

# **One of the best times of our lives**

## **Pre Retirement Summit 2018 of 1978 Peradeniya Medical Batch**

I was not worried! I knew it will be OK. The treacherous rain which was creating havoc appeared to be settling. I actually did not know how many will be attending but I always knew that my batch mates are fun loving and they will come.

I wanted to be there well on time and hence left Colombo pretty early with my family and in laws. Youngsters attending this sort of an event is always challenging as I have make sure that they are 'not bored' when we have fun.

Reached Habarana comfortably around 1.30 to very calming surroundings of the hotel. It appeared ideal for our event. The appearance of Happa and Damayanthi always gives me so much confidence as I know how hard he has worked behind the scenes to make this a success. Evergreen Lakshika appeared soon after with her hubby and the 'surprise' appearance of Abey and his family for the first time at a batch reunion was very encouraging. For the first time we had a registration document made by Happa giving an official impression to our event.

'Hello machangs' started soon after as many rolled in to the reception area beaming with smiles which turned to laughter soon afterwards. A coach load also arrived with Soori and co. suddenly boosting numbers. I quickly got down to surveying the hotel facilities for our programmes with Happa. The scenic lake side barbaque site had the first inspection of the Friday evening fun event.

A slow stroll towards the barbecue site by all signalled the official start of our programme. As the theme was retirement, it was very appropriate to start with ' Retirement ideas and planning' talk by Happa. His thought provoking talk touched on ' loss of authority of our work environment, psychological and financial aspects of retirement' which provoked a very lively discussion of various ideas by many.

Fun was waiting to make its entry. Fading light needed a fire boost, and the 'Haro Hara' chant broke the silence of the night sky making the Vaddha entry of Lal and Bole in traditional batch style dating back to late 1970s community medicine trips. Beaming surprise smile of Mahipala graced the escalating fun. 'Ging gan gooli gooli' song even awoke the birds who were trying to get to bed. Action packed games energised with batchas in groups mimicking many animals in the zoo in the 'old McDonald song' would certainly have confused the birds on the trees and certainly it must have threatened their dominance of this peaceful environment. Two brain teasing puzzle games followed by the creation of most wired sentence game gave a very difficult time for the young judges. Though in life most of us have aimed at things, we never have checked the aims of our buttocks with a pendulum like string hovering over a narrow opening. Further action on the song of 'If you've seen the sun shine' song when many hugging, dancing, bum shaking etc etc actions may have really confused the hotel staff who were bystanders. With some chicken and fries looking after the needs of the tummy to make all elements of physiology well looked after under the night sky. The night needed to end on a high which was fittingly provided by Lal and Uditha bringing fits of laughter with

their skit ' Banana click'. Personalised computers were given a pretty different meaning making some of the female audience blushed!

With the night sky darkening fast, we needed to get back to sanity which we did in the hotel restaurant for a sumptuous spread of food with more 'hello machangs' and laughter spreading across the whole area. The poolside soft music by the band gave a romantic atmosphere post dinner.

I knew that Saturday will be a bloody hectic day. Sumptuous breakfast with roti, hoppers, string hoppers prepared me for the action which started with traditional rounders. More batchas were still arriving inflating overall numbers. With youngsters equally ready for action, all with creeky joints had to follow suit. The battle lines were drawn in a combative mood once the captains Asoka and Shanthini selected the two teams which appeared equal. Lal's Murali threats did not deter the opponents who kept on running like mad dogs to score a reasonable 8 points. Some fantastic fielding by Bole did blunt the overall score. When Asoka's team batted a tough fight ensued but Shanthi's team were the deserving winners helped by acrobatic catches as well as misses by myself. Referee Manjula had to deal with hot tempered appeals and sometimes she would have liked to call for TV replays if it was available. Despite the creeky joints, many Batchas and particularly batchis showed their sporting credentials but it is likely that most would have needed Siddhalepa the following day !

The sweaty scene was ideally set to jump in to the pool. Then came the unique pool fun probably unique to our batch , thanks to evergreen Lal. With background baila using modern technology, curious tourists too were greeted to a unusual display of pool dancing and no doubt it would have been a first at Habarana Village. This fun was followed by further furious combativeness in the water polo contest. Pool fun concluded with pool races and the youngsters like Chandika, Lal's son made it like the contest between the rabbit and the tortoise race ridiculing the older generation.

After a heavy breakfast, lunch had to be light, and I was kindly invited for a unique 'tree top' lunch looking down on ever active fish beneath, thanks to an invitation by Lal's family while rest of my family were away watching world famous elephant gathering in Minnariya.

The formal batch photo was done with the scenic background of the lake. Many flashes from our cameras will surely have a special place in our albums. Unfortunately some felt asleep after the heavy workout in the morning missing this valuable photo session. 40 yrs since we entered the medical fraternity meant that we had to 'go down the memory lane' at the conference centre. This was superbly conducted by Lakshika and Gowri. Many unique contributions, achievements to Sri Lanka by individual batch mates were discussed and I felt very proud to be part of this batch. Similarly we also discussed difficulties, disappointments we endured during our careers but no one indicated that they would have taken a different route if they had to choose their speciality once again.

All were set for the main event of our batch reunion. Nimali's efforts of sorting this programme was truly commendable. Rightly, we had 2 minutes silence to remember our batch mates who are no more. The batch photo clip competition confirmed that we still remember our batch mates even with minute photo clips. The ' last person standing' competition on the history of Peradeniya

University not surprisingly was won by Chandrika, who has dedicated all her professional life to Peradeniya.

'Blind feeding the blind' added spice to the night. The instant skits by groups gave another surprise element to the nights entertainment. Sasi would not have ever thought he will have to be on 'all fours' after travelling half the world. Ananda J's politician spectacle was a master stroke giving the impression that he may have post retirement future as a SL politician. This was followed by yet another skit 'Dr Malaseka 's - Mind your language doctor ' skit from Harley street practise by myself and my partner in crime Lal. My kids threatened to disown me after hearing the contents of the skit, which actually was a watered down version! With chicken and chips once again kept the physiology happy. The highlight of the nights entertainment was Nimali's paper fancy dress parade involving both young and the old bringing fits of laughter to remember a life time. The batch talent was in full display even after 40 yrs. DARK as the 'Red Indian ' chief Huka MuDa, Chandra as the 'Egyptian faroe' , Kalu Kule as the ' Brazilian dancer' and Abey as the 'Amazon beauty queen'. What a finale! what a spectacle!! What memories!!!

Exhausted with laughters for over 2 1/2 hours, it was time to head for dinner. Another welcome surprise to see Keerthi and wife appearing at the 11th hour.

We were expecting the hotel to have a Saturday night band. Yes, they had but provided only light music in the pool area. Having found this out, myself and Ananda H. took a n executive decision to have a DJ. He was actually providing some background music for the earlier entertainment. After dinner, I came back to the hall to see no one there. I thought that the DJ will not be used as every one will be busy chatting in the dinning area. Of course we had so much to catch up with each other.

I thought at least I will make some use of the money we had to pay to DJ and started rocking my hip on my own on the dance floor. Thankfully, gradually every one trickled in to the hall making me very pleased and all immediately joined me on the floor and in no time we had a full dance floor every one rocking to the tunes forgetting the back aches and joint pains. I was wondering if this was 35 yrs ago when we had the medical dance as every was on the floor with all innovative moves reminiscing those good old days. Twists, turns, ball room moves, bolly wood jitters, complete indescribable atypical moves, arm circles marches etc etc were in full display making it a fitting end to the entertainment night.

Exhausted but not deterred about 15 of us sat around with juicy batch stories, romances, romantic disappointments, ragging stories in typical old batch days with Kodda in full swing. I actually was not sure if I was part of this batch as many juicy, sarcastic stories were new to me! DARK was a particular target from Kodda. This easily could have continued till morning but all felt very sorry for the workers with droopy eyes who were eagally waiting for us to finish our laughters.

Getting up on Sunday was not easy after such a hectic day but I wanted to enjoy every bit of rest of our reunion. In the breakfast area, I came across another beaming smile which took few seconds for me to recognise. Ah.... it's Shivantha whom I actually expected much earlier as he had told definitely he will come. True to his word even later than the 11th hour it was so nice to see him. Many group photos continued to click in various formations. Damayanthi was busy collecting phone numbers which actually was a master stroke to create a 'what app' group which has helped us to keep

memories of this fantastic event fresh in our minds with many videos and photos uploaded on to it. This also has helped us to be in contact and hence thank you so much Damayanthi.

Finally it was time to say bye with huge smiles as we will be having precious memories of this event for ever. With 2yrs of planning, I would have been happy to have a 'good' event. As our previous events too were very good, I thought we may not be able to beat them.....but alas, no doubt this was the best and I simply do not know how we could ever beat it.

No event will succeed with out participation and hence I am immensely grateful for all those who came from many corners of the world as well as from many corners of Sri Lanka. Some such as Lalith Satkunam and others such as Poomahal were truly sorry for not being able to attend due to other commitments and we really missed them. Having worked our guts out for our patients in our 35 yr working life, we all deserved a good time at least over a weekend to enjoy ourselves and our lives deserved this. I feel privileged to experience this most memorable time of our lives and no doubt all the participants too must be feeling the same.

This was truly a team effort. Gowri, Lakshika and Lal together with the core team of Nimali, Ananda H supported me in this effort. On behalf of all those who came I want to thank them for their fantastic support.

Uditha Jayatunga

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