

APPRECIATION

J H S Peiris - S. Thomas College Mount Lavinia 1927-1964

For those who never met our Father, here is a great picture of him having Toddy. Now,
I know why I like to have a drink



and a picture with our maternal grand-mother and the oh so beautiful, MOTHER - the
bearer of 7 Boys. Now, I know how my Father had SEVEN children. He worked over-
time



Dear Family,

Following on in a similar vein to El Juwa's appreciation of our Mother..... on Mother's Day...

This is an article that Doyle and I wrote for a book titled "Reflections 60s and 70s" . The book was released last week.... and therefore we can make this article... public

With love and Rgds

RONNIE AND DOYLE PEIRIS

My Father,...Our Teacher

by Ronnie Peiris (assisted by Doyle Peiris)

I often wonder who felt more awkward in dealing with each other during school. Was it our father who was also our teacher or was it his sons who were his students.

My father, J H S Peiris (Peeraiya/Black Tie) was a teacher at S. Thomas College from 1927-1964, the last 6 years in the capacity of Head Master of the Lower School. My brother, Doyle (1960-1971) and I (1958-1969) were Lower School students during the period that my father was the Head Master. We were the last in a line of 7 boys... all Thomians.

Doyle and I never addressed him as Dadda, as we used to call him at home, nor did we address him as Sir, which is how other students addressed him. When we did meet, which was quite often for reasons explained later, we communicated silently with our body language or eyes and we probably understood each other.

This awkward relationship extended, albeit at a slightly lower intensity, to our home, Number 8, Barnes Avenue, where my father, and mother, parented, an average of 30 boarders at any given time, in addition to their own sons. The boarders ranged from the Wickremasinghes (Sanath & Tissa), Karunaratnes, (Rohan & Jayanath), Amerasinghes, (Gamini & Tissa), Gunasekeras (SL & SJ), P W D Wijesuriya (P-d- Wadaya), Gunasekeras, (Elasto), Abeyratnes (Yogi & Sanath) all from the South, to C M Gunaratne of Hanguranketha, Vijaya Corea, the Martenstyns'(Howard, Dallas & Keith), the Senaratnes'(Lalith and Indika) of Negombo, the Jayasinghes'(Gamini & Tissa) of Kohuwela and Harsha Abeywardena, the Wijetilekes (Cyril and Tissa) and the Welgamas (Mahinda & Kumar) of Wellawatte, just to name a few. They came from near and far. There were many more and they are too numerous to mention individually.

Most of them were placed in my fathers care to imbibe the principles of discipline and order. Our home was run like the military. In this environment, my father insisted that there was to be no differentiation between his sons and the boarders. To my parents, the boarders, too, were their sons. Under this regime of no differentiation, Doyle and I did not refer to him as Dadda unless it was a very family specific matter. Neither did we call him Sir. Our silent language continued at home too.

Naturally, it was the holidays that we really looked forward to in engendering the normal father-son relationship. Many were the early morning sessions, during the holidays, where we joined him in singing hymns and popular folk songs, solving riddles, answering general knowledge questions and playing I spy with my little eyes. The switch from the silent to the more natural father-son communications was quite easy and automatic and this confirmed to me my fathers ability to adapt to any situation. He taught us how to mingle with kings without losing the common touch. My father was an enigma to us. He was a gentle giant, rigid and stern in the outside, as the students usually knew him, but very soft and gentle in the inside.

Professor JNO Fernando, now the Rector of the College of Chemical Sciences, writes;
(The History of the OBA- Centenary Number);-

Mr. JHS Peiris who succeeded Revd. Barnabas when the latter left for India in 1958 was a good teacher and a firm but fair disciplinarian. He was one of the first teachers to give class-room instruction in the mother tongue. With those who dodged work and shirked responsibility, he would brook no nonsense, but those who were eager to learn soon discovered that his firmness was tempered with much kindness and a deep understanding”

There were many similar teacher-son relationships during our years at S. Thomas. Those who I recollect are; (apologies once again to anyone I have missed) Mrs. Kusuma Bandaratilleke, Mrs. Merlin Fernando, Mrs. Lorna Mendis, Mr. Leo de Silva, Mr. Arisen Ahubudu, Mr Orville Abeynaike, Mr. D. S. Jayasekera (Pol-Tokka), Mr. C. S. Weerasooriya (Pol Weera), Mr. D. F. David (Bamboo), Mr. B. D. Jayasinghe (Phan), Mr. R. Asiriwathan (Hispaniola), Mr. Rifle Mendis, Mr. Jayakody (Cock Curry), Mr. Lister Mendis (Lingus), Mr E L Perera (Key-hole) and Mrs. Adele Goonewardena. I have used their nicknames with a sense of love. I question whether their teacher-son interactions were as awkward as ours? Irrespective of whether it was awkward or not awkward, there is no doubting that those teachers, just like my father, exhibited a heightened sense of justice, and equity, when dealing with their son/s at school and demanded of them a significantly higher standard of decorum. As with all the other great teachers of S. Thomas, their curriculum was an insignificant part of what they communicated. From them, the sons didnt learn merely a subject but learnt life. They learnt tolerance and justice, fearlessness and pride and reverence and pity. They learnt that all were equal. They saw no difference in race, religion, colour or creed.

A few anecdotes will serve to illustrate my fathers attitude to us and, for that matter, to all his other sons, his students.

As I stated earlier, despite the many efforts made by Doyle, and myself, to avoid physical contact with our father at school, we enjoyed little success because invariably any acts of discipline arising from indiscipline originating in our individual class started with one of us. While we may not have enjoyed it at that time, I firmly believe that this helped us to become better leaders, leading from the front and absorbing the first round of “bullets”.

Another anecdote evidences my fathers subtlety in conveying to us not to rat on our colleagues. There was this ex-boarder who used to bully Doyle and me, and when one day he referred to us as Black Ties sons, we saw an opportunity to fix him. We conveyed to our father what had occurred, particularly stressing on the use of Black Tie and we were quite pleased when he immediately referred the matter to the Warden, who at that time was Mr. C H Davidson (Poeta). When we arrived at the Wardens office, we were delighted to see that the accused had also been summoned and we were elated when he was admonished, reprimanded and severely warned. With hidden glee, Doyle and I turned to go away when we were stopped in our tracks by Poeta and were asked to hold the wall to receive 4 canings each. We were confused. Unknown to us, our father has asked the Warden to cane the two of us for ratting on our colleague.

Our father respected those who owned up to their misdeeds. To illustrate;- the boarders, including Doyle and I, had returned home after a Royal/Thomian and he gathered all of us and informed us that he was aware that we had been smoking and suggested that we own up before he went deeper into the matter. The two of us, together with approximately half of the boarders, admitted and all of us got 6 of the best. In addition, Doyle and I were sentenced to 2 weeks of isolation in the garage at the back of the house. We were deemed to be a bad influence on the boarders. As further punishment, we had to use the servants toilet and eat in the kitchen. At that time, the isolation was more acceptable to, and therefore enjoyed by, us than the rigidity in the house. However, we subsequently felt very deflated when our mother told us that she was very pleased, and that our father was very proud, that we owned up, particularly given that he had no idea that we smoked and did not have any evidence, at the time of summons, to prove the same.

Incidents such as the above are many and I can go on and on. Space, unfortunately, does not permit me to do so.

My father lived in an era, when, more often than not, Proverbs 13; 24 which states; He who spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him correcteth him betimes - was deemed to be right and was practiced literally. Whilst this style of discipline would certainly not have survived the litigious penchant of the modern times, I am yet to meet an Old Thomian who has spoken disparagingly of my father's liberal use of the cane (perhaps they were being courteous to me) or the system of discipline we had at S. Thomas. Doyle and I owe much to our father. It did not matter to us who felt more awkward in our interactions at school. What mattered to us ultimately was what we learnt from him.

Our Thomian grit and our Thomian spirit were instilled in us by the great teachers we had at St Thomas. They crafted us astutely and moulded us patiently in making us what we are today. They did not teach with the intent of gaining great riches or fame. Their rewards of teaching came from their innate belief that, every day, they had the opportunity to enrich the lives of their students by igniting the human spirit, dignifying the human experience and inspiring human excellence.

The great Roman orator and philosopher, Cicero, summed it all when said;-
"What Nobler employment or more valuable to the state, than that of the man who instructs the next generation"

At S. Thomas, Our Teachers were our Fathers and our Mothers. We are forever indebted to them.