

Warden S.J.Anandanayagam

The Power Of One

“Have faith in the boys you teach, even the most difficult ones. Understand them, love them, sympathise with them and expect great things from them – S.J. Anandanayagam

As soon as I read those words in “A Selection of Special Speeches” in the last Thomiana I had to sit down and reflect on them and write my bit on the reality of those words as they were applied to me by so many teachers at STC. My thoughts went from Father Barnabas and Miss Bay to Mr Cook and Father Baldwin; from Brookie and Mr Muttiah to Rev Selvaratnam and many more, but specifically to the man who spoke those words – Ana himself!

I joined college in form 1A in 1955 and left school at the end of 1968. They were 13 long years – probably a bit more than the average student but due mainly to a hiatus in the Upper 6 and Col B days and the long suffering of senior teachers who nevertheless showed faith in me during that season of my life.

What struck me about the quote was that it was not only just spoken but lived out as well, though I often might not have seen it then. I can’t remember Pythagoras’ theorem or Maxwell’s Corkscrew rule or my Latin declensions but if there is anything I take out of my time at STC it’s the influence that so many teachers had in shaping my growing up years and equipping me for life itself.

Ana as I will fondly call him, was Upper School headmaster in my Upper 6 and Col form years. I remember when I went into Upper 6 B he was my Physics master and one to be revered. You sort of kept your distance with him not only because of the stature of the man but because he had a reputation for the most painful caning in the school. I know that for sure because I got whopped by him a few times and it really, really hurt!

I suppose the only way I could get back at him was to write about his mannerisms and sayings in my little ‘red book’ and I can assure you that the quotes I had from him were not as noble as the one that has just inspired me to write! We had fun at his expense but never dared to take him on openly.

I remember him with his thumbs under his armpits tapping his “pecs” and bellowing in that powerful voice of his that “these two points are rather very important!” I remember him walking to the blackboard with his hands on the waist of his trousers telling us, “now boys I want you to take this down!!” I think a few generations of Physics students will remember these

because no one dared to correct him. He was biblically speaking 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

I suppose I didn't do much to build his confidence in me either. I failed my O'levels in '63 and went from Upper 6 B to Col B2 and then to Col B4 after my results arrived. I failed again in August and again in December of '64 only to make history with a few others the next year in the newly formed Col B5 (as if Col B4 wasn't bad enough).

We were in the 'takarang shed' created for us between the kitchen and the 'lavos.'

It was only the brave teachers that ventured out there to teach us and when they did, they rewarded us with free periods. After all there was nothing more to teach us seeing we had learnt it all over the 3 years. Our free periods, particularly in the afternoons consisted of 'working the line' from the kitchen to the classroom. The line incidentally consisted of coconuts and jam tarts that worked their way into the classroom.

Well it was no surprise that I failed again in August '65 – my fourth attempt! My next step was to sit again in December and then probably grace the halls of Pembroke.

My reputation at that stage wasn't too flash either. I had been reported for my behaviour at the December '64 exam. Four or five of us were hauled up before Mr Davidson and he read the riot act to us because of comments made by the chief invigilator about our behaviour.

I remember that exam. First someone (not me) threw a 'garandiya' into the exam hall. The next thing we knew was that the sareed supervisor was standing on the desk and there was absolute mayhem. That brief period of time I think changed the results of some of us from an 'F' to an "S" if you know what I mean! I think it was Roger D'Silva who gallantly saved the lady by carrying the snake out of the hall. Then we had our Physics paper on January 1st. It was accompanied by firecrackers in the hall because some of us were still in party mode after the night before. It was not good to say the least.

To my utter surprise I received a week's detention though suspension was on the cards. I suspect I may have got off because of the credit my father had built through being one of the distinguished judges at our annual PT house competitions.

Well all that to say '63-'65 was among the worst years both in my studies and behaviour. I was headed nowhere. That's how I saw it. That's what I believed and that's how I lived it.

In October '65 Ana met me as I was going in to class. It was just outside the Physics lab in the new science block. I can to this day picture the scene. I can even smell it given the H₂S that usually wafted through the building! His words to me were, "Brohier, what do you plan to do with yourself and with your studies?" "Good question sir," I said to myself, because I had never given it any thought. Then still in a state of shock I blurted out, "well sir, I hope to get through my O'levels in December and I hope I can come back to college next year after the results are out." His next sentence absolutely stunned me and changed the direction of my life. In his typical, thoughtful fashion he said, "you know we don't like to lose boys like you!" Then he went on to tell me that if I did well in my end of term exam that I could ask my dad to make a special appeal and that he would speak to the teachers on my behalf and consider keeping me in College another year.

"We don't like to lose boys like you!" That statement rang in my ears that day as I went home from school. In fact I have never forgotten it since. I was surprised. Shocked. How could he could make a statement like that about me given my track record? Someone at least believed in me in spite of Someone had faith in me I thought and something clicked in my head that day.

I bought some basic text books and began studying from scratch but with a new motivation. I missed classes which was not a surprise, but this time I studied from 12 to 15 hours a day, even more. My mother thought I was out of my mind but from being 32nd in class I came 2nd at the term exam. I breezed through my O'levels that year and never looked back both in my studies and in the offices I held. In fact my dad didn't have to make any appeal. My report at the end of the year simply said, "promoted to Col B" and it was in Ana's distinct handwriting.

For me that one simple conversation was a watershed in my life. The man I least expected to believe in me actually saw what I was capable of. He had faith in me. He expected better things from me and was not afraid to articulate that and stick his neck out for me.

That simple word of encouragement not only had an impact on my life then but has served as a model that I have used over the years to encourage and believe in many others who were just like me. It has served me in my role as a Leadership Consultant, Life Coach and mentor across this nation of Australia and as a pastor of some 900 people in my church in Geelong.

I can't remember the formulae and the experiments with bunsen burners and calorimeters but I can remember the influence of one man who made a difference in my life and not just me, but for generations that I have had

the privilege of influencing. I guess that's what STC is about. And I guess that's what education is finally all about.

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Let's pass the baton on to others that the likes of S.J. Anandanayagam passed on to us.

Esto Perpetua!

- Richard Brohier