

J. DE S. JAYASINGHE **1924 – 1991**

I first got to know “Jaye,” (or Uncle Jaye) as he was affectionately known to all, when I joined the staff of S.T.C. Gurutalawa in January 1954. Jaye had joined the staff five years earlier in March 1949 and in 1954 he was house master of Winchester House and (later of De Saram House), taught Biology and General Science in the middle and upper school and was cricket and athletics coach in addition to his other duties. It was evident that at this time he was one of the senior masters in whom Dr. Hayman placed a lot of trust.

This was a period in which there were several outstanding members of the staff who worked as a team under the leadership of Dr. Hayman and Rev. Foster. Some of them were Messrs. F L Amarasinghe, A K Chapman, Gerald de Alwis, Bradman Weerakoon (for a short period) , Mr. & Mrs. E Scott, R Pegler, Oswin Wright of Trinity College fame and George Pillai.

As a teacher, housemaster and sportsman Jaye easily held his own with the best of them. He was a product of one of the great Buddhist schools of South, Mahinda College, Galle, and it speaks volumes for the Buddhist tradition of tolerance that he, one of its best products, spent forty years of his life in the service of S. Thomas’, a Christian School.

He was an outstanding sportsman in this day. A contemporary, Dr. W G Wimaladharmasiri writing about him in the ‘Island’ of 7.6.1991 says “He was the eldest of four brothers, all of whom attended Mahinda College. He excelled in cricket, football, athletics and cadetting. He captained the Mahinda College cricket team in the years 1944 and 1945. The 1944 match against Richmond and Mahinda ably led by J de S Jayasinghe was memorable, with J de S bowling extremely well to return a bag of 13 for 53.

That Saturday afternoon “J de S” trying to stop a powerful drive from Christie Karunaratne split his palm and was rushed to hospital, only to see him return an hour later with a bandaged hand to take three more wickets and demolish the Richmond side for a resounding innings victory.”

Jaye was very versatile. He was well known for his big hitting as a batsman and the small boys expected ‘fireworks’ when he went out to bat; he was also a fine bowler who could considerable pace off the pitch with a short run up. He could also move the ball both ways with no difference in his bowling action; hence he was very difficult to “read.”

As athletic coach he took a lot of interest in the latest developments in athletics and attended a professional course in India at his own expense. Drama was another of his interest, and the ‘Ralahamy’ plays he produced in which he played the leading role at Diyatalawa and Badulla will long be remembered by those who saw the plays. He was also at various periods in his career, Secretary and Committee member of the school’s

Co-operative Society, master in charge of the Buddhist Society, and for a time even interested himself in the cultivation and sale of vegetables. All this is in addition to being a very popular and competent teacher of General Science and Biology.

S. Thomas' was very fortunate to have him as a teacher of Science in the earlier fifties. This was the time when the change in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala and Tamil in the Arts and Science was being made. There were not many teachers at this time, who could handle both languages equally well. Those who could do so were an asset. Jaye was equally proficient in both languages. Some of the boys to whom he taught Science and Biology became specialist surgeons and physicians in later in life. Among were L K Amarasuriya, L R Dias, H D Jayasundara, Milroy Fernando, the late N R P de Silva, D M de S Jayasinghe, N S Jayasinghe, P K K Dias, Nihal Heenatigalla, C R L Wattedara, Ravi Jayasekara and M N D P Jayatilleke.

He was always accessible to everyone – boys, staff and others. All sorts and conditions of men and boys used go to him for advice and no one was ever turned away. Like Rev. Foster he saw the good in everyone, even the most hardened breaker of rules. I shall remember part of a song that was composed by a member of De Saram House and sung at a House dinner; it went like this:

“Mr. Jayasinghe, our House Master.

Thank you for coming here, sir. You are our father....” etc. He was truly a father, ‘in loco parentis’ to them all.

The best years of Jaye's life at Gurutalawa in my opinion were from the beginning of the fifties to the end of the sixties when he worked under the leadership of Dr. Hayman and Rev. Foster, men who he admired and respected.

I remember many things about Jaye with gratitude; the long, rambling conversation which we used to have in his rooms after dinner along with his great friend Laffir and other bachelor members of the staff, the trip to Dambana and Veddah country in the holidays, the visits to Nuwara Eliya on Sundays, the occasional dinners at Welimada when we got tired of College food, the cricket matches and the discussions on politics and on everything else. Jaye was a very loyal UNPer; the only photographs he had in his room were those of D S Senanayake and of Dudley Senanayake having a swim in the college swimming pool.

Oswin Wright told me how thrilled Jaye was when he (Oswin) brought Sir John Kotalawala to Jaye's room after Sir John Kotalawala had finished addressing a meeting at Gurutalawa in the 1956 General Election.

Jaye was later appointed Deputy Headmaster in recognition of his services to the school. He also acted as Headmaster for a period of four months when Mr. Patrick Gunewardena was out of the island and made a very good job of it.

He retired in May 1989 after forty years of devoted service. The Old Boys Association hosted him to lunch at the B M I C H on his retirement. He died barely eleven months after his retirement in April 1990. The large gathering of old boys, staff parents, minor employers and friends at Talangama testified to the high regard in which he was held.

After life's fitful fever' may he sleep well.

Oliver de Soysa