

A Tribute to Principal Thanapalan

My Experience as a Past Student Looking Back at our Late principal Thanapalan On Oct/29/2006

I had the opportunity to attend the Thanks giving service that was held in Toronto in remembrance of our late principal Thanapalan. He was an excellent Principal, and I would like to share a few of my thoughts and experiences from my school days under him as my former Class Master, Economics teacher and he was also my Hockey Coach.

Looking back 25 years, I remember how he was so involved in our daily activities. Long ago there was an interesting Test cricket match, which was between India and Sri Lanka. I was very excited about this game, so I carried a pocket - radio with me through all my classes during the day. My teacher Mr. Thanapalan noticed that I had an ear piece in my ear, he asked me if I had a hearing problem and I told him that I did because I did not want to get caught with the radio. During class he commented "I wonder what the score is right now for the cricket game." I immediately jumped out of my seat and yelled the score with excitement. I was caught red-handed that day, but because of his love for sports he understood and let it go with just a warning. I also heard he was a Cricket commenter for SLBC for the first Cricket match England vs. Sri Lanka

Mr. Thanapalan had a passion for sports. I remember Thanapalan master as a coach, was selecting players for our College hockey team. Since I was only a minor in the hockey league we only played on the sides of the main field. But he paid extra attention to us on the sidelines. He recognized that I was playing well and immediately called me and took me in the College Team. I was really taken up of his observation. He always wanted St. Johns students to do the best in sports and in order to achieve their goal he had taken all kinds of extra steps. Even after I left the school Principal Thanapalan would send students to my house asking me to come and play at the College grounds so the team could practice with former hockey team members to gain experience. His expansion of the College ground also an example of his love for sports

Discipline was a big part in his life. I recall the time in 1980 when there was a hockey match Jaffna College Vs St. John's College. A player from the Jaffna College team used foul language and got me upset. I instantly turned into a rage and started arguing and hitting him with my Hockey stick. We both were sent out from the field. The first thing that Mr. Thanapalan told everyone was that because of my rude behavior I had lost my privilege of becoming the Captain for following year and also I lost the colors on that year. Discipline, self-control and responsibility came first in his career.

1983 was a difficult time in Sri Lanka. Most of the Jaffna Tamils escaped from the country including myself due to the unrest and civil war, but Principal stayed at St. John's residence during the difficult time. I always admired him for doing his best, because I remember during the Sri Lankan Military operations in Jaffna, people started to leave the area but our principal stayed at his premises to guard the School from the Looters.

The others that stayed with him were few members around the neighborhood and the bats from the Old Park. When the shells started to fall, the bats started to move around and came in slowly to the Principal's bungalow and eventually too many bats were inside his house. I heard during my visit in 2004 that he couldn't bear it anymore so he took the shotgun and aimed at the Bats but instead he succeeded in only putting a hole through the roof. We have to admire that even during rough times Principal Thanapalan still held the grounds. I can remember the students cheering in Tamil

during 2004 " Panai marathila vavalam pariyoovan kalooriku savalam", He is a man of courage and I always take my hat off to him for his remarkable dedication.

He treated the students & the staff as part of his family and when ever we called him on the phone, he was available at the office or at his residence to speak to us. He was indeed the Guardian Angel for St.Johns College.

During the Centenary celebration in 2004, I called Principal Thanapalan and wanted to know if it was possible for him to add another hockey game so that we as pass students could participate. And he never asked for a second opinion, he added the hockey game at 7:00 a.m. He also altered the Program schedule. This was an example of how much he cared for the past pupils. We enjoyed the game like old times. He always respect past students and kept in touch with the students outside of Sri Lanka.

I heard from one of the staff members that Principal Thanapalan took special interest in Late Principal CUE . Anandarajan's block. There were so many more projects under his leadership such as expanding the college ground, putting up new buildings including the staff room, developing drinking water systems & upgrading the Computer Lab. This was his long time dream and most of us thought due to civil war and uncertainty in Sri Lanka this would be a dream that would not last forever but he made the dream come true by initiating all the projects.

I was also involved in one of the projects "upgrading the SJC Computer lab" which included Crishanthan, Arni Arnold & myself. We did upgrade with the help of the funds from U.K, USA and Canada. Right now we have a very successful Eagle Net IT Lab going on with intranet connections, IT Curriculum software's and also scholarship funds allocated for Eagle Net Computer Lab projects. A big thanks to our principal who went beyond our expectations and coordinated past Johnians around the world by collecting the funds sending acknowledgment receipts and also updating us with the progress report about the Eagle Net Computer Lab. Principal Thanapalan was very happy of the involvement received from the pass students. He was very organized with all the receipts and he also thanked each and every contributor individually and I was very impressed because of his interest and involvement with each and every contributor's personal life. I have always wondered how he could have remembered each and every one of us even though everyone left the school over 20 yrs ago. But my personal opinion is that he was not only a Principal but also a father who took an extra step to remember each and every one of us because he cares for every individual.

My uncle Charles Somasundrum wrote me an E-mail from UK and told me that you can't shoot an empty barrel gun and what you guys did by calling him and honoring him was the best gift of his life. And I do agree with him, Canadians and UK Johnians did a tremendous Job by inviting him and giving him the best vacation even though his intention was to update all of us with the development of the school. He wanted to gather the Johnians under one Umbrella. We have been blessed with his visit to Canada and honoring him was our privilege.

We should remember our Alma mater and in return should contribute to our College in all possible ways. Thanpalan master is a Legend who lived according to true College motto, - 'LUX IN TENEBRIS LUCET' - the Light shineth in Darkness. "He spread his wings around the college and protected us, May his soul rest in peace."

**Hudson Solomons
Canada**