

## **ANOTHER SCHOOLBOY REMEMBERS (1961 – 1963)**

**by F M Tan (Oct 4, 2007)**

### **A. DO YOU REMEMBER.....?**

#### **1. THE DASH TO THE LIBRARY (AFTER LUNCH)**

The quick dash after lunch from the Dining Hall to the Library to get the first opportunity to read the newspapers, and also to reserve any interesting printed article by writing “Booked by .....(your name)” beside it. Then, (was it after a week?) retrieve the newspaper and cut out the article, (of course) after getting the Librarian’s permission.

#### **2. RECEIVING MAIL OR PARCELS FROM HOME**

The exhilarating feeling that one gets on receiving a letter, or even more a parcel of goodies from home, and then the joy of sharing it with your friends? Although the mail and parcels that I received during my days at Guru were few and infrequent, they were items that I really looked forward to.

#### **3. SIT-IN PROTEST AT MEALTIME (1961 OR 1962?)**

Once, a protest was made to draw attention on the declining quality of food provided at meals, with students forgoing their food during a sit-in for two meals, one at tea-time, and then at the subsequent dinner, as well. If I remember correct, each student just took an empty plate, and then sat down at his meal table. I don’t really remember how this matter was finally resolved, (or if there was any reprimand), but there was a marked improvement in the meals after this incident. I think the idea for this protest came from (my) De Saram (Junior) dormitory mates. Perhaps some of our contemporaries with better memories may wish to comment, or even add more details of the above incident.

#### **4. THE (SLEEK) LINES OF MR JAYASURIYA’S (GREEN?) MG CAR.**

His car, in the same colour as that of Reid House, of which he was the House Master, might have been more than a simple coincidence. It was usually parked near his staff quarters, and was the object of much attraction and discussion.

I wonder if the ownership of such a car became the burning ambition of many of a school boy then, encouraging him to study hard, graduate with flying colours, and strive for a successful career in life to be able to afford a similar car.

## **B. DID YOU HEAR ABOUT .....?**

### **1. THE PERSON MOST BITTEN (BY A DOG) .....(1962?)**

Most likely (I think) I must be the unevitable record holder to be the only person in Guru's history who was bitten by THE SAME dog TWICE, and also in a time interval of ONE WEEK.

Background history: A dog had somehow selected an opening near the door of one of the squash courts to give birth to her puppies, and took a quick snipe at my leg when I was about to enter the courts. For some unexplainable reason, that dog chose to bite me only, and not any of the other numerous players who frequented the courts; not once, but twice within the same week. This was even more of a puzzle as I did not even try to touch the dog or her puppies.

Aftermath: Suspecting the dog to be rabid, I was given an (anti-rabies, I believe it was called then) injection a day (alternatively right and left on my tummy each day) for I think 14 days. Subsequently, a conclusion was made that the dog wasn't rabid, and so I did not need the full course of 21 injections. With the advance in modern medicine, an anti-tetanus jab will now suffice. (Medical guys out there: please correct me if I'm wrong).

Food for thought: Had often wondered why that dog and the puppies were not removed from that location after biting me the first time?

### **2. THE SONNET/ BONNET EPISODE**

During an English Literature class while poetry was being introduced by the teacher, brought the class down in laughter for thinking out aloud if there was any connection between "SONNET" and "BONNET". Then spent the rest of the period as punishment outside the classroom appreciating the songs of the birds, instead of the intricacies of the English Language.

Food for thought: Had often wondered if that punishment was justified?

### **3. THE DAY I RECEIVED 'TWO OF THE BEST' FROM "DOC" HIMSELF**

Received 'two of the best' from 'Doc' himself for having a sheet of paper (which accidentally fell out of my trouser pocket) during an English Language Term Test. A few days prior to the test, I had copied quite a number of English idioms (aka "Words of Wisdom") from our English textbook at the time on to a sheet of paper, slipped it into my pocket, and then had completely forgotten about it. Making entries in the 'Autograph Books' was very popular amongst students at that time, and quotes using those idioms were extensively used. However, this explanation was not accepted by the teacher supervising the test.

Result: The English Test answer paper, and the sheet of “Idioms” were confiscated, and the whole episode reported to ‘Doc’, who also did not appear to accept the reason either, later that evening handing out the punishment mentioned.

Food for thought: Had often wondered long and hard, but could not understand how I could have obtained unfair advantage reproducing any of those idioms for my English Language test. A student might be asked to explain an idiom, but not vice-versa.

#### 4. THE DAY THE CHAPEL TAPESTRY CAUGHT FIRE (1962 OR 1963?)

Once, during service in the chapel, the candles on the altar had been placed (probably a bit too) close to the tapestry over the altar, and a sudden breeze suddenly blew the flame onto the tapestry, which quickly ignited. What could have been a serious tragedy was prevented by the quick thinking and action of Timothy Bridge, and possibly (I don’t remember well) one or two other servers near the altar, who quickly doused the flames.

(Related) Note:

If lighted candles are still in practice during church service still, and in case there are no portable fire extinguishers in the immediate vicinity, I would suggest that these be installed to prevent a similar incident.

#### 5. MR A K CHAPMAN (AS A WRISTWATCH REPAIRER)

In addition to being a respected Mathematics and Chemistry teacher, Mr A K Chapman was also adept at repairing wristwatches during his spare time. This was extremely appreciated, as a wristwatch was invaluable to a student in a boarding school, especially in one with as large an area as Guru, where all the students are kept fully occupied with a wide variety of activities.

I remembered two occasions when he very kindly repaired mine (free of charge, by the way). Did anyone else have this experience?

#### 6. THE DAY I SURPRISED MYSELF (COMPLETED TWO LAPS OF THE SWIMMING POOL)

Having been unsuccessful trying to learn how to swim for several years, I had almost given up all hope of ever being able to do so.

Over a some considerable time, I had watched closely, and been very attracted to the apparent ease and elegance of the swimming prowess of our considerable number of swimming ‘greats’ of that period like the Kellar Brothers, R Dobbs, T Bridge, J Goodacre, J Conner, Don Gazara (previously known as D. Kannagara), M B Ratnayake, U Jayasuriya, and quite a number of others (whose names just escape me now) under the dedicated and untiring coaching of “Doc” and “Mara”, something in my brain snapped, and I felt that I could conquer my fear of water.

So one day, after making sure that there was a watchful lifeguard on duty, as was usually the case, I took the plunge (figuratively, of course), and completed two laps on my very own. My heart was in my mouth when I was in the deep end, but I somehow managed to complete what I had been determined to do that day.

### C. EVER WONDERED WHY.....?

#### 1. "DOC" NEVER (APPEARED) TO STOP WORKING?

Taking several subjects taught by "Doc", quite a number of classmates and I had noticed that after he had completed teaching the subject matter, and had given us exercises to do, almost without exception, he would be busy with pen and paper at his desk. Occasionally, when I had the chance to be near his desk, I saw what I thought were triangles and circles drawn. My guess was that he was extremely keen to keep his skill in Geometry sharpened so well that he could solve any Geometry problem in the quickest time.

I think that our Mathematics contemporaries would agree with me that our experience was that after cramming the numerous Geometry theorems, if they are not applied very frequently, are forgotten in double quick time. I regret very much now that I did not get the chance to personally ask him if I was correct.

I wonder if any of Doc's previous students have any other explanation.

#### 2. A SIMPLE MEAL OF BREAD & SAMBOL WAS SO TASTY?

The simple fare of a loaf of bread and sambol – (seeni-, or any of the other types) bought from the nearby Welimada town, (or apparently any other location so long that it was from outside Guru's boundary) was so tasty? I do not know if it was something in our adolescent appetites then, or were there really some secret ingredients, or maybe some coincidental culinary matching of the bread and the sambol creating a perfect match for our taste buds. Any answers to this subject are most welcome.

By the way, can anyone explain the difference between sambol and coconut sambol, and how many different types of these dishes are there in existence (in SL)? I seem to have lost count. I have a hazy memory there was a (dry) type prepared with Bombay onion, coconut, and chilli powder or fresh chillies, one type prepared using shallots, and then there is the wet type with coconut milk (or is that not classified as sambol??).....Another delicacy that I cannot remember the name of is fish cubes in a dark coloured (sauce?) that after prepared is dry without any gravy.....(is tamarind one of the ingredients?) .....My mouth just starts to water when I think of these delicacies that I haven't been able to taste or buy for the several decades after leaving SL. The reason could be due to my inability to remember the names of the dishes. Perhaps some of our

contemporaries, (or otherwise), or readers may be able to provide this information, (and also the recipes as well,) if possible. These would be most welcome.

### 3. END-OF-YEAR HOUSE DINNERS WERE SO DELICIOUS?

Have often pondered why the dinner provided at the end of year House/Dorm dinner was the most sumptuous and memorable one for that year in quality, as well as in a quantity? Other than for the obvious reason of additional cost (I think we had to pay something extra on our own), perhaps it had something to do with our mind set then, or was it the special prowess showing through by, or was it the 'free rein' given (only allowed for the House Dinners) to the Pantry Matron (a lady named Mrs. Abeywickrema, I think) ?

## **D. DID ANYONE TRY TO .....**

### 1. COOK FOOD IN THE WOODS? (1961)

Ever cooked food over an open fire in the woods of Guru? I tried this once cooking some sausages sent from home. I wasn't sure if the pantry cooks could prepare it correctly. So, one day after classes, (or it might have been a Saturday), I got help from a few friends and gathered some firewood in the woods (at a location near the old boxing ring, I think). We then selected three longer and thicker sticks, tied them at one end to form a tepee-like structure, hung the sausages at the top, and then lit a fire below it. As we did not want to draw too much (unwanted) attention to our cooking, due to prolonged (and tell-tale, as well) smoke from the fire, I think the results were slightly undercooked, but still very tasty sausages. Whatever is cooked outdoors has a very special flavour – at least, that's my personal opinion.

## NOTES

The above are a few of the recollections of my days at Guru. Although my memory is below average, somehow, (at least some of them) seem to be indelibly written into my mind, and I wish to take this opportunity to share them. I am sure that many of my contemporaries of this period, and that even more past students (those before, and after this particular period), will have similar, or even more interesting memories or anecdotes, as well. By sharing these memories, my hope is that this will inspire them to share their reminiscences as well.

I count myself most fortunate and privileged to have been taught by and known Dr. & Mrs Hayman, and also by Canon Foster during my years at Guru. I experienced first hand their honest concern for each and every student throughout the school year during classes, as well as outside classes (shown by their own involvement of the numerous extra-curricular activities), and also their complete dedication to bring out the best in body, mind and spirit in each student.

However, memory sometimes plays strange tricks, and if any incidents, (and or names mentioned) are not fully accurate, please let me know. These errors (there could be quite a few) will definitely be corrected with the help of other (if available, and hopefully 'reliable') sources.

I have tried to classify these recollections into different headings, and numbered, for easier reference.

In the event that some of our contemporaries had tried, and was unsuccessful in trying to contact me due to the email address given incorrectly (as [fmtan@tellus.net](mailto:fmtan@tellus.net)) in the present Members Directory, please note that the correct one is [fmtan@telus.net](mailto:fmtan@telus.net). The webmaster had already been informed of this error.