

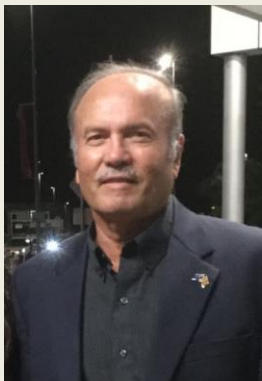


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Anton Swan, Dean of the Consular Corps of Queensland

Anton Swan, former president of the Sri Lanka Society of Queensland, has been appointed the Dean of the Consular Corps of Queensland. He is the first Sri Lankan Consul General in Australia to be appointed to this position.



There are around 50 countries in the group and the Dean is appointed to serve for one year only and is based on seniority. We have been privileged to have Anton serve the Sri Lankan community in this capacity, with dedication and commitment for over 25 years. It is an honorary position which entails many hours of work and travel without any monetary imbursement from the government. It is done purely out of love and a sense of service to his motherland and the community.

On behalf of the Sri Lanka Society of Queensland and the Sri Lankan Community we congratulate Anton Swan and extend our Best Wishes to him and his family.

Lock Down

Lives at risk
Oxygen needed
Covid is the name of
Karma retributed

Don your masks and keep your distance
Out and about can earn a jail sentence
World in turmoil with borders closed
Nature's messages need to be heard

Covid-19 Updates

Where to get help:

Community Recovery Hotline	1800 173 349
<i>(Food, Medications and Essentials)</i>	
13 Health	13 43 25 84
Mental Health Support	1800 614 434
Financial Counselling & Support	1800 007 007
Homeless Hotline	1800 474 753

Sri Lanka Society Membership

Please remember to renew your membership for 2020

BSB	: 06 4000	Family -	\$20
Acc: Number	: 10725278	Single -	\$10
Bank	: Commonwealth Bank, Queen Street, Brisbane	Concession/Pensioner-	\$5

Locked Down in Sri Lanka

“Many of the things we desire are expensive. The truth is that the things that really satisfy us are totally free”

Having spent nearly two months in Sri Lanka, just missing mandatory quarantine by a few days, our time in Sri Lanka was an experience we would never forget.

I remember wondering whether we were crazy to leave the safety of Australia at this time. Irrespective of the situation in Sri Lanka, we have always travelled extensively in the island. Pre and post terrorist war, tsunami, SARS, Chi gunya and Easter bombings, somehow, we happened to be in Sri Lanka. This time was no different. With the belief "one lifetime is not enough to see what Sri Lanka has to offer" with almost 15 percent of the island made up of national parks and reserves, and world heritage sites, there is never a shortage of places to visit. Our biannual visits to Sri Lanka gave us the opportunity of spending time in the island, visiting far off places of historical, spiritual and cultural significance.

As we stepped out of the plane it was clear that the island had undertaken preparation measures for



Covid-19, far more than we saw in Australia.

The presence of the air force personal amongst the airport

officials checking passports with masked faces, the health care personnel in full body suits checking us as we came in a queue, with their impressive efficiency, gave us a sense of safety which I must admit we didn't expect. It was apparent they were screening passengers for any symptoms, and separating the passengers from China and Italy from the rest.

Out of the airport it was business as usual in the airport pick /drop zone... Bustling with vehicles, with one difference... Everyone wearing masks! During

the 45-minute drive home, the driver was full of news about the Corona virus.

Arriving on the 11th of March, in time for the Battle of the Blues annual cricket match, it was as though nothing had changed in our social timetable, other than the looming talk of "the virus".

Usual camaraderie and humorous banter continued, after the cricket match and the talk of an infected individual in one of the Thomian tents on the evening news, sent shock waves, through the normally comical cheerful friends. Sudden realisation that we could all be infected, was the start of our self-isolation, coupled with the curfew which continued to the day of our departure.

Despite the prevailing uncertainties, the state funded health service response to the challenges of Covid-19 pandemic was very impressive to say the least. No time during our stay did we feel unsafe, in fact it was quite the opposite.

There was an overwhelming amount of media



coverage: daily corona updates, continuous advice on hand washing and distancing practice,

commercials advertising sanitising lotions, germ killing soaps and above all the number of panel discussions, covering subjects ranging from spirituality during the disaster, to indigenous medicine. Doctors and various government officials with impressive qualifications holding conversations and debates, on television programs and radio to inform the public about the pandemic.

People caught violating curfew was a daily occurrence on the news. With no access to buying alcohol due to the curfew, the local illicit alcohol

"Kassippu" makers where in full swing and so were the additional number of police ready to raid these backyard stills. With the knowledge "No better time to raid than during a curfew" police made a record number of arrests of makers and distributors of alcohol and drugs. Armed with Sri Lankan ingenuity, the distributors found novel ways to transport their goods, only to be caught by the police and shown in the news on the same day! Large drug hauls were bought in on a daily basis.

Televised addresses by both the prime minister and President at various stages, assuring the citizens of adequate stocks of basic necessities such as medicine, food and fuel, gave hope to those who felt hopeless. Above all, generating a feeling of hope and faith, that we as a nation will win this battle against the pandemic. Citizens deeply saddened and worried seeing news reports of the daily body count from around the world took solace in these messages, in spite of their political affiliations.



Police feeding the homeless, acts of kindness by a multitude of people from all walks of life were on the news. Street dogs and

cats who roamed the streets in search of food were fed by the police and animal lovers.

For the first time, travelling to Sri Lanka took on a whole new meaning. House bound and with very little to do, came a whole new way of perceiving daily life.

A most enjoyable aspect was the silence. Hardly a vehicle could be heard. As a result, the bird sounds seemed louder than usual. As it was April, the mangoes and Jack fruit trees were full of fruit, the squirrels ran back and forth. They managed to get to the very top of the trees and eat the waraka and mangoes that we couldn't get to. The coconut

plucker must have been considered an essential service, because one morning there he was at the gate. Delighted, we found out he was allowed to visit properties as people needed to use whatever food they had on the land as sustenance. Picking all the fruit we distributed it among the grateful neighbours. So, our coffers were full of kos, mangoes, waraka, coconut and thambili.

Sourcing food was the next hurdle. Nevertheless, a day into the curfew, we heard the "Malu, Malu!" early in the morning. Being vegetarians, that was out for us. However, we enjoyed the birds eye view of the people coming on to the road in masks, waiting to be served. The chaps in masks and gloves yelling "Malu! Malu!" and selling fish was a novel sight. Then came the "Elolu! Palathuru!"... followed by "Pol! Pol! Pol!", "Biththara, Pol Thell!" from the various street vendors selling a variety of vegetables and fruits.

As time went on, we were fully stocked and shared fancy recipes, like my Kos chips with chilli and salt as well as Kos chips in sugar syrup. Some friends and neighbours had let their domestic staff leave for their homes. Having to fend for themselves, they soon learnt that life was not that bad after all.

I followed up on an interesting news item, which basically stated that anyone wishing to grow their own vegetables will be



supplied with seeds. Calling the number given, I was directed to the number of the "Grama Niladari" for our area. Less than two hours later, to our delight, there was a man on a motorbike with 28 envelopes with seeds, and the house numbers of the area. Each household was given an envelope with 5 varieties of seeds; chilli, bandakka, batu, pathola, and karawilla, along with instructions. Coconut shells were used to grow the seedlings. With little to do, and an affinity for gardening, improvising where

necessary, we managed to create a fairly good vegetable patch. Even managing to eat homegrown kangkung, gotukola and mukunuanna before our departure.

I found myself teaching my friends gardening tricks. Growing up and living in Australia for 45 years, the home garden has always been a source of fresh vegetables. Though we had the option of ordering online from supermarkets, we chose to buy from the vendors that arrived at the gate. In addition to the novelty, we felt they needed the income more than the large supermarkets. As a result, we had fresh and unprocessed food.

Rising early in the morning with nowhere to go, sitting on our balcony, listening to the distant sound of pirith chanting; we waited for the mung beans, kadala, kos or bathala to boil. Scraping coconut and making katta sambol for breakfast became a daily occurrence. Hardly spending any quality time at home on our trips to Sri Lanka, opting to spend time with friends in beautiful places, hotels, through the years, we had never really enjoyed our home.

Despite the challenging conditions, as of May 1st to-



date (21st) there have been no cases of community transmission of the virus in Sri Lanka. The conducting of contact tracing by intelligence services of the armed forces and the Police, together with health authorities desperately working around the

clock, to curtail the spread, appear to have been effective. New cases are reported only among the quarantined, including members of the navy and those in quarantine returning from overseas.

Sri Lanka as a relatively poor island nation is now ranked 9th best country in the world for its successful immediate response on tackling the

virus. It is noteworthy that Sri Lanka's success can be attributed to their geographical position as an island, their immediate response and the hard work of the Army, Navy, Airforce and Police along with the healthcare personnel, the cleaners, spiritual leaders and the involvement of media to send out a positive message and above all the people who made a supreme effort to do as they were instructed. The indigenous practice of drinking kotthamalli, tea and ginger infusions and good hygiene practices would have helped too.



With the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) predicting, a famine of "biblical proportion", 256 million people on the planet on the brink of starvation by the end of this year, I thank God for the rain, sunshine, and the hard working farmers of Sri Lanka for the fresh food we enjoyed during our stay. With a tough road ahead, and the risk of recurrence, people sit in daily prayer invoking blessings over the island.

Initial reports suggested international travel may not resume until the end of 2020. Nearing two months on the island, it became apparent that we may have to stay in Sri Lanka longer than expected. In the early hours, on the 9th of May, we were on a charter flight bound for Melbourne, Australia, ending a 52-day lockdown life style. A flight to repatriate Sri Lankan students from Australia was our ride home.

Currently sitting in a hotel room in quarantine, looking out the window, putting pen to paper, praying that this will all come to pass with no more loss of life. We are Appreciative and grateful for everything from a coconut shell in Sri Lanka to the 15-minute fresh air and exercise break that we are given once a week during our quarantine period in Australia.

A Fernando

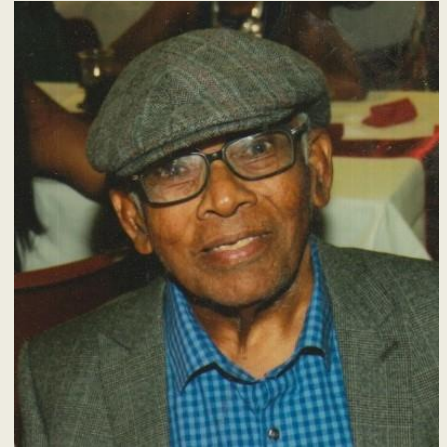
A tribute to Dr Victor Augustus Gunasekara

A man with many skills – academic, scholar, linguist, author and significant achievements to his name died on 19 January aged 86 years.

Dr Victor Gunasekara was a founder member of the Sri Lanka Society of Queensland and the editor of its newsletter for several years. He and his wife Chalani have continued as members of the Society and have participated actively in its events since then. Victor was recognised for his services to the Society by the awarding of the inaugural cup for services to the Society.

He was also a founder member and secretary of the Buddhist Society of Queensland, which he has been involved with for over 40 years.

Victor saw himself as a humanist and was a member of the Queensland Humanist Society and Humanists Victoria. He made regular contributions to their newsletters, especially on the relationship between Humanism and Buddhism. He also served on the executive committee of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies in 2002.



Victor spoke several languages, Sinhalese, English, French and German. He was also well versed in Pali and Sanskrit.

Victor was an academic and lectured in Economics at Colombo and Peradeniya Universities in Sri Lanka. He received a scholarship that allowed him to complete a PhD in Economics from the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne in Paris in the early 1960s.

Upon returning to Sri Lanka he married Chalani in 1965. They were blessed with a daughter Imani and a son Pradeep.

Victor after completing his sabbatical as a lecturer at the University of Ille Ife in Nigeria accepted a position as a Lecturer in Economics at the University of Queensland. He was one of the first Sri Lankan Migrants of Sinhalese heritage to arrive in Australia, just before the abolition of the White Australia Policy. He lectured at the Department of Economics at the University of Queensland until he retired at aged 67, 20 years ago.

Throughout his life Victor generously helped anybody who asked for support - friends, family, students and new arrivals to Australia. Throughout his academic career, he educated thousands of students.

Victor had a very good knowledge and understanding of Buddhism. He authored many books and articles, with a good example being the book *Basic Buddhism - A Modern Introduction to the Buddha's Teaching*, now in its 3rd Edition. In addition, he was a great teacher and freely shared his knowledge with anyone who was interested. His talent for linguistics led him to learn the Pali language to a very high degree of proficiency. One of his final projects was to paraphrase and translate the Pali Cannon to delete repetition in order to make it easier to read for lay people. He combined this with his passion for programming and technology and published this work on his website, VGweb.org

Victor passed away peacefully in his sleep after a short stay in hospital, without pain or suffering.

May he attain Nibbana.
Hermin Goonetilleke

Vesak Lanterns

Vesak Full Moon Poya Day is an auspicious day for Buddhists, memorialising the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. The day is usually commemorated like other Poya days in the lunar calendar by visiting the temple and even holding festivals with communities, for example the 'Buddha Birthday Festival' held annually in South Bank, however due to Government restrictions that are in place at the moment, this year has unfortunately seen a loss of these festivities.



Instead, the restrictions have allowed families to spend time together, and many Buddhists have been practicing their rituals at home. This year my family and I created our very own lanterns for the first time since I was young. Due to our usual busy lives with work or education, we never had the time to create our own lanterns at home, but this year gave us an opportunity to do so.

Vesak is known to be the 'Festival of Light', and therefore many illuminated decorations are made to commemorate the meaning behind the occasion, such as these lanterns, lighting oil lamps, candles and many more. Traditionally, these lanterns are made out of bamboo, but due to lack of material availability in urban communities they can be made in other ways as well, for example using plastic frames. During the time leading up to Vesak, the streets of Sri Lanka are filled with vendors selling their own materials and ready-made lanterns for those who do not have time to make it themselves. My family had bought some materials in the past, which we never were able to put to use until now.



Using square-shaped plastic frames to create the base frame of the lantern, these are usually put together in a hexagon shape by using four frames and attaching each of the corners together, traditionally with string or in this case, with plastic connectors made for these plastic frames. Next, special cellophane paper (almost see-through) in various colours are used to cover the sides of the lantern. As the lanterns use square frames, these are cut into square and triangular shapes to cover each blank side, except the bottom and top orientations of the lantern (a gap is left to allow light to pass through). The paper can be cut and designed in various ways and make each individual lantern unique due to the various creative possibilities. They are then glued onto the frame using a special thick glue, traditionally made out of flour and water. The remaining pieces of paper are used to make long tassels (tails) for the lanterns and are stuck onto the bottom orientation of the frame. A candle or light holder is fixed into the middle of the lantern, and string is tied onto the top corners of the frame so the lantern can be held.

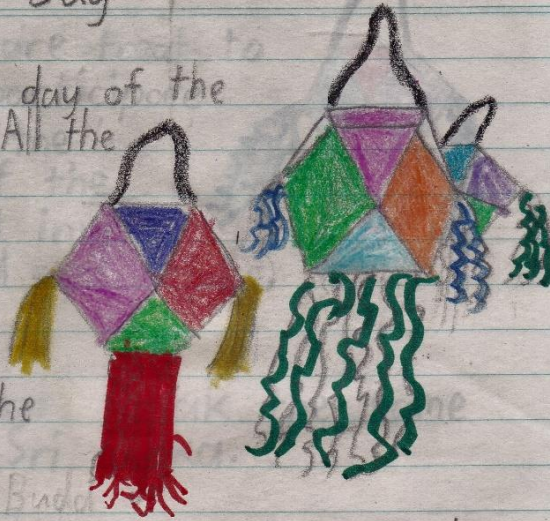


Since my family could not visit the temple this year for Vesak, we hung the lanterns in front of our house and lit them every evening using neon lights instead of candles. We received many compliments from our neighbours and people passing by for the lanterns, and some even asked the reason and meaning behind making them. Celebrating Vesak from home has been a good experience for my family and myself to be able to re-create these lanterns after not being able to for so long, very enjoyable and the final product is definitely worth seeing, especially when illuminated at night.

Anuki De Silva

Vesak Pohoya Day

Vesak is the most significant day of the year in the Buddhist calendar. All the Buddhists around the world celebrate this day as a festival.

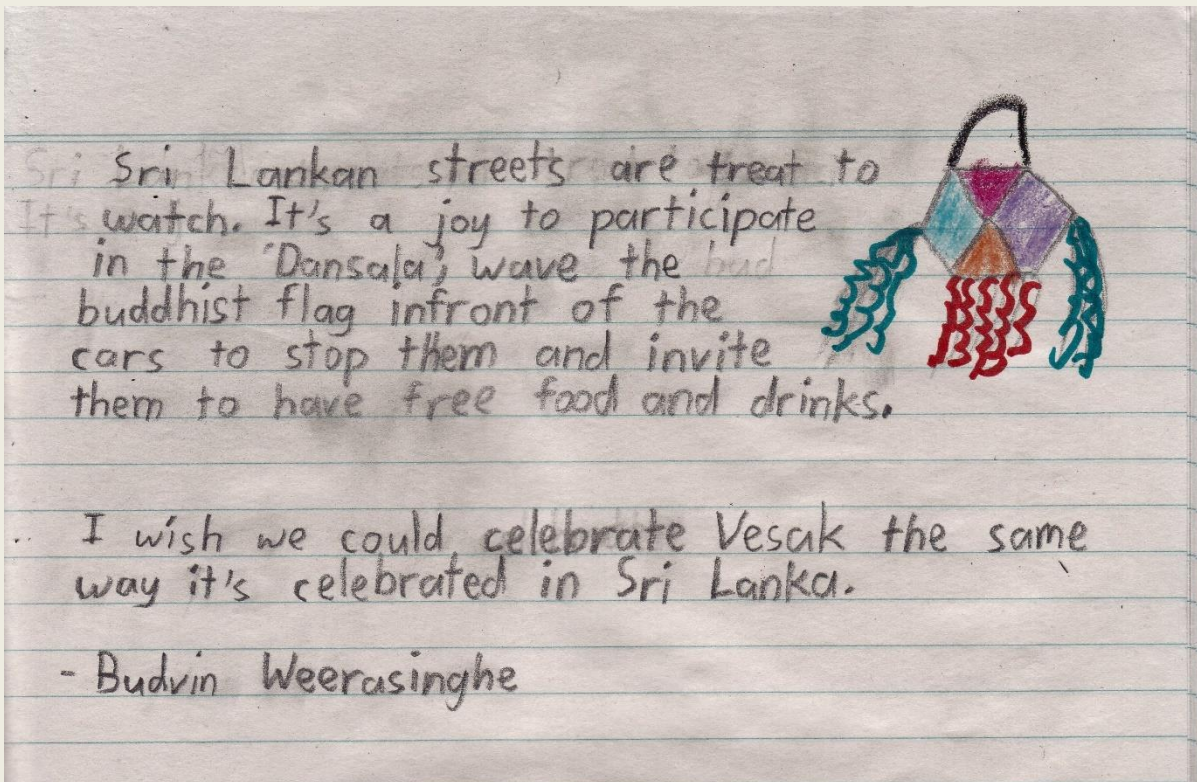


The day commemorates the birth, enlightenment and passing away of Lord Buddha. It's a day of immense joy, peace and reflection.

People love to decorate houses with colourful lanterns. Some people get together to give 'D' 'Damsala'. All the Buddhists engage in religious observances at temples. We can see pandols in streets. Many 'Jathaka' stories are exhibited by them. Buddhists send Vesak cards to wish each other.



My dad and mom showed me the videos of how these celebrations take place in Sri Lanka. We together made a couple of Vesak lanterns and hung in front of our house. Those big, turning and colourful Vesak lanterns and pandols with flashing lights in



Budvin Weerasinghe is a Year 3 student at Coorparoo State School

Daya Tennakoon the Versatile Actor and Great Human Being.

By Dr Nimal Sedera

Daya Tennakoon who died on the 17th of April at the age of 78 was to celebrate his 79th birthday in the coming November. I knew Daya from the time he acted in "Hantane Kathava" of Dharmasena Pathiraja. Incidentally, that was the first film of late Wijaya Kumaranatunga too. He was elder to me exactly by two years. He and I studied in two colleges in Kandy located on the two sides of the same mountain. He was a Rajan (Dharmarajan) and was an Ampitiyan.

Daya had a unique style of acting unmatched in the films and tele dramas. He lived in the character and was so natural that people felt so comfortable being with him in the films. He is one great actor that proved simplicity was the best quality for any human being in any field. He never overdressed for any function or celebration.



When Daya was in the University of Peradeniya we used to meet him in the company of Kalansooriya, another actor of Kandy. Late Bandula Jayawardane who was a great director of drama attached to the Peradeniya University got Daya to act in his "Bihivenu Bosathanani". When Sugathapala de Silva and Namal Weeramuni picked him for their dramas, he hit the limelight. Then he was through to films and with the arrival of the teledramas, Daya's popularity grew in many folds.

I do not intend to look into the numbers of films, stage dramas, and teledramas he acted as the list is so huge. Death is inevitable and there is no bargaining in that. He leaves us after successfully accomplishing his mission.

Daya is survived by his wife Grace, the sister of Merly Patabendige of Brisbane.