

**A Trip Down Memory Lane-
Life at Royal College Hostel in the Late 70s and early 80s,
by Janaka Kumarasinghe**

“On your marks” Command was given by ‘UPKB’ to start the race to find the winner to whom he had decided to offer the remaining few biscuits which he had brought from home. Before the next command “Get set” was given, ‘Prem’ jumped the queue, grabbed all the biscuits and ate them. All the other children were dumb founded and ‘Prem’ was very smart. It was one of the funny incidents that ‘took place’ at the Royal College Hostel where all the boys had a memorable time.

In January 1975, nearly 40 Grade 6 students were provided accommodation in the hostel and I was lucky to be one of them. At the initial stage of hostel life, most of us felt ‘home sick’ and were eagerly waiting for an opportunity to go home. Boys whose hometowns were close to Colombo were fortunate as they went home regularly. With the time passing by, our parents had to force us to visit our homes as we got accustomed to the hostel life.

Whenever we went home occasionally, we became ‘guests’ of our parents. During school vacations parents used to cook good food and arrange special trips and gatherings to welcome sons. As a result we became ‘strangers’ at our own homes after few years stay at the hostel. It took some time for us to adjust to the normal society after leaving the hostel.

The morning physical training (PT) session was very unpleasant for many us as we had to get up early. On one particular day everybody woke up and did the exercises as usual and found out that it was still very dark. Later we came to know that one of the boys had advanced the alarm clock secretly and thereby letting the bell to go at 3 am. Sometimes Hostel prefects had to check the toilets in the morning to make sure that no one used them as hiding places avoid PT.

The standard of English among the hostellers was not satisfactory. To remedy this situation, the **Warden Mr. Nanayakkara**, an old Royalist, and a strict disciplinarian, started an English week to improve the standard of English of hostellers. The warden was affectionately called “Hara”. During the ‘English week’, it was compulsory for all the students to speak in English. Those who spoke other languages during that week were subjected to various punishments. The boys who were caught by prefects were asked to parade around the hostel shouting “remember boys, this is the English week”. Occasionally individual students got a punch on their nose from the warden as a punishment. The sports-loving warden used to play cricket with the students. During one such ‘English week’ we could not make him out as he started saying ‘not out’ once appealed. We were not able to explain the reasons in good English and he batted a long innings as a result.



Mr. V.H. Nanayakkara

‘Kadale’ the beloved gram seller who used to stay in the college premises was an interesting character and an ardent loyalist of Royal College. ‘Kadale’ known for his non-bathing habits was thrown once in a while into the ‘cloth washing tank’ when drunk by the hostel waiters and senior students under the instructions of the warden. This was done with the sole intention of cleaning ‘Kadale’ and it was sheer fun.



‘Kadale’

The **late Mr. E.C. Gunasekara**, the dedicated vice principal and strict disciplinarian was an occasional visitor to the hostel. He got married late due to some personal reasons. After the marriage the couple was felicitated at the hostel. After the dinner, the students were given an opportunity to ask questions from the deputy principal. One student asked “sir, why did you get so



Mr. E.C. Gunasekara

late to marry?" The warden did not like this question and subsequently reprimanded that student for making the 'newly wedded' couple embarrassed.

During our stay in the hostel, we had to undergo certain difficulties as well. One such incident was a severe drought during which we were compelled to carry our own plates after dinner to the well situated near the Basketball court for washing. Luckily it was only for few days. During that period, the 'Royal Aquatic Club' was kind enough to allow the hostellers to use the college swimming pool once a week.

At the hostel, we only had the company of males. However the warden's pretty daughter was the only pleasing sight for most of the boys who dared to have an occasional look at her being fully aware of the firmness of her father. We also enjoyed the sight of pretty sisters of our brethren who visited the hostel premises to meet their brothers. Parents came to know about this later and they tried their best to avoid bringing them to the hostel. In this atmosphere boys used to write love letters to other boys to get some psychological satisfaction which does not mean that they ended up with physical connections.

We went to weekend college-related sport activities as spectators. Traveling by bus and behaving in a manner attracting the attention of other passengers was fun for us. Many conductors got annoyed and we shouted the famous slogan "T.H.U.R.S.T.A.N" instead of "R.O.Y.A.L" to hide our identity. This behavior led to a serious repercussion when once a strict 'Thurstan' College master caught one of our friends walking through the Thurstan College at night to reach 'Raheema' Hotel on 'Thurstan' road. He had accused our friend saying that you were the notorious people who ruin the good name of their school ("thopi thamai ape nama kanne"). He had also complained about the act of trespassing to our school authorities.

The late president His Excellency J.R. Jayewardene took action to give the then the 'Official Language Department' buildings to Royal College hostel with a view to expanding the hostel. Once he graced the hostel day dinner as the Chief Guest and he asked the Head Prefect (HP) of Royal College hostel why he was not having dinner that night, as the HP was seated next to the President. "Stomachache" was the short reply given by the HP. After all the guests had left the place, the HP was seen enjoying a big plate of rice. When he was asked why he lied to the president of the country, the answer was "Machang kohomada kukul mas kellak ehema visi unanam president ge engata?" The real reason has been his reluctance to eat chicken with cutlery.



President His Excellency
J.R. Jayewardene



Official Language
Department' buildings

The annual Hostel Day was an eventful day for all of us. In addition to the sumptuous dinner, we were able to witness many entertainment activities performed by fellow students after much preparation. Hostellers were also rewarded for their achievements in the field of sports on this day. During our period of stay, we were fortunate to have eminent old boy ministers of the caliber of **Dr. Ranjith Attapattu** and **Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali** gracing the event as chief guests.



Dr. Ranjith
Attapattu



Mr. Lalith
Athulathmudali

I can remember another unique incident during our stay. A legally separated mother, who was also the legal custodian of the child visited the hostel and found that her son was missing. This created a real pandemonium. Later it was found the father of the boy, who was also an old boy of the college had come to the hostel in that morning taken away the son and flown to Nuwara Eliya with his friend and business magnate late Mr. Upali Wijewardhana. The child had landed late in the evening at Upali's helipad at Thurstan road and returned to the hostel to the relief of the mother and others.

Then the Principal **late Mr. L.D.H. Peiris** was seen occasionally walking around the school premises. But he used to work in his office from morning to evening to maintain the high standards in curricular and extra-curricular

activities which were evident during his tenure. Even today, we respectfully remember him as the principal who opened the doors of Royal to the outstation students by introducing the 'Entrance Examination' to enroll students to Grade 6.



Mr. L.D.H. Peiris

The time came for us to face the G.C.E O/L examination and all of us did relatively well. The warden was so happy about it and took action to post the summarized results of all the students to their parents. But when we went to the A/L classes things changed. The first term test results were a disaster. The Warden wanted to pre-warn parents of the interest taken by their sons in relation to their studies and decided to send the summarized results to parents. But we were smart this time to sense the danger and bribed the minor employee who usually posted his letters. We were successful in preventing the posting of our results to our parents. Alas! Bribery and corruption crept into our lives. At that age we thought that we emerged victorious. If not for that foolish move the destiny of some of our batch mates would have changed.

Despite all the above mentioned incidents regimented life at hostel brought some discipline into our lives. Getting up in the morning, doing PT, getting ready for the morning dress parade , having meals together, resting after school in the dormitory silently, playing, studying in the evening under strict supervision etc., helped us build our character. We also got the opportunity of mixing with persons from different cultural backgrounds and geographical areas. Also, we were fortunate to interact with students belonging to different age groups.

Many of us had the opportunity of taking part in sports and other social activities which contributed immensely towards building our personalities. Being away from home and tackling our own problems made us to be self-reliant and self-confident. The camaraderie among the hostel students is still felt when we meet occasionally at get-togethers.

The exposure at Royal gave us a proper training to serve selflessly for the betterment of all of us in the true sense as mentioned in the oath taken by young men of Athens. **“..... Thus, in all these ways we will transmit this City, not only not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.”**

I dedicate this article to my following fellow hostel batch mates most of who shared our joy and sorrow round the clock for 6-7 years. Please pardon me for any omissions. (Late Major Mahinda W Rajapakse and Sumedha Rajaratne, GRND Gamlath, Sumith Kaluarachi, KLNA Seneviratne, UPKB Wijesinghe, , Saman Weerawardena, Ranjan Premeratne, Raja Thilak, Harsha Perera, MAM Idroos, Prema Jayantha, , Senerath Pitigala,, Rukmal Dias, Jayantha Madurapperuma, Sanjaya Wijesinghe, Upali Bandara Wambotuwewa, Sumudhu Jayamanna, SHAP De Silva, JMSJ Jayakody, Priyan Samarakoon, Palitha Senaratne,VT Piyasekera, Rasika Dissanayake, RLPA Rajapakse, ULAG Weragoda, CS Athukorale, Asitha Chandrakeerthi, PS Ravindra Thilaka, Nishantha Rajakaruna,Upul Ekanayake, Asela Seneviratne, Pasqual, Charlie, UB Ariyasinghe, G.V.K Senanayake, USC Bandara, Ajith Karunaratne, Prabath Jayathilake, Sanjeevan Sampanthan, FA Jamaldeen, PK Hewavitharan, Dinesh Perera).Also thank Upali Bandara for proof reading this article for me.

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