereal peace.

Immersed in the healing hush, far from the city's gabble, I sipped slowly from the chalice of tranquility as a lonely sambhur trotted unhurriedly to drink, each gulp weaving rhythmic ripples on a slate of water. Not far away, a princely heard of deer chewed tufts among an unhindered riot of aquatic birds – Lapwing, Egret, Painted Stork, Ibis – plume colours subdued in the ebbing sun, setting a counterpoint to the symphony of even-song.

We had come to a halt at captivating Thimbiri Villu, one of the 26 villus, as these picturesque natural lakes of the Wilpattu (Land of Lakes) National Park are known. These villus are predominant in the Park's central, northern and some western sections, between vast stretches of forest land, each villu varying in size and beauty and each an amazingly perfect oval of incredible natural charm.

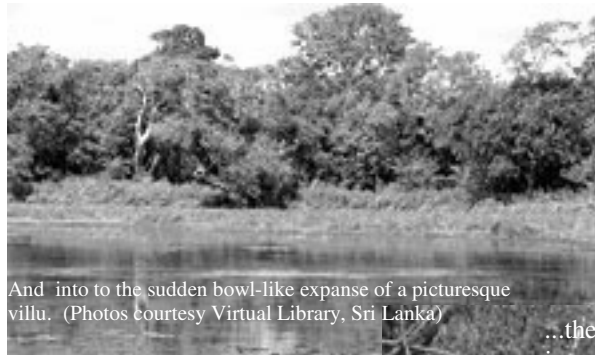
Each villu captures the imagination in different ways. There is an unmistakable aura of mystery about Borupan Villu. Then Kokkari Villu, the biggest of the villus extending more than two kilometres in circuit, holds you in wonderment. But Nelum Villu, festooned with Olu and Nelum like a saturated carpet of a myriad precious gems, set against lush pasture and parkland, will tug at the heartstrings as it did mine and enchant always.

Here was nature's canvas at its primeval and pristine best!

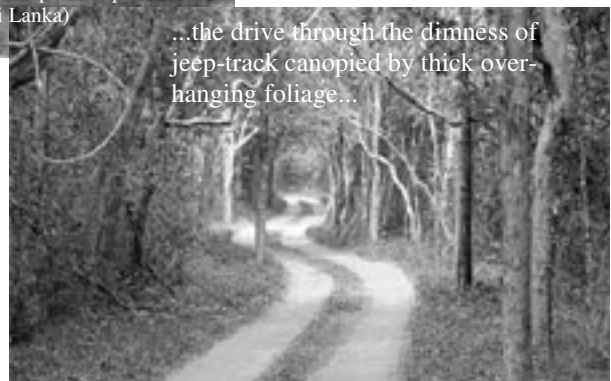
Wilpattu is the largest wildlife sanctuary on the island and is about 50 kilometres from Anuradhapura and a 16-kilometer drive (four-wheel, of course) off the beaten track from the turn-off at Timbiri Wewa on the Puttlam-Anuradhapura Road will take you there to imbibe the heady splendour of one of creation's finest handiwork.

Let's ruminate. So what does make Wilpattu 'tick'? Not its idyllic beauty, nor its calm splendour and peace. There are other places in Sri Lanka that can equal, if not surpass, Wilpattu's spellbinding charm.

Wilpattu's allure lies in its unspoilt fullness of nature, the complete harmony of animal, varied and majestic, with plant life bountifully



And into to the sudden bowl-like expanse of a picturesque villu. (Photos courtesy Virtual Library, Sri Lanka)



...the drive through the dimness of jeep-track canopied by thick overhanging foliage...

rich and endowed, where perhaps only man can be an intruder.

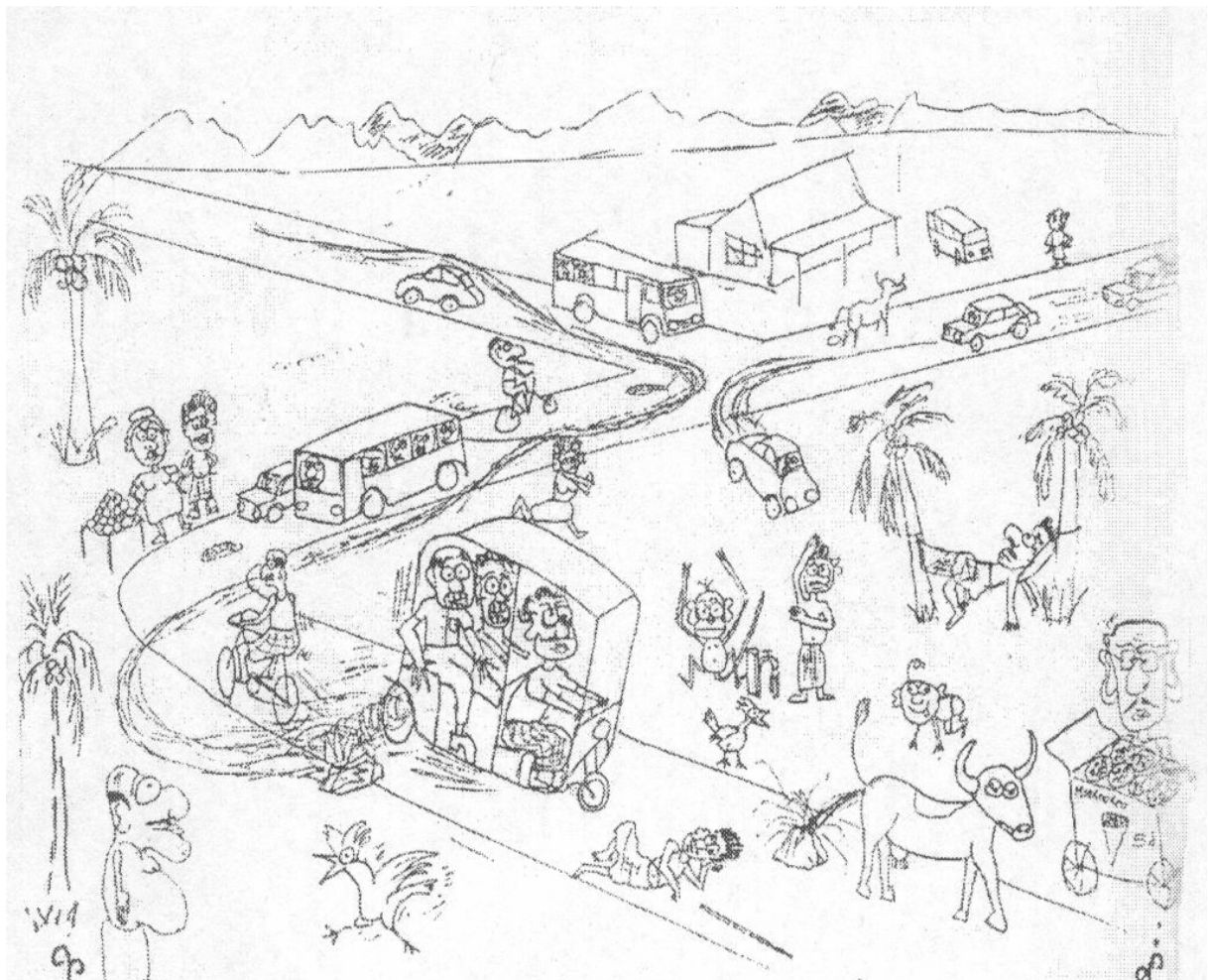
When night falls and all's velvety black and the jungle seems to sleep, I have seen the glow of deer eyes between the shrubs, like galleons on some far-off, distant shore. Hundreds of fireflies switch on to swirl like bud lights and the cacophony of discordant insect chatter somehow becomes tolerable. Life in the wild never seems to cease, even after rosy dusk laps over into the darkness of night. Sated with the serenity of nature in Wilpattu, I have fallen on my bunk only to awaken to another heart-stopping day of tranquility and birdsong.

Tongue in Cheek

by June Colin-Thomé

Pierre's flair for comic strips
Is grossly underrated
They're funny! Even if they are
A touch exaggerated

Pierre is June's son, potential resident cartoonist for The Ceylankan? ...Ed



...a hypothetical ride anywhere (only in Sri Lanka)

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



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Battaramulla, Sri Lanka

David & Rema Rockwood

Glen Iris VIC

Nissanka Dassanayaka

Garran, ACT

Tissa Devendra

Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

Dr Lakshmi de Silva

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Bemal & Kapila Gunawardana

Ashburn, VA USA

Rajah & Vasantha Wilson

Glen Waverley, VIC

...who have joined since publication of Journal # 41

*...we also welcome following gift subscription recipient of four issues of **The Ceylankan** awarded by a member:*

Dennis Williams

Box Hill, VIC

REMINDER MEMBERSHIP DUES

2007 calendar year subscriptions are now overdue and 2008 are due. Australian members may send personal cheque/ MO in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia to Srikantha Nadarajah 50A -The Esplanade - Thornleigh NSW 2120, or arrange direct payment to the Society's account BSB 062-308 Acc# 1003 8725 at Commonwealth Bank. Overseas members are kindly reminded to send their remittances by Bank Draft in Australian currency or pay by using SWIFT Code CTBAAU2S. Personal cheques in foreign currency cannot be accepted. Those making direct payment to Bank are requested to inform the Treasurer by email where possible. Sri Lankan resident members have the option of paying in Rupees to local Treasurer. Please see contact details in adjacent panel.

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Int + 61 2 9980 1701

E-mail: vsnadarajah@bigpond.com

OFFICE BEARERS OF THE CEYLON SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

President:

Sunil de Silva

Int + 61 2 9983 1116

sunsil@smartchat.net.au

Vice President:

Dr Srilal Fernando

Int + 61 3 9809 1004

srilalf@bigpond.net.au

Secretary:

Doug Jones

Int + 61 2 9894 7449

decjay20@aapt.net.au

Treasurer:

Srikantha Nadarajah

Int + 61 2 9980 1701

50A The Esplanade Thornleigh NSW 2120

vsnadarajah@bigpond.com

Public Relations:

Harry de Sayrah

Mobile: 0415 402 724

harolddes@hotmail.com

Publications:

Mike Udabage

Int + 61 2 9879 7728

mike_udabage@itechne.com

Editor/Librarian:

Sumane Iyer

Int + 61 2 9456 4737

48 Helvetia Avenue Berowra NSW 2081

sumane@pacific.net.au

Social Convener:

Chandra Senaratne

Int + 61 2 9872 6826

charboyd@iprimus.com.au

Melbourne Chapter Convener:

Shelagh Goonewardene

Int + 61 3 9808 4962

devika@netstra.com.au

Colombo Chapter

Convener/Local President

Somasiri Devendra

2737180 - somasiri@edisrilanka.com

Local Hon. Secretary

Daya Wickramatunga

2786783 - dawick@sltnet.lk

Local Hon. Treasurer

Mike Udabage

Mob: 0775 412 420 - mike_udabage@itechne.com

329/124 Lake Road - Dehiwala

Ph: 273 1914

Ex officio:

Dr Robert Sourjah

Int + 61 2 9622 2469

robertsourjah@yahoo.com

Hugh Karunanayake

Life Member

Int + 61 2 9980 2494

hkaru@optusnet.com.au

Tony Peries

Int + 61 2 9674 7515

srini.p@bigpond.com

Ron Murrell

Int + 61 2 9484 4070

ronchris@tpg.com.au

Thiru Arumugam

Int+ 61 2 8850 4798

thiru.aru@gmail.com



NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 11th May at 6.30 p.m

Dr Geoffrey Brahm Levey
Lecturer University of New South Wales

will speak on
Australian Multiculturalism: Success or Failure

Venue: Thornleigh Community Centre
Cnr Pennant Hills Road & Phyllis Avenue
Thornleigh NSW 2121
Info: Sunil 02 9983 1116-Doug 02 9894 7449

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

Sunday 22nd June at 5.30 pm

Anoma Pieris

will speak on
The Messenger Birds Of Jayawardenepura
A birds eye view of the old city as described in the epic poem "Salalihini Sandesaya"

Venue: Holy Redeemer Church Hall Cnr of York Street and
Mont Albert Road Surrey Hills VIC 3127
(Melways Ref: 46 H10)
Info: Shelagh -03 9808 4962 Or Srilal -03 9809 1004

NEXT COLOMBO MEETING

Saturday 17th May at 5.30 pm

Dr Raja Bandaranayake

will speak about his award-winning book

"Betwixt Isles"
The Story of the Kandyan Prisoners in Mauritius

Venue: Lions Hall,
2 School Lane, Nawala

Info: Somasiri - 2737180 - Mike - 0775412420
Daya - 2786783

How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

Contact Treasurer Srikantha Nadarajah
50A The Esplanade Thornleigh NSW 2120
Ph: 02 9980 1701

E-mail: vsnadarajah@bigpond.com
and request an application form

In search of speakers

The committee would welcome nominations of knowledgeable and academic persons to speak at our regular meetings, in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo. You may have friends, relations who live in or visit Australia./Sri Lanka Our calendar for the year is - April/May, September/October and November/December. Dates can be arranged to suit availability of eminent speakers. Please contact :

In Sydney -President :Sunil de Silva
Ph: 02 9983 1116 E-mail: sunsil@smartchat.net.au

In Melbourne - Vice President Srilal Fernando
03 9809 1004 or E-mail: srilalf@bigpond.net.au

In Colombo - Local President Somasiri Devendra
2737180 - somasiri@edisrilanka.com

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Where applicable, contributors are requested to annotate bibliographical references to facilitate further research & study by interested members.

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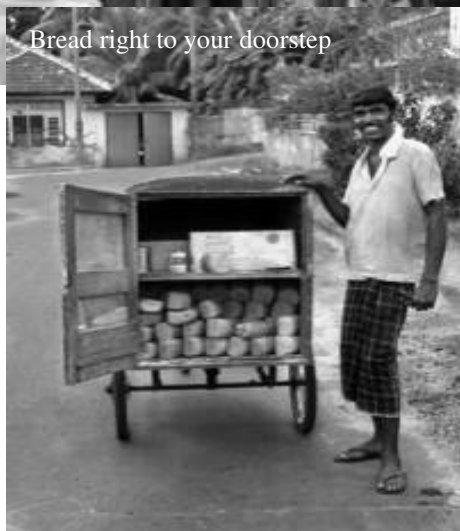
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Fish vendors, definitely “no ice” ..or is it?