



Volume 49 spring 2011

NEWS LETTER OF NEW ZEALAND SRI LANKA FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation Inc.P.O. Box 109419, New Market, Auckland 1149, New Zealand Email: nzslf@nzslfoundation.com Web: www.nzslfoundation.com

## Message from the President Dr. Sydney Fernando

Dear members and well-wishes of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation,



It is an honour and a great privilege to be elected as the 13th president of the New Zealand Sri Lanka Foundation. It is with great pride, that I accept the opportunity to carry on the Legacy and traditions of the foundation and continue to work on the illustrious goals set by the founder members, past presidents and leaders of this organization. I was introduced to this organisation in the year 2007. Since then, I have been in the committee throughout. It has been immensely gratifying to serve this organization during these past years.

Over the past years, the Foundation has been at the forefront of setting standards in delivering a quality service to our community. As the new president, I would like to not only continue to strive towards achieving these goals initiated by the previous presidents, but also aim to go beyond this with your kind assistance.

On behalf of the Foundation, I wish to thank Mohamed Nalar, the outgoing President, for his contribution to our community and the new directions shown to the Foundation during his tenure. I also wish to express my gratitude to our departing

committee members, Niroshini Jayasekera, Thesara Jayawardena, Rafil Hamid and Jason Bandara who volunteered to serve our community. I am confident that you have elected yet another dynamic and enthusiastic executive committee to take the Foundation forward. The committee is determined to engage all synergies available within its reach to meet the expectations of our Sri Lankan community. It has a clear vision and a well planned programme for the year ahead. Above all of this, our committee has a strong fellowship, and is proud of the wider Sri Lankan community.

With a humble heart, I ask the new committee, past presidents, members, and well-wishes to help me succeed in leading the Foundation. I also hope that our community will continue to stand by us. We are partners in sustaining and maintaining this organization to the benefit of our present and future membership and the wider Sri Lankan community.

Finally, on behalf of your committee, I wish you all a great year ahead!

## Editor's Note

Ayubowan! and welcome to the spring edition of "NewZLanka". We've got a new committee under the stewardship of Dr. Sydney Fernando and another exciting year of news lined up for you. This issue is dedicated to the "Movers and Shakers" of the Sri Lankan community. We have invited some well known names and faces within our community across a broad spectrum of fields to share their experiences with us about life and living in New Zealand. We hope you enjoy reading these stories.

To the new migrants out there, we hope these stories will encourage and inspire you, and give you an insight as to what is possible within this beautiful land of the "Long White Cloud", Aotearoa, New Zealand that we've adopted as our home.

Farhana Nalar

### President:

Sydney Fernando  
(09) 520 2304

### Vice President:

Ranjith Randeniya  
(09) 815 7115

### Secretary:

Jayasena Widanagamage  
(09) 5746723

### Treasurer:

Renuka Anthony  
(09) 962 6821

### Committee Members:

Kumar Velamblam  
(09) 579 0380

Mohamed Nalar  
(09) 638 9376

Thusitha Perera  
(09) 820 7357

Priyan Rajapaksa  
(09) 625 1259

Ajith Sujeewa  
(09) 524 9130

### Auditor:

Nihal Jayawickrema  
(09) 579 1807

### News Letter Editor

Farhana Nalar

### Calendar of Events:

**Saturday 5th November 2011**

#### Sri Lankan Food Fair

From 11am – 3pm  
Mt. Albert War Memorial Hall  
773 New North Road,  
Mt Albert, Auckland

#### December - 31st 2011

**Lanka Night - Dinner**  
Dance at Alexandra Park – Music played by "Velocity"

## *Dr. Gamini Jayasuriya – Working his magic to inspire young minds.....*



Migrating to New Zealand was for me and my family a step into the unknown. The only prior knowledge in our possession regarding this country was that they had a “one-man” cricket team by the name of Richard Hadley, and whenever a test match was played it was abandoned on account of persistent rain!!! However, when we did arrive here the panoramic beauty of the country captured our imagination, and convinced us, here was a country with an unique scenic beauty and an astonishingly outstanding quality of life. In a very short period of time we were as a family joyously established in the new environment which has now become our happy home.

At the time of our arrival way back in 1989 there were very few Sri Lankans and for that matter there was only a sprinkling of migrants from Asia. Obtaining employment for any non-European migrant was not easy at the time as the normal Kiwi employer was sceptical about the validity of overseas qualifications and dubious about the work ethic of people from that part of the world. One cannot castigate them for this fallacious attitude as they were not familiar with Asian people, particularly in view of the fact that New Zealand

is geographically located in the furthest corner of the earth!! I was personally aware of several well qualified people of Asian origin in the fields of medicine, engineering and other areas of specialization who were unfortunately compelled to resort to jobs such as delivering newspapers and mowing lawns to sustain themselves in a harsh and hostile era. However, the situation changed for the better very rapidly as more Sri Lankans joined the workforce and acquired for themselves an excellent reputation as quality workers. The result was that within a few years more and more Sri Lankans were gradually absorbed into a variety of fields in the workforce who soon became known as intelligent and hard working people with an admirable work ethic.

Sri Lankans have enormous opportunities of integrating into New Zealand society successfully with their inherent English language competency as well as their compatibility with Anglo-Saxon culture and life style. These two attributes coupled with their internationally comparable standard of education should enable them to ease into the New Zealand social fabric effectively.

Having worked with a variety of people in New Zealand for two decades it is my firm view that the most important attribute needed to achieve success in this country is assertiveness. As an employee the Kiwis do not respect people who are prepared to be subservient, but on the contrary they admire and appreciate people who stand up to them as equals. The traditional Sri Lankan way of grovelling in front of superior officers has no place in this

country and such an attitude will not contribute to attaining any degree of success in this country. The Kiwi employer would categorise such an employee as weak and not able to perform or function effectively in an organization.

It is no secret that I obtain a tremendous amount of satisfaction by teaching economics to tertiary students. Imparting knowledge to young people and developing in them an abiding interest in the discipline of economics satiates my hunger to make an effective contribution to the society I live in. Motivating and inspiring young and impressionable minds gives me enormous pleasure and gratification. I am particularly proud of my ability to maintain pin-drop silence in a class of 600 students by making economics (normally a boring subject) a thrilling saga keeping my students absolutely fascinated.

Lecturing can be quite exhausting specially when teaching long hours in the MBA programme, but recuperation is rapid when I return home to my welcoming and smiling wife who makes my “home a heaven on earth”. She personifies the old adage,

“Behind every successful man is a woman”

***Dr. Gamini Jayasuriya works as a professor of Economics at the University of Auckland***

## *Lal Senaratne - Top executive turned Entrepreneur*



This is the fascinating story of a migrant’s journey from having it all, to losing it all and then having the courage to acquire it all again.

We talked to Lal Senaratne, a veteran in the business circles about his life, his dreams and how he used hard work and ambition to make them all come true. A man of strong will and quiet strength, Lal shared with us his life experience in the land that he calls home.

“There are not many countries in the world where you could lose everything, get bankrupt and then get back on your feet again and go where you want to go leaving the past behind. The opportunities presented to me during the course of my working life are more a reflection of the country and its people than any other reason,” says Lal Senaratne,

former Deputy general manager of Watties NZ Ltd and now Owner/CEO of Liquor centre, New Zealand’s largest chain of liquor stores with 170 branches, 470 employees and a turnover in excess of \$165 million.

“The Kiwi Culture is the easiest culture to adapt because they are a relaxed people” Says Lal who migrated to New Zealand in the mid 1970’s. During this time Lal was working as an advisor to the Minister of Industries in Sri Lanka. He was contracted to turn around 2 loss making companies; Sri Lanka Leather Corporation and Hardware Corporation. Lal signed a contract for 2

years and managed to turn around these two companies in 14 months.

With his mission accomplished Lal led a trade delegation to Australia. A new chapter in his life began when he decided to stay back in Australia and not return to Sri Lanka. Having heard much about New Zealand and its charms, Lal applied for jobs in New Zealand and was rewarded with an offer of a position at Watties NZ Ltd. as "Manager-Management services" which, he was delighted to accept. His career with Watties spanned a period of 15 years. During this time he progressed through the ranks and was subsequently promoted to the position of Assistant General Manager.

After spending 18 years in a successful career as a top executive working for 2 big companies, Lal decided to look in a new direction. Taking the advice of a dear friend who claimed that "You won't really make money working for someone else" Lal bravely went where few would dare to go. He quit his job and ventured on his own buying a company manufacturing Aluminum windows and garage doors. With Fletcher Building being their biggest customer Lal was confident that he had made it into the world of Entrepreneurship.

Unfortunately for Lal the 1987 stock market crash happened and overnight things changed. His company went

under and for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in his life he had to make employees redundant. The nightmare continued as all of his assets were seized and he was declared bankrupt. Lal lost everything including his million dollar house which was mortgaged to his business, his marriage failed as he came under tremendous pressure and the effects of this began to show on their two Children.

It took Lal a nerve wracking 8 months to find a suitable job again as the reverse principle applied. i.e. Once you've been at a very senior level, middle level jobs were no longer a possibility as the recruiters thought him too qualified and experienced to do a lower level job. His perseverance paid off eventually when he was appointed as CEO with Lion Nathan's "Liquor centre chain".

Lal Successfully ran this company for 4 years and expanded it into a chain of 40 outlets. Using a franchise model similar to KFC, he eventually bought over this company and made it the Liquor centre group, New Zealand's largest chain of liquor stores and is now looking to expand into China and South East Asia.

Looking back now Lal feels that he would have like to get into his own business much earlier. "Lot of people ask me what is the best industry to get into? My answer is fairly simple; there

are two industries where you can never go wrong;

- Food – Because People have to eat irrespective of the economic climate &
- Liquor – New Zealand has one of the highest per capita consumptions of liquor."

Lal's advice to new migrants and Sri Lankans is;

*"There's no substitute for hard work. Resolve to work really hard in the first 10 years, be confident and committed. Your attitude is the key to your success. Always be proud of who you are, value your Sri Lankan Education, it is excellent and defines who you are as an individual. Set yourself a goal and go for it. Don't let anything or anyone stand in your way. Never take a step back, always keep moving forward"*

Despite his passion for Business and his success in the liquor industry Lal says he never drinks. "Why?" I ask him, "Because I never liked the taste of Liquor" he says with a contented smile!

#### **Farhana Nalar**

***Lal Senaratne has kindly offered to be a Voluntary Business Mentor to the Sri Lankan Community. If you would like some advice on Starting a New Business, Please contact Lal on 09-5285292.***

## ***Dr. Anne D. Perera - Journey after retirement***



One way to complete some of my Soul's sincere projects, before it was too late, was to announce my retirement and to take one step at a time and just do them... The first thing in my mind was to spend an extended period of time in Sri Lanka reconnecting with family, friends and the motherland that I had left behind in 1970. Having completed 40 years of work including higher studies, practically around the globe, via India, USA, Brazil, New Zealand, Singapore and back to NZ.... retirement was a well deserved change to my soul...

The first thing I did was to complete the autobiographical book I was writing, titled, "Thank You for being My Father" which was a tribute to my stepfather. The date was set for its launch, which also happened to coincide with a special birthday. A third special event that occurred on the same day, 24 July 2010, which was attended by a cross section of the people whom we have associated over the years, was to receive a farewell to take up a two year position as a volunteer Food & Nutrition Adviser in Tanzania, under the auspices of Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) New Zealand.

At the time of writing this I have completed my first year in Tanzania and well into my second year. What an exciting year it has been for me in this completely new environment in the African continent for the first time in my life. As some of you may know I am

based in Arusha, which is the gateway to National Parks in Tanzania, such as Serengeti, Ngorongoro etc.

People are interested in knowing what I have been doing in Tanzania.... Well, VSA has created a Blog for me on their website, which can be accessed from my website; [www.anneperera.co.nz](http://www.anneperera.co.nz), which also covers some information about my life here in this unique land of Tanzania, with a tremendous potential to become the bread basket of Tanzania. So as a Food and Nutrition person I could see into the future of this country. It has been very rewarding to be part of their journey from the village level advisory role to venturing into setting up a Tanzania Institute of Food Science & Technology (TIFST), a professional organization for Food Scientists and Technologists.

At village level I have been teaching various groups how to make use of food products from their own back yards, which are now been thrown away or used as animal feed. One of which is the "Banana Blossom." It has become a hit and I have taught many groups how to cook it as an accompaniment for their staple, ugali (stiff porridge), rice, chapatti or bread.... In one of the training sessions I also showed the group how to cook the green banana peel and the pith of the banana stem. Banana is a staple food product here and many varieties are available in abundance. The blossoms of some varieties are bitter and I am still in the process of distinguishing them from good ones.

There have been many occasions for me to be part of social events of the

people around me. Once I was invited to the pre-engagement event, where they were discussing about how much dowry that the man was going to give to the girl's family. Later, my host asked me how much did Conrad give my parents to get me ? Then I have attended weddings, funerals, baby events and cultural functions.

Besides my work as in the area of Food & Nutrition, I have also been involved in a programme called Youth Development Network (YDN) Tanzania, as a facilitator, lecturer and a mentor. This has been a very rewarding experience knowing that it is a long term investment in the country. This year Tanzania is celebrating 50 years of independence. Among the events, was a youth related one where I was invited to speak on "post-independence

development in other countries" that I have lived in. It was an interesting exercise to reflect on Sri Lanka's up and down period and compare that with Singapore and the United States.

It has been a very rewarding experience for me that I would treasure for the rest of my life, however long or short it may be and as many have shared, they have been inspired. So I live up to my motto, which is "I aspire to inspire before I expire."

**Dr. Anne D Perera is a Food and Nutrition Consultant with many years of experience working in several countries around the world.**

## Assimilation or Integration: challenges of having more than one cultural identity



Many of us who have immigrated into New Zealand face a challenge of living our cultural identities within a context of a dominant culture that is not ours. It is obvious that the culture of the country that we have chosen to live is not of our own nor nearer to our origins within the Asian continent. It is of either sides of the North Atlantic. Whether this is the right culture or the norm for the rest of the world to follow is not the issue. Instead the question is do we get assimilated into this dominant culture or integrate ourselves within the dominant culture while we maintain our unique cultural identity.

Arlene Torres-D'Mello in her study of Identity Development among children of Filipino immigrants in Australia names her research "Brown Outside, White Inside." She identifies the chal-

lenges the Filipino children have in living in a cultural setting that is not of theirs. This is not only for the Filipino in Australia but also for many others who have immigrated. It is so in my observation with regard to many of the Sri Lankans living in New Zealand. In many aspects they are „white inside, brown outside."

We who come from Sri Lanka must remember that we have cultures (in plural as it could be Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala cultures) that precede the modern cultures of the West. Our cultures exist for over 2500 years. Culture in the sense it is the beliefs, way of life, practices, values and other aspects of a civilisation. It is certain that some of the practices of our cultures in the light of science and technology are irrelevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there are certain practices that stand out even today. For example, respect for the parents and to take care of them in their old age is something embedded in our cultures. On the other hand some of the superstitions or omens of our cultures are irrelevant for the life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is important while we live in a secular society we practice our religious beliefs which have influenced the formation of our culture. I do not highlight one particu-

lar religion but as a whole we all have our religions and beliefs.

Living in a context where the dominant culture is not ours the tendency is to get assimilated into it. This is where our people become „white inside." A better way of adapting to life in this context is by integrating into it. It is to maintain our cultural identity and values while we adopt and adapt to live effectively, by becoming full and participating members of the wider community. If we could think of integration rather than assimilation our inside would remain just as our complexion. Just as certain aspects of the dominant culture contribute to the development of New Zealand we too have certain aspects of our own cultures which can contribute to make this country a better one. Women and men, girls and boys from Sri Lanka or born to Sri Lankan parents in New Zealand, integrate yourselves with your own identities in the New Zealand context. Hold onto your Sri Lankan cultural identities as it is unique in this world. Preserve it by living it for future generations.

**Rev. Prince Devananda** - Synod Superintendent of Manakau, the Methodist Church of New Zealand