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NEWS LETTER OF NEW ZEALAND SRI LANKA FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

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## Message from the President

It is with great privilege that I write to you in my capacity as the recently elected President of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation. The foundation has been in existence for over a decade now and has built an impeccable reputation over the years through the hardwork of our predecessors. It is a well respected community organisation. My goal is to build and progress on this strong foundation.

One of the concerns raised during the AGM was to expand our activities into more community based services in the coming years. This is mainly driven by the fact that our community has grown significantly over the last few years and needs various support services. I plan to focus on this area together with my committee in the months ahead. The objective is to develop a road map for the future so that we can go from being a "Good" organisation to a "Great" one.

Your committee is currently working on a number of initiatives and some great events and hope to update you on them as they progress. However, a key point to remember is that to get the value and enjoyment from your association with the foundation also means YOU need to put effort in as well. We invite you to become actively involved and participate in the foundation activities and events regularly.

With the focus being on our community this year, we have

decided to dedicate the Spring issue of Newz Lanka to some of our achievers; the "**Movers & Shakers**" within the Sri Lankan community. I do not have to emphasise the reputation Sri Lankans have as professionals, skilled and unskilled workers and as a people contributing positively to New Zealand. We believe that these stories will motivate and inspire the new and old within our community and motivate them to be successful in their own journey as well. I am sure there are many other success stories such as the ones you will read in this publication. We have had the privilege to talk to a few who are known to us and have dedicated this issue to sharing some of their experiences.

On that note I will conclude wishing you success in all your endeavors today and in the future.

**Mohamed Nalar**

## Peter Vann – Specialist Vascular Surgeon



A fun loving nature, hard work ethic, faith as a Christian, a supportive spouse and the ability to adopt and blend into kiwi society without losing his identity as a Sri Lankan are the key ingredients to his success says Peter Vann a successful visiting Consultant Vascular Surgeon attached to the Auckland regional vascular unit. Seated peacefully and at ease in his lovely Howick home along with his wife Dilo and their two lovely girls, Peter agreed to share his experience with us.

Peter was the first Sri Lankan Vascular Surgeon in New Zealand. He was also the first New Zealander to pass the vascular fellowship by examination and holds an impressive record of qualifications.

Starting off his Medical career in Sri Lanka with a Sri Lankan MBBS qualification, he then went over to Scotland as a junior doctor. Whilst in Scotland he read an advertisement in the medical journal inviting Junior Doctors to come over to New Zealand for a 2 year contract. Having relatives in New Zealand; Peter was motivated to apply and was invited to join the Auckland health board and was appointed to work under the Chairman of the surgical selection board and the Post graduate Dean of the Medical College. Both these indi-

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### Calendar of

#### Events:

Sat. 16<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1.30pm - Franchise, SME & Employment Seminar, at St. Paul's Methodist Church, 12, St Vincent's Ave, Remuera

Sat. 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. Auckland International Carnival, Ellerslie Race Course

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> Dec - New Year's Eve Dinner Dance Tasman Room, Alexandra Park

viduals gave a great deal of support and encouragement in the early years of his career says Peter.

Once his 2 year contract ended with the Auckland health board Peter was faced with the dilemma of heading back to Sri Lanka. Although the hospital was impressed with his record and wanted to re-appoint Peter, his Sri Lankan MBBS qualification was not recognised by the New Zealand immigration service for issuance of PR.

His wife Dilo stepped in undertaking to study for a degree in computer technology in order to re-apply as the principal applicant.

Once their PR was granted the New Zealand Medical Council wanted Peter to sit for the official NZ Rex examination in order to practice Medicine in New Zealand as a PR holder.

Perseverance and passion being his trademarks in the medical profession Peter decided to use the opportunities presented to him during his 2 year tenure in New Zealand to further his career by studying for the Australian FRCS. Amidst long working hours and full on night time study sessions, Peter managed to find the time to do extra training at the clinics of his favourite professors after hours in order to learn more and improve himself. His hard work paid off when after completing part one of the FRCS he got selected to do his training with the Australian College of surgeons.

Peter then did an extra year of training in London under the famous Surgeon Sir Professor Bell. This training was initiated by Peter and was a result of his perseverance and passion to be the best in his field.

Whilst in London Peter was head hunted from New Zealand and was invited to join the Middlemore hospital as the Head of Vascular Surgery Unit which he accepted. He worked as the head of this unit for 9 years and was in-

strumental in organising and fundraising (collecting almost \$750,000) to establish a Multi-faith prayer room in the Middlemore hospital. Peter also had the opportunity in 2005 to operate on former Prime Minister David Lange (the 32<sup>nd</sup> Prime minister of New Zealand). This experience holds a special place in his memory and he calls David "The man who did not lose the common touch".

Peter says "In all these years I never forgot that I was a Sri Lankan first "and believes that it is important to maintain your identity as a Sri Lankan. In this spirit Peter and his wife Dilo help and support members of the Sri Lankan community to settle into life in New Zealand. At this point he reminisces with gratitude and great respect how his friend the late Ken Rasanayagam helped him and his wife settle into life in New Zealand when they first arrived in 1985.

Having a strong Patriotism for his country of birth Peter took 2 teams of medical doctors to Sri Lanka to help out when the Tsunami hit in 2004. He also helps train young doctors who come over to New Zealand from Sri Lanka on a one year exchange programme and heads back regularly to Sri Lanka to address the Sri Lankan College of Surgeons and other medical bodies.

As with his passion for his profession Peter is an avid and passionate fan of Cricket. "Sanath Jayasuriya is my favourite cricketer. I even have his photo as my screen saver" he says with a big smile of admiration lighting up his face.

Being a man of many talents, and an old boy of St. Thomas's Mt. Lavinia, Peter also captained the St. Thomas's rugby team in 1974.

***Peter is a Visiting Vascular Surgeon at the Auckland regional Vascular Unit. He also consults at Ascot, Mercy and Brightside hospitals. His wife Dilo has quit her job to be his PA and manages his private practice.***

## Arjun Abeynaike writes about life in Cambridge



*Arjun Abeynaike completed his degree in chemical engineering at Auckland University with first class honours. He then won a \$60,000 William Georgetti scholarship to complete his PhD in Chemical engineering at Cambridge University in England.*

*The scholarship aims to encourage post graduate study and research in a field the scholarship board sees as important to the social cultural and economic development of New Zealand.*

*Arjun chose Bio-Diesel Production as his PhD topic. His overall ambition is to research and develop sustainable technologies that do not deplete or harm natural resources. Below is a write up by Arjun on his life at Cambridge.*

I graduated with a Bachelor degree from the University of Auckland in Chemical Engineering with First Class Honours. For my undergraduate degree I conducted research projects in biodiesel production and water treatment, which led me to continue research for my PhD. I was awarded the William Georgetti Scholarship by the New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee, which made my studies in Cambridge possible. My constant motivation has been to contribute towards a sustainable society. I have pursued my passion, and while I still don't know how far it will take me, the journey has been a rewarding experience in itself.

In September 2007 I packed my life into a suitcase, bade my family farewell and made the onerous 24 hour journey to Britain to begin my postgraduate studies at Cambridge.

My first impressions of this country were that everywhere I looked there were so many people and so much history. This would not overwhelm those from Sri Lanka, which is short on neither people nor history. But coming from New Zealand, I was awe-struck by the historic buildings on every corner, the sense of character and identity that permeate Cambridge's narrow cobble-stoned streets - along with throngs of people, cyclists and vehicles all getting in each other's way!

Cambridge is a fantastic place to live. Its small size and peaceful setting belie the wealth of activity that goes on in the town. Besides the research and learning, there is a vast and varied array of events and activities for students to get involved in. The social calendar is packed with events at the 31 colleges. Countless university societies exist for every sport, interest and hobby imaginable. These are not only outlets for having fun, but provide the opportunity to meet some very bright and passionate people and gain valuable experiences. My own involvements have varied from organising large conferences on sustainable energy as part of the Cambridge University Energy Network, to singing at retirement homes every week with a voluntary entertainment group. And if one feels a yearning for the bright lights of the big city, London is just a short train journey away. Between sight-

seeing and extra-curricular involvements, I have somehow also found time to study for a PhD in Chemical Engineering. I decided to continue studying in pursuit of my ambition to develop sustainable forms of energy. My research is focused on improving methods for the purification of biodiesel, a renewable fuel made from vegetable oils. Among the difficulties of doing research is that it tends to be very open-ended and unstructured. Figuring out just what to do is, I believe, the hardest part. On the other hand, doing research has given me the freedom to expand my knowledge of my field and gain skills that I would never have had otherwise.

In a few months time I aim to submit my thesis and face the real world outside of the Cambridge bubble at last. My plan is to gain work experience in industry, ideally in the area of my passion, sustainable energy. This century we face the major issues of climate change and the depletion of energy resources. Renewable sources of energy will play a vital role in addressing these problems. The challenge of completely changing our sources of energy is enormous in scale, but it is a challenge that stimulates me.

## Lillian Gnanasundaram



Lillian Gnanasundaram is one of the most senior members of our community. At 90 years she's the epitome of peace and contentment. Seated regally in her lovely home overlooking the Remuera golf course, this lovely lady shared with us her life of 90 years tinged with the wisdom of the ages.

"Aunty Lillian" as she's affectionately known by many, migrated to New Zealand with her husband and two little girls at the age of 50 in 1969. Her husband was the Superintendent of the Welikada Prison. They lived next door to the prison and had a lot of contact with the prisoners who came to help maintain their garden. "I think we used to have the best garden in the city" says Lillian with a nostalgic smile.

In the late 1960's getting bored with prison work and its serious atmosphere, Lillian and her husband decided to move overseas. They came to know of a job vacancy available for a secretary for church & society in the National council of churches in New Zealand through their pastor and decided to apply. A priest from New Zealand

came down to Colombo and interviewed her husband and the rest of the family and they were offered the job.

The family migrated to New Zealand in 1969. Their passage was paid for by their new employer. After they arrived in New Zealand they were given a fully furnished house to live in Omaha Road and all the amenities including food and transport were provided for. Their church was very helpful and supportive and therefore they had no issues settling down to life in New Zealand says Lillian.

Lillian learned to drive at the age of 68 after the passing away of her husband. At ninety years she is still independent and takes care of herself. She can see without the aid of glasses and keeps herself busy sewing for her children and grandchildren, knitting for Charity and cooking. She's also heavily involved in church activities and bible study groups having been a part of the St. Aidan's church community in Remuera for the past 41 years.

"The word "tired" is not in my vocabulary" says Lillian "I am never tired."

Lillian has also travelled widely and says she made it a point to visit some part of the world every year for at least a month.

Lillian says that she was able to overcome any adversity she encountered in life including accepting the sudden death of her husband as a result of her relationship with god. "If you have a good relationship with your god, you will never be lonely".

Finally I asked her if she would like to share with us her Philosophy in life;

"I have a god given gift which is the capacity to love people no matter what, and this is what has kept me going all these years and given me peace and contentment" says

Lillian. "I have acquired a number of sons and daughters in New Zealand and in other parts of the world as a result of this" she says with her gentle smile full of wisdom.

## Book Review



*THANK YOU FOR BEING*

*MY FATHER*

*BY ANNE DOLORAS PERERA*

This is an intriguing and eye-catching title. At first one weaves all kinds of fantasy to understand the title. It is only when one reads the tribute that one realizes that this is a story of a difficult relationship between a step-daughter and her step-father.

Anne writes glowingly about her step-father, Remical Anthony Fernando, who inspired her during her adolescent years to develop her full potential and multiply her God-given talents.

He had left a treasure, his life story in stanzas, in the Sinhala language, one of which, referring to her (translated into English) says:

"Though rejected by my children, another child will care for me

To this little girl without a father, a stepfather I shall be

And shall do whatever I can, and great success I wish, she will see

No doubt that in my old age, she will certainly look after me. This type of stanzas, (called 'kavi' in Sinhala) are very popular in Sri Lankan literary circles. Each stanza has four lines, with each line rhyming with the other three.

What began in 1984 as a memory sparkler was, as Anne says, was to cope with the grief of not being able to thank him in person for being her father. She has completed the project 25 years after her Papa's death. She released the book on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2010.

The memoir is well written, lucid and moving. Its style and lucidity is what made me read it completely and enjoy and learn many things in the art of writing a memoir.

Anne is widely travelled covering countries such as India, U.S.A., Brazil, Singapore and New Zealand.

She says writing this book has given her an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of many people who have touched her life from her infancy through childhood, adolescence and adulthood and in her roles as a wife, a mother, a professional and a citizen of the universe. That is a very kind thought for a writer. In a tightly packed 13 chapters, she relates very interesting topics which would be of information and use to a reader.

She writes vividly of her experience in agriculture and physical science. She holds a Ph.D. in Food and Nutrition, a qualification that would serve as a passport to find work anywhere in the world. She weaves her memoir very cleverly and deftly to prove the course her life took both in the pursuit of a career and in the choice of a life partner, leaning solely on her faith in God. She is a devout Catholic.

She combines beautifully a pictorial Memoir of her journey in life – which adds an extra lustre to this beautiful well-written memoir. It is neither lengthy nor boring, but captures the reader's interest from the beginning to the end.

Anne should be commended for showing so much attachment to family, profession and social life. It is really a commendable and great work.

**Review by – Mohamed Hassan**

## Deepa Wanniarachi- On winning Gold at the Ice Cream awards



Winning in any form is such an awesome feeling! In May 2009, two of the Ice Creams I created for my company won Gold and Silver awards at the NZ ice cream awards. I would like to share my success story.

I have worked in three NZ companies and have won awards for all three companies. I do a lot of research and update my knowledge by keeping in touch on current trends in food. Developing a new product is not easy and needs a lot of hard work.

Starting a new chapter in one's life in another country is very challenging. I started my Career as a food technologist more than a decade ago. Looking back, I am happy about the hard work and achievements to-date.

As a child I developed an interest in food and cookery, and realising that my parents sent me overseas for higher studies. I did a B.SC in Home Economics specialising in Nutrition and Dietetics. I really wanted to become a Dietician. Since there were not many opportunities for Dieticians in Sri Lanka I worked as a Lecturer at the Poly Technical Institute in Dehiwala for a few years. Later on I joined MILCO as a Nutritionist. After one year I switched over to Product Development. My main duty was to create new products and improve existing products. I really enjoyed this work and enrolled to do a Masters in Food Science. I ave had to juggle with work, family and studies. That was a challenge.

Migrating to NZ in 1998 with my husband and two sons I got an opportunity to work part-time as a Food Technologist. I was so happy to get that opportunity. I joined Old Fashioned Foods Ltd, a manufacturer of steam puddings and X'mas cakes for the export market, and was involved in product development.

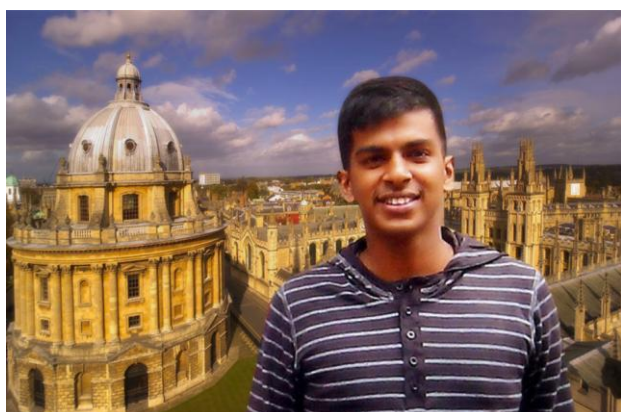
In year 2004 at the Massey University food awards three of the products I developed won awards under the convenience foods category.

In 2006 I joined Cottrell & Rouse Ltd, a manufacturer of jams and sauces, as a Product Development Technologist. At the 2006 Massey University Food awards for the second time products developed by me received awards under convenience food category. I was proud to see my name appearing in the Awards magazine for the second time.

In 2008 I joined Kiwi ice Cream, a dairy based food company. I had this opening as I had dairy product background from Sri Lanka. Soon after joining this Company I was sent to Australia for training. I was trained by a Dairy Expert from Danisco in Australia. In May 2009; I was given the opportunity to create two Ice Creams for the New Zealand ice cream awards 2010. I created two new products; a Christmas Ice Cream and an Avocado Ice cream with Pistachio nuts. The Christmas Ice Cream won the only Gold Award out of the 12 participants, and the Avocado Ice cream won a Silver award. These products are not available in the market yet and they were made under the open creative category competing with other ice cream manufacturers.

I want to continue with my success and continue my winning streak. I try to blend ideas from Sri Lankan foods with NZ food to create products. This becomes really interesting. I am proud when I see products created by me on local supermarket shelves. If you have faith in yourself and a positive attitude, anything is possible!

## Pradeepan Puvanekumar's journey to Oxford



Pradeepan is a bright young man with an even brighter future ahead of him. Presently completing his thesis on Stem Cell research at the Oxford University in England, Pradeepan agreed to share his success story with us.

A focussed young man he has had a brilliant academic career. Starting at Auckland grammar school where he excelled consistently in each subject scoring over 90% and maintaining the averages, Pradeepan was streamed into the A class right through his time at Auckland grammar.

One of his teachers described Humility, Honesty and Tenacity as his key attributes. He further stated that

Pradeepan has consistently displayed these qualities during his time at Auckland Grammar school.

He was an all-rounder at school activities, being a school prefect; a flutist in the concert band & playing cricket & badminton for the school. He was also a member of the debating team. In the year 2006/07 Pradeepan was on the honours board winning the scholar's award.

In 2008 Pradeepan's academic dream was fulfilled when he got selected to study medicine at the University of Melbourne. He undertook to study a conjoint degree in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery/Bachelor of Medical Science.

Pradeepan was awarded the Archbishop of Melbourne scholarship for the highest ENTER score of 99.95. This is the highest possible ranking achievable in Victorian Certificate of education in Victoria, Australia.

I asked his dad Puvana Kumar what was the secret behind Pradeepan's Success? *"This is a team effort between Pradeepan, my wife and me" he said. We were totally focussed on Pradeepan achieving the maximum he was capable of. This is the culmination of 22 years of hard team work that had paid of* "he said.

Meditate.  
Live purely. Be quiet.  
Do your work with mastery.  
Like the moon, come out  
from behind the clouds!  
Shine

**Buddha**  
"The Enlightened One:

Whatever the mind can conceive and believe  
the mind can achieve.  
*Dr. Napoleon Hill*

Flaming enthusiasm, backed by horse sense  
and persistence, is the quality that most frequently  
makes for success.  
*Dale Carnegie*

You only have to do a very few things right in  
your life  
So long as you don't do too many things  
wrong.  
*Warren Buffett*

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."*

**-Theodore Roosevelt**

## **Don't Quit**

*When things go wrong, as they sometimes will  
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit  
Life is queer with its twists and turns.  
As every one of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow  
You may succeed with another blow.  
Success is failure turned inside out  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far:  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit  
It's when things seem worst that you must not QUIT.*

**-Anonymous-**

**Views expressed in articles are those of the contributing authors and may not necessarily reflect the views of the NZSLF**

### **This newsletter is published quarterly.**

We welcome contributions to this newsletter and apologize for not being able to publish all contributions due to the limitation of the available space. We reserve the right to edit submitted material. Being a not-for-profit-organization, we do not make any payments for articles. Please send your contributions to the Summer Issue by September 2010 to the correspondence address below. Attn: **Editorial Committee** or by email to: [nzslf@nzslfoundation.com](mailto:nzslf@nzslfoundation.com)

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