

**J de S Jayasinghe**  
**An Appreciation by Harish Nilaweera**

It was with a great sense of sadness that I learnt of the death of Mr.J de S Jayasinghe a few weeks back and I am certain that anyone associated with S Thomas' College, Gurutalawa at any time during the four decades spanning the fifties to the late eighties would feel no different.

'J de S' or 'Uncle J' as he was known to all and sundry (but never referred to by us students within earshot) was one of the first recruits made by that Giant of Education and Thomian Institution, the late Dr R L Hayman. He came to Gurutalawa from Mahinda College, Galle, to 'help out for a few months'. In the event, he stayed on for FORTY years till his retirement in 1989! One of the best sportsmen in the South in his era, he captained Mahinda College in Cricket and Football and won his colours at Athletics. He really was a noble gift to STC from Mahinda.

I first came to know Mr.Jayasinghe when I entered Gurutalawa into the Lower Fourth Form in 1958 and by that time he was already a Senior master. He was just appointed Master of de Saram House which itself was a Senior position. (There were just three Houses at Guru during that period plus Winchester which was a dormitory for the sub juniors. (first year students). I do not think it is far from right to say that one would have got to know of Mr.Jayasinghe within a week or so of entering the College – his fame simply preceded him. He did not teach in the L4 but one did come across him very early when one went to the 'book cupboard' to purchase the requirements for that year.

One came across Mr.Jayasinghe in the class room only from the Upper Fourth onwards. He just could not be avoided. He taught Maths, Physics and Biology in the Upper Fourth and Fifth Forms. Maths was taught in Sinhalese and English. The Science subjects were taught in English. Thus the reader would appreciate how one could not have gone through one's stay at Guru even if one stayed on for just two years without being at least in one of his classes.

Likewise, his presence in the sports field was ubiquitous. He was Master in charge and coach of U16 cricket and Football and was in overall charge of

Athletics. The sports meets, during his era at the helm, were perfectly organized events.

He was in charge of de Saram House for over 15 years, and was a strict disciplinarian who tackled students in a most kind and humane way.

A versatile actor, he was mainly responsible for the production of two J de Lanerolle's plays, 'Ralahamy Rides Again' and 'The Return of Ralahamy'. They were superbly produced and performed both in Colombo and Gurutalawa. He played the role of Ralahamy and if I recall correctly, 'Haddjar' was played by another member of the staff, John Marasinghe, also retired. It was a combined cast comprising students and members of the Staff with J de S J as usual, leading from the front.

Off the field of sport and out of the classroom he took an active part in outdoor activities such as the Social Service Club, encouraging students to voluntarily assist in various building projects at the school.

He was a genial gentleman who always had time; be it a fellow teacher, student or a member of the minor staff who wished to consult him regarding any difficulty. He was a mediator who was respected by everyone and this strength was a valuable asset to the Headmaster and was in his later years, Senior Master. He was a religious man, and I recall him saying in my final year at Gurutalawa, that compulsory Religious studies would have given the students a deeper insight in to their faiths.

He was a dedicated teacher from the Old School the likes of whom we may never see again in this changing world.

Alas, his life in retirement was not to be too long as he was ailing from diabetes which finally overcame him. A doyen among teachers in the finest Thomian tradition, 'He stood still for us to go forward in life'. – a remark by one of my closest friends at a recent OTALK meeting. True words. We who were nurtured in Gurutalawa, Owe a lot among others such as Dr.Hayman and Cannon Foster, to this stocky, small made gentleman in the green/brown pullover who came for a 'short stay' from Galle to the plains of Gurutalawa and did not think of returning for almost forty years – having given a lifetime to education. Mahinda College and STC can be proud of him.

MAY HE ATTAIN NIBBANA