

Memories of Gurutalawa

by Lanka Nesiah

The Guru Appeal - The Teacher

In December 1960, I had just sat for what was then known as the University Entrance Examination and was due to leave school from the College Arts A form. If I was successful in gaining admission to the University, the academic year would begin in July 1961. I was going to be at a loose-end for six months and so wrote to Dr Hayman asking if he had any opening for me for six months. He promptly wrote back saying that a master was going on study leave for six months and would I be prepared act for him? He offered me board and lodging and an allowance of Rs 60/- per month. Having lived for years queuing up on Thursdays after school for the weekly pocket money of 50 cents, Dr Hayman's offer seemed extremely generous. I immediately wrote accepting his offer - before he could change his mind!

Somewhere in mid January, I travelled by train to Nanu Oya to start my first "job". The college van met me at Nanu Oya and I found myself going to Guru with another six or seven other boys who had travelled in the same train. One of them happened to be Earlsom Kellar, the then Head Prefect at Guru. When I arrived at college, I was given accommodation in the staff 'chummary' in a tiny room facing the senior dorms. It seemed smaller than my cubicle in Copleston House! But it was to be the beginning of one of the happiest six months of my life.

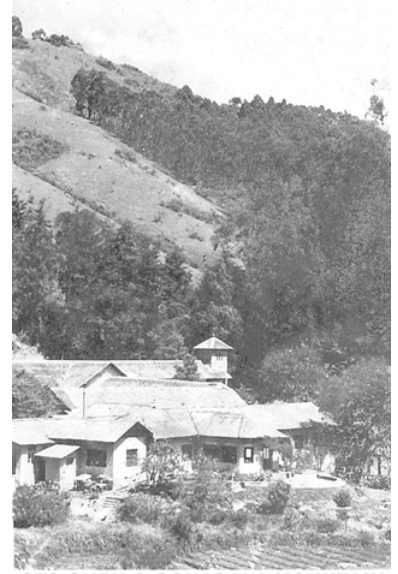
I was to act for Mr Samaranayake who had taken leave to study and sit for his London Arts degree. I was to teach History in the Lower 6th and English, History and Civics in the Lower 4th, Upper 4th and 5th forms. I was also Master-in-charge of Boxing. I do not know how much I taught the boys but I learnt a lot about life myself. In the evenings, we had boxing only on two days and on the other days, I joined the boys at practices in cricket or basketball. I also assisted Mr D Jayasuriya with the work of the Junior Literary Society and for the first time produced a magazine 'Junior'.

As one just out of school at Mount, I got on well with both the boys and the staff. By the end of the first term, I think I knew almost all the boys by name. On week-ends, we went on hikes or trips or played cricket matches. I played with the staff cricket team in matches at Nuwara Eliya and Bandarawela. I also took the school cricket team to play a match at Badulla against Uva College where Mr Gerald de Alwis, an old boy, was Principal. We went on several hikes to Horton Plains and Diyatalawa. I joined the staff and boys on a trip to climb Adam's Peak, the first and only time I have done the climb. The staff used to meet on most Friday evenings for drinks and dinner. I remember one such evening in Mr George Pillai's house. As the evening grew, the exuberance of those present also grew and the party became a little noisy. Dr Hayman's bungalow was directly across the fields and he quietly walked across with his torch and from the roadway below gave us a gentle reminder that our noise level needed to be toned down.

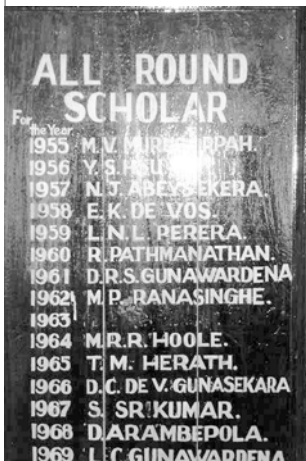
We had a superb team of staff then at Guru. The school owed much, very much, to the leadership of Dr Hayman and his able lieutenant Fr Foster, the Chaplain. The senior staff members included Messrs Chapman, Jayasinghe, Oswin Wright, Gnanamuttu, Chinniah, George Pillai, Laffir and Marasinghe. Mrs Hayman was in charge of the sick room and Mrs Jayawickrema in charge of the Commissariat and feeding the boys. Those were truly the heyday of Guru.

I have kept in touch with Guru ever since I left. The school went through a bad patch, particularly following the death of my cousin Bala Gunasegaram, who was Head Master for far too brief a period. But thanks to Jacques Huyghebaert and the present Head Master Fr Marc Billimoria, Guru is slowly but surely returning to its earlier glory. I am glad Fr Marc has started the Hayman Foundation not only to perpetuate the memory of a person who strode Guru like a colossus for the first twenty years but also to bring back Guru to that early glorious era. From humble beginnings, Dr Hayman built up Guru to be a magnificent edifice. Let us therefore support the efforts to maintain and build further on that edifice.

Esto Perpetua!



STC GURU & GONAGALA MOUNTAIN



"Guru is slowly but surely returning to its earlier glory"

