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***NEWS LETTER - 01***

Dear

**S.THOMAS' COLLEGE- GURUTALAWA****A.OUR GROUP**

The Annual Fellowship/ Dinner of the OBA was held successfully on October 13,2001. We made use of this opportunity and **FOR THE FIRST** time, we were able to muster 16 contemporaries, most of whom had not even seen each other for well nigh 40 years, which by any standard was good for an inauguration. The nucleus of this Group had its origin in the project undertaken for the construction of the A.C.M.Laffir Pavillion and Sports Complex which was aborted, due to lack of support from certain sections of the oBA and the Board of Governors.

Amongst those who attended were Sarath Suraweera (Police Dept- Borella.), Jurair Marikkar (General Manager, Human Resources, Hayleys Ltd Nugegoda) Neelendra Karunaratne (Marine Engineer,- Peradeniya), Mohan Wijedoru (W M Mendis & Co Ltd- Galle) Mahen Ranasinghe (Chartered Engineer-Vidyasilpa- Rajagiriya), Lakshman Amunugama (Real Estate Agent, Pothuhera), Nimal Senaratne (Statcon Factory Manager- Avissawella) Nihal Wanniarachchi (Product Manager- Energizer Lanka Ltd- Mt.Lavinia), Jabir Junaid (Chartered Architect-Dehiwela), Wasantha Attygalle (Deputy Airport Manager, KIA Boralesgamuwa) P.S.Ranjith Fernando (Motor Engineer- S L I C Mt.Lavinia), B.Gamini C.Fernando (Building Construction-Dehiwela) Joe Rajakaruna (Attorney-at-Law- Kollupitiya), Mohamed Anzari (Business-Dematagoda), Thangarajah Sunderajah (Retired Planter-Nawala)

I.A. Munasinghe –Operations Manager (Parliament), R. Mahawaduge- Terminal Engineer KIA, Walter Gammanpila – Planter, and Sarath Jayasinghe Red Berry (Pvt) Ltd , could not attend due to urgent commitments elsewhere.

We could not 'catch' in time Don Gazara (formerly D C Kannangara- Trico) L.N.De S. Jayasuriya (Kelany Valley Plantations), Sarath Nanayakkara (Petroleum Corporation), H .S Prematilake (People's Bank Kandy) S. Selvaratnam (formerly Siva Sinniahnathan), M.P Sooriyarachchi, Sunil

Watawala (Siriyanigani D C Mills Katana) Harish Weerasekera (CIC) amongst our contemporaries.

Sydney Abeykoon (Hali –ela), A.M Gunaratne (Bibile), Ravi Kotalawala (Watawala Plantations) T.R Bridge NSB (Bandarawela), Shantha Dimbulana –Attorney-at-Law (Badulla) though in touch with us, we felt could not be troubled to come down all the way for a preliminary gathering and were to be prevailed upon once the group gathered steam.

We are anxious to ascertain the present addresses, telephone numbers etc, of Lakshaman Abeygunawardena (Galle), M.H.De Silva (Talawakelle) Dr.P.S Dias (UK), Harish Yapa (Canada), U.K.D Jinapriya (U S A), R.Sabaratnam (USA), Mahen Waidyaratne (Ambalangoda) and any others who were our contemporaries so that we may contact them and see whether they are interested in keeping in touch with each other and College.

So if you know the particulars relating to the above or any others of our era who may be interested in joining our group to keep in touch with each other and also help College, please let us know.

As there are several of our contemporaries in and around Kandy who are anxious to have a get together in Kandy itself, we hope to arrange a gathering on an evening soon in Kandy at which whoever is in a position to travel up from Colombo or elsewhere could participate. As soon as the names and addresses of those in Kandy are collected, a convenient date, time and venue in Kandy will be arranged for this gathering.

## **B. OTHER OLD BOYS**

All of those who participated in the Fellowship/Dinner at Mt.Lavinia on October 13,2001 are hopeful that we could continue to gather around us as wide a circle of friends not only resident in Sri Lanka but elsewhere so that we could meet or atleast keep in touch with each other, whilst doing our best for College.

Several Old Boys both members and non members in Passara, Badulla, Bandarawela , Gurutalawa, Nuwara Eliya, kandy, Kurunegala, Ratnapura, Balangoda, Galle, Matara, etc. have been in touch with us and are keen now to establish small groups in the outstations to meet, get to know each other and discuss how we can pool our resources to work for the betterment of College. We are in touch with them and are hoping to have meetings with a view to harnessing the support of all towards College. It is clear that this situation has arisen owing to the lethargy of the OBA. Till such time as the OBA is willing and ready to recognize this flow of good will towards College we intend to fill the vacuum and harness all the resources.

## **C. OUR REPORT ON COLLEGE**

In the meantime, conditions in College have deteriorated to such an extent that most of what we experienced of College life has disappeared. Very few of our contemporaries were in touch with College or visiting or attending the Annual OBA/ Get-together held every February. There is also nobody on the Tutorial Staff now who was there in our time. **Yet this is no reason why we should look the other side when College needs our help.**

Recently, many requests were made to a few of us on one of the occasions we were at Gurutalawa to take an interest and visit College **ON A NORMAL DAY.** As we ourselves felt there was an urgent need to look into matters **WE ENDEAVOURED TO SET THE BALL ROLLING UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE OBA WHICH IS THE OBVIOUS AND NATURAL THING TO DO.**

**UNFORTUNATELY, WE CAME ACROSS MANY OBSTACLES AND OUR EXPERIENCES MADE US FEEL THAT THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED DOES NOT WELCOME ANY OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE, ADVISE OR CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, WHICH WILL BE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE COLLEGE AND THE OBA ITSELF.** We came to this conclusion after over 6 months of procrastination by the Ex-Co of all that we have proposed.

We therefore decided to co-operate with the OBA where we could or were welcome and as far as the balance goodwill was concerned to divert it to College direct. Nobody can get hurt or find fault with our course of action.

We decided to attend the installation of Mr.Geethal Mendis the New Head Master at Gututalawa and also the Prize Giving at which the new Bishop Duleep de Chikera was the Chief Guest. The Bishop is the Chairman of the Board of Governors. The new Head Master was reported to be a good Administrator. The New Bishop gave an assurance that Gurutalawa would receive his attention henceforth. As all of you no doubt will be aware the Board of Governors who are the ultimate decision-makers of the College are reported so far to have given step-motherly treatment to Gurutalawa, and been totally disinterested in its development and activities. **We were therefore somewhat encouraged by those factors.**

Consequently, we initiated a fact-finding mission which involved 3-4 days of lodging at Bandarawela and spending the day time at Gurutalawa, inspecting certain areas and interviewing a wide cross –section of People who mattered amongst the Tutorial Staff, non-academic staff, minor staff, students and even parents.

We thereafter compiled a Report originally with the idea of handing it over to the Head Master and/or even the OBA. When it was found that considering the very sensitive issues involved and the nature of the material it contained, and the loud silence we have experienced with the Ex-Co of the OBA, it would not be prudent to do so as it may not be secure in the Head Master's Office at Gurutalawa and elsewhere, and hence, having spoken to the Bishop transmitted it to him direct.

Without a Head Master of the Calibre of Dr.Hayman, **resident in Gurutalawa,** it is a wonder that College has lasted even thus far. There have been reported murders of the Head Master and his wife; suicide of a Master; formation of Trade Unions and breaking out of strikes amongst the minor staff; and even students revolting and resorting to violence necessitating the entry of Police; vandalism and factional violence amongst the senior students etc,etc; It does appear that this horrific record will be difficult to match by any other school. It was in this scenario that we made a quiet entry to feel the pulse and see whether College could be resuscitated.

In our endeavours, we are fortunate to have had the unstinted co-operation, advise and guidance of no less a person than Mr.P.S. Duleep Kumar (who every body has always considered should have been the natural successor to Dr.Hayman)one of the Original 42 students at Guru in 1942 and deeply involved in the 1959 inauguration of the OBA and its affairs thereafter with some other pioneers. Several other very senior Old Boys have offered their support, advise and encouragement to us.

Recently however, unfortunately the OBA appears to have lost sight of its objectives and the majority of the Old Boys do not get actively involved and the pioneers too have had misunderstandings and keep away.

A vast number of Old Old Boys and even very young Old Boys are joining our efforts to resuscitate College to what it was without getting involved in unnecessary disputes in the OBA and it's Executive Committee.

#### **D. OUR PROPOSALS TO OBA**

Amongst the proposals we made to the OBA since the last AGM in February 2001, are the following:-

1. After Election of new Office Bearers – Paper Ad or Circular Letter to members.
2. Paper Ad for Members to inform change of Address.
3. Update Register of Members
4. Notice/Agenda of AGM to accompany
  - a) Secretary's Report with details of Ex Co Meetings Attendance.
  - b) Reports of Vice Presidents of Projects undertaken progress etc, during year
  - c) Audited Accounts;
  - d) Head-Master's Report;
  - e) Draft of Minutes of last AGM
5. Introduction of Participation Register or Registration Desk at AGM
6. New Membership Cards with Number
7. Helper Tags for Aides at Foster Hall for AGM
8. Publish the Directory of Members
9. Membership Drive with Paper Ad etc.
10. Invite all old boys who have drifted away to take active role, and sort out any matters unresolved.
11. A few not to monopolize the activities at the AGM i.e proposing and seconding election of most office bearers.
12. Appointment of Sub-Committees for identified subjects most important being Committee for Management with Head-Master as Chairman.
13. Approval of New Application Form (with data)
14. Regular News Letter
15. Rehabilitation and Refurbishment of Junior Dorms.
16. Feed & advise for Farm Animals.
17. Regular informal Gatherings in Colombo.
18. Secretary to be reimbursed with expenses.
19. Inventory of gifts at College.

20. Prompt Receipts for all cash received.
21. Application Forms & Receipt Books to be available at College for February get-together, at Fellowship Dinner & all other functions.
22. Change of Address of Member notification, recordal, and confirmation
23. Locate Members abroad.
24. Inform new Members of their admission in writing as soon as processing is over instead of notification at next AGM.

**SINCE MARCH WE HAVE NOT HAD EVEN THE COURTESY OF AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO OUR SEVERAL LETTERS.**

**E. Amongst the proposed projects we have been able to give serious consideration and attention to and are awaiting take off are:-**

1. We have discussed with the Director of S L F I who conduct a workshop on career counselling aimed particularly at the Teaching staff the possibility of inviting Teachers from Gurutalawa. This will enable masters/teachers to participate in such course which would help them in their careers **and also to counsel students** (who have problems similar to those reported from Gurutalawa)
2. We have also made contact with the High Commissions of Australia, Canada and U K with regard to obtaining personnel on their Youth Ambassador Programmes as well as their Volunteer Overseas Programmes.
3. We have also discussed the possibility of having the Senior Students i.e G C E (O/L) classes for a Residential Life Education Programme or Leadership Programme course at Subodhi at Moratuwa which normally lasts 05 days for which a nominal fee is charged. This will enable students to have a better understanding of their environment.
4. There is also the possibility of obtaining the assistance of the YMCA at Bandarawela who will send the required expertise to do counselling of students even on a Regular basis.

All the above arrangements will be designed to assist primarily the students who are undergoing a difficult period due to problems at home as well as not too satisfactory an environment in school.

5. The above will not involve College in any financial commitments, and we shall pursue these matters if College is interested.
6. We are also actively pursuing the cleaning up of the wells so that they can be put back into proper use. Already some old boys have confirmed that they would supply the pumps.

7. Some other old boys have agreed to do up the Dorms. Some consideration will have to be given whether it is the Senior Dorms or the Junior Dorms that are to be given priority. Although the Senior Dorms are in a worse condition, the wanton damage, and vandalism will necessarily discourage any refurbishment until the house is put in order.
8. The supply of a Call Box for the Keble Dorm which is totally cut away from the rest of the College is essential. So also a telephone system for the College to make communication easy from the Head Master's Office and Bungalow to the Senior Classrooms at one end of the College as well as the Keble Dorm at the other end of the college and the Security Points.
9. The provision of T V's and videos and repairs to the water tanks for bathing in the Keble Dorm as well as storage tanks are being looked into.
10. Arrangements are also being made to ascertain and supply sports equipment etc.
11. It is hoped the College would permit the necessary personnel to inspect these areas and discuss their requirements with the Head Master and the Master/s Officer/s concerned, so that proper estimates can be obtained and work could commence early.
12. We are also hopeful of arranging teachers and others on a voluntary basis to attend Week-End Camps for English, Computers etc,etc, and depending on the progress, usefulness and reception to organize further camps.
13. In addition a Medical Camp is being planned so that medical personnel could examine the general health of the hostellers, submit a report to the College so that parents can take remedial action in the interests of the students concerned. It would be good if the College were to insist on the Immunization Records of the children when they are admitted and keep them in the students record. So also to incorporate in the Report the height and weight etc., at the beginning and end of terms.
14. We have endeavored to secure the services of a Chaplain for College, and had discussions with Rev. Fr. Lokendra Abeyratne the Parish Priest of St. Matheas Church, Moratuwa, Rev. Fr. Chrisantha Mendis, the Parish Priest of St. Pauls Church, Milagiriya and Mr. Elmo Wijesinghe, the outgoing Secretary of the Ceylon Bible Society. We are still hopeful that a person suitable and ideal for the current situation at Gurutalawa could be engaged.
15. It was observed that the Sound Equipment in the Hall was malfunctioning during the Prize Giving in early September this year. According to Mr. Alban Fernando the Ex Head Master, it had just been repaired. He suspects sabotage was the reason. If the system is in fact in need of replacement, this can be done.

16. We are looking into the question whether the services of an Old Thomian with a good Track Record of Sports and Organisational Skills as well as Studies could be obtained as a Chief Administrative Officer.
17. One of the most important matters that Senior Members of the Tutorial Staff drew our attention to was the need to replace the Class Room Furniture with both Individual Desks and Chairs supporting the back (instead of the present benches). The difficulty experienced at Exams and End of Term Tests was explained. A small cupboard should also be provided in each Class Room. This is also being looked into and several Old Boys are willing to pool their resources towards this venture.
18. It was observed that the General Office handling Administration did not have a Photostat Copy Machine or Fax Machine. These are essential items for the school. In or about 1994, our Group had to take a Plan all the way to Welimada to turn out a photocopy. These items too can be provided.
19. We have discussed and arranged (should the College decide to accept the offer) with an Old Boy Mr. Chamika Thushara (of Thushara Stores) Welimada, who has agreed to **SUPPLY** and **DELIVER** at College **AT COST** all Hardware, Electrical, Sanitary ware, Mattresses, **GROCERIES**, Provisions etc, and at whatever regularity and **WITHOUT ANY DELIVERY CHARGES.** This will eliminate commissions and sending the College Van on numerous errands to Welimada, Boralanda etc, etc,. The system can be operated by Telephone confirmation and so can all adjustments. This could be tried for some months and continued if advantageous.
20. We have decided to gift several Trophies to be awarded for excellence in Academic as well as Sports Activities to students at the Annual Prize Giving in the hope that it will encourage students to greater heights
21. We have discussed certain losses in the farm which may be attributable to certain deficiencies in the animal food supplied and the manufacturers are willing to look into this complaint and do justice apart from agreeing to supply feed at greatly reduced cost and also make available their expertise at no extra cost.
22. We have also given serious consideration to the fact that Senior Members of the Staff particularly Tutorial, are hardly ever appreciated at Gurutalawa. No special award or gesture to our knowledge has been made **DURING THEIR LIFETIME AND WHILE IN SERVICE.** A building being named after the demise can be bettered by the holding of a Special Assembly where appreciation is shown in words and by some special Token or Gift. This is a noble act. We feel this should also find a place and look to the College for co-operation to make it a reality. It would be a loss for College to let go of experienced and long-serving members of the Staff **at critical stages.** This has happened in the past, to the detriment of College. Regular paper notices show that the past students of prominent schools

like Royal, Visakha, D S Senanayaka et al have made an Annual feature of treating the Retired and Present teachers to a day's trip to enjoy themselves.

23. The road from near the Senior Dorms up to Keble needs re-surfacing. With the assistance of the students as a Shramadana scheme it will be possible to find the finances necessary to attend to this project.
24. The entrance to College too has been neglected and can be renovated to give it the appearance it richly deserves.
25. Old Boys are perturbed about college property being subject to deliberate malicious wanton damage by Senior Students or removed to residences of members of the non-academic staff. Hence, future delivery or gift of any article i.e. Beds and Lockers for the Dorms, Tables and Chairs for the Class-Rooms; TV's and VCR's for recreation or educational purposes, Books and Magazines for the library; Sports equipment, Photocopy, Fax, Roneo and Telephone equipment for the Main Office, Lab Equipment etc. etc., will be made only after corrective action is taken to remove and relocate persons who have been found to have misappropriated temporarily or otherwise College property from their present places of work to other stations where they will be rendered harmless and these articles that are donated are placed in the charge of responsible and Senior Members of the Staff who have an unblemished record in these matters and who will be answerable to the Head Master after the taking of a proper Inventory. There should be no room for Senior Students to deliberately cause any wanton loss or damage to any of the donations made or for members of the Non Academic Staff to spirit or pilfer them out of College premises in to their homes.

**THUS IT IS LEFT FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY TO TAKE CORRECTIVE MEASURES.**

**WE HAVE HOWEVER MADE IT VERY CLEAR TO THE AUTHORITIES THAT OUR INVOLVEMENT IS SUBJECT TO THEIR PUTTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER FIRST.** There is no point in executing any development work which is going to be the immediate object of any act of vandalism by the senior students just because they have a grievance against the conditions in College or its administration, however fair or just they may be.

**F. MATTERS UNDER REVIEW/DISCUSSION**

Other matters which are being discussed at various levels amongst old boys of different eras are:-

- a) The Rules of the OBA require the holding of an Annual General Meeting in every year on such date as may be fixed by the Ex-Co **AFTER DUE CONSIDERATION TO THE CONVENIENCE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE MEMBERS.** It is now relevant to question whether **THE CONVENIENCE IS BEING CONSIDERED AT ALL.** The majority are not present at the Annual General Meeting. Hence we should discuss whether the AGM should be held in Colombo to enable the vast majority of Old Boys

to participate (whilst continuing to have the traditional celebrations at Gurutalawa). It is quite evident that the Older Old Boys feel it difficult to travel up and spend a day or two at Guru particularly amidst the present conditions. The AGM being the main Annual Gathering therefore should be at a venue convenient to the majority, taking in to consideration that hitherto there has been no way the Old Boys who do not travel up to attend the AGM at Guru can participate in its important deliberations or voting and **THUS A VERY VALUABLE PART OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS GOES BY DEFAULT** and a charade is enacted year after year in election of office bearers.

- b) Whether the AGM (if held in Gurutalawa) should be on Sunday Morning instead of Saturday Evening immediately before the Fellowship and Dinner.
- c) The Rules of the OBA also require the holding of a Re-union of Old Boys at Gurutalawa on a suitable day as decided upon by the Ex-Co in every year. This has presently necessitated College giving mid-term holidays to almost the entire school. About 5 dormitories are vacated by students to accommodate Old Boys. Parents have not taken to this forcible process very kindly. Their having to come, most of them by Public Transport, from far off places, take their children away for 2-3 days and then bring them back is a fairly expensive process for them. This inconvenience and expense is blamed on the OBA. WE MUST TAKE COGNIZANCE OF THIS.
- d) To have informal gatherings of Old Boys in Colombo at regular intervals to which all Old Boys could come and be kept informed of activities of College and of Old Boys etc.
- e) To have a Newsletter circulated at least quarterly giving news of College and of Old Boys etc.
- f) It would appear that none of the Members of the present staff of over 60 members have joined the OBA. Some have served for over 20 years. Their absence from OBA activities leaves a big vacuum and perhaps is one of the reasons why standards at College have dropped to such alarming levels, unchecked and unnoticed by all of us. Leaving the tutorial staff out in the cold and gallantly handing over a packet of money to be shared amongst the minor staff (who have during the recent past not only consistently followed a policy of confrontation with the administration but have fleeced and torpedoed the very foundations of College) immediately after the Fellowship and Dinner does look ridiculous. This coupled with the fact that the work done by the tutorial staff does not appear to be appreciated adequately are matters that need urgent rectification, if thought fit.

As a preliminary step we hope to keep making our group as wide as possible and if/when the time comes to have gatherings of Old Boys of various eras, amalgamate the entire crowd i.e all the groups and have an exchange of ideas as well as give the very young Old Boys an opportunity of meeting and listening to the Pioneer Old Boys extol the virtues of the Founding Fathers and the goals they set out to achieve that are now perhaps required to be tempered by the winds of change that have blown across our Country and College in particular.

## **G. (NEWS) LETTERS**

We hope to in due course send out a (News) Letter with some regularity informing the Old Old Boys of the present trends and conditions and the Young Old Boys interesting portions of the past they may not be privy to .

We also hope to in a future, (News) Letter, make available to you a sketch of the Campus with important land marks properly itemized and identified as a large number of Old Boys may not have visited College for a long time and hence may not be aware of the ground situation as it exists now. This sketch is being prepared by a professional in the field.

Amongst the other subjects we will be adverting to would be;-

- (a) the tutorial staff, the number and composition and their separate fields of instruction, whether, resident or otherwise, their involvement with extra curricular activities, their isolation from the OBA, welfare measures in place for them and a lack of appreciation of their services by the College and the OBA.
- (b) the students, the number, the background, their academic and sports achievements, discipline etc.
- (c) the school's curriculum, activities in terms of the present requirements of the authorities, the additional subjects that could be made available at Gurutalawa.
- (d) The sports that are now available, those that have been abandoned, the lack of competent coaching and the dangers caused to the College Grounds by its virtual abandonment.
- (e) The minor staff, the number and their militancy, lack of discipline, dedication, and loyalty, the problems posed to the College, by over-staffing and perhaps being pampered by the OBA who appear to be unaware of the actual situation.

These then are only some of the interesting aspects the next few (News) Letters will touch upon.

It is hoped that soon it will be possible to circulate this letter among a wider section of old boys whether Members of the OBA or not, to generate an interest which is hoped, would be to the eventual benefit and advantage of the College.

We came across large numbers of Old Boys (even members of the OBA) who are unaware of the identity of the Office bearers of the OBA. One school of thought particularly of the present Ex-Co, seem to be content with the idea that it is infra dig to insert a Paper Advertisement giving this information immediately after an AGM. Some are unaware of the traditional celebrations held annually in February in College. Others are unaware of the October Fellowship/Dinner held in Colombo. Some others feel, if the will or interest is there, Old Boys wherever they may be resident, will make it a point to make contact with somebody, check up and thereafter attend these functions and generally keep in touch. Be that as it may and without entering into any controversy about the pros and cons of these options, we have

decided to fill in the vacuum and endeavour to bring both Mohamed and the Mountain together. A mighty task no doubt but we loose nothing by trying and we would have got the satisfaction that we have tried to do some good for the benefit of College.

**THIS LETTER THEREFORE IS ONLY TO SERVE AS AN EYE OPENER AND INTENDED AS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF SIMILAR (NEWS) LETTERS TO BE SENT TO AS MANY OLD BOYS OF THE COLLEGE AS POSSIBLE (WHETHER MEMBERS OF THE OBA OR NOT) WHO INFORM US THAT THEY WISH TO BE PLACED ON OUR MAILING LIST AND WHO SHOW SOME INTEREST IN OUR ACTIVITIES, WHICH ARE DIRECTED TOWARDS A)CONTINUING OUR FRIENDSHIPS BORN ALMOST 4 DECADES AGO AND B) PUTTING OUR JOINT WEIGHT BEHIND COLLEGE TO RESUSCITATE COLLEGE SO THAT WE CAN BE TRULY PROUD TO CALL OURSELVES THOMIANS.**

Esto Perpetua

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

***LAKSHMAN JAYATILAKA***

LJ/ns

PS: I am enclosing an Application Form for purpose of joining the OBA. Please photocopy same and make available to friends and acquaintances who may wish to join. If the Form etc is duly perfected and sent to me I could have same transmitted and try to follow up.