

The Souvenir

Bambalapitiya Flats, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka



Bambalapitiya Flatters and Friends

Greatest Get-together Ever

Springvale Town Hall

Melbourne, Australia

12th. March 2011



Register now

Flatters and Friends Website: www.bambalapitiyaflats.com

Two Years in the Making – Kumar Bhagwandas

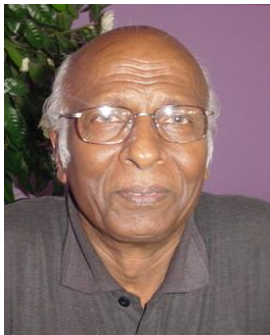
My sincere thanks to each and every member of the committee and their partners for the dedication, effort and commitment that was put into organising this fantastic Flatters and Friends get-together. It was great to be able to draw on the extensive experience of each of the members. Planning an event such as this requires of these committee members to spend an inordinate amount of time, patience and love for the cause, to make it work. There is no doubt that these committee members possess all this and more. Thank you and take a bow.



Kumar Bhagwandas



Everard Hoffman



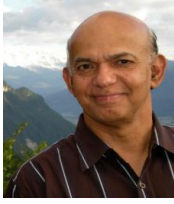
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The Following Flatters and Friends contributed the articles for the Souvenir



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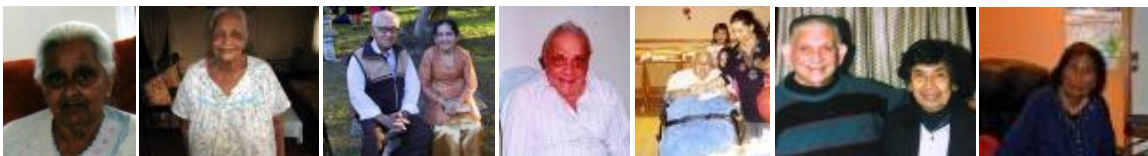


Everard Hoffman



Herman Gunsekera

Senior Flatters





The Greatest Flatters Get Together *by Mohan Bhagwandas*

'I live in Bambalapitiya', said the voice across the table at Palm Court restaurant in Glen Waverly, Melbourne, while she was munching a delicious masala dosai. 'At the Flats?' asked her Australian friend. 'Omg, how come you know about the flats?' asked the surprised visitor from Sri Lanka. 'Why, have you not heard about the greatest flatters get together taking place in Melbourne in March 2011?' she replied.

"The Greatest Flatters Get-together" in Melbourne, has been two years in the making. The launching of a website and the creation of an online community has been a way of pulling together the far flung Flatters Diaspora.

In those days

If you go back and sit on the rocks along the beach opposite the Bambalapitiya flats, (be mindful and take care when crossing the new marine drive next to the railway track) you can sit there for hours on end and watch the waves in the ocean twist and turn. In the distance you see the Wellawatte bridge and the old diesel trains built in Romania under orders from Mrs B in the 1970s, still rumble over the tracks, chock-a-block with people going to work in Colombo.

Bambalapitiya

Independence came to Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) in 1947. The first blocks of flats were built seven years later, in 1954, on land that belonged to a seminary.

Bambalapitiya in the early 19th century was a thick jungle infested with venomous snakes. Kadju Pulang trees were common to this area. Vast areas of Bambalapitiya were owned by the Senanayake family. The descendants of this family still live in their ancestral home down Mary's Road. Herbert Bartholomeusz J.P and retired Engineer PWD bought 10 acres of land for Rs 6.00 per acre in Bambalapitiya 1896. Today land in is worth about Rs 1.5 million per perch (one acre = 160 perches). The Bambalapitiya Flats land was known as Seminarywatte (Seminary Garden), in which novice priests were trained. Before the flats were built, the Seminarywatte was also a favourite cricket ground.

History's clock has moved on. The rock on which you sit has remained unchanged. The same sharp projection that caused discomfort on your bottom is still there. The same waves are lapping on the shore. In the blazing hot afternoon sun, a girl and boy come and sit near you. Oblivious to the world, only focused on their romance. Holding hands. Shy.

The fun part of living within the flats or nearby was the daily morning meeting at the bus stop, waiting for the various school buses to take the girls and boys to their mainly English medium, private, church affiliated schools. Life was one non-stop reality TV show at the flats where everything that could ever happen, happened, and life still moved on serenely.

The intrigues, relationships, are too many in number and would make best-seller reading if they could only be collected and compiled into a book. And then there was the Bambalapitiya Flats Welfare Society, which catered to the entertainment, amusement and general welfare of all its residents on special occasions, festivals, and holidays.

The Flatters Community

Yes, some things change over time. Other things remain eternal. The Flatters bonding and the community spirit. At the Flats, every religion, race, language, creed and colour mingled to form a crucible of human interaction, where almost everyone knew each other by their first name. Only the 'flatters' know the remarkable power of a community that is bonded together in the celebration of life, in a symphony of unspoilt fun and laughter. The first thing 'flatters' do when they meet each other in any part of the world today, is to burst out into spontaneous laughter! It's that simple. It's that profound. A sort of recognition that in that flashing moment, you are compressing perhaps 30 or 40 years of your life!

As you sit on that rock and reflect on all these things, you can see in your mind's eye, young boys and girls splashing in the water on the beach. You can see a group of people setting out with inflated car tubes going out to the reef to dive and do spear fishing. You can see joy, fun and laughter.

There were cricket matches, badminton tournaments, film-shows, police and robbers, camps, sea-baths, diving, spear-fishing, kite competitions, 'rugger', football – all this and more was the stage and we, an amazing close knit community, were the star players.

Somehow, the Flats became a haven for the Burghers in post Independence Sri Lanka. Thus the larger community in the Flats were much influenced by the happy-go-lucky, sports and music oriented culture of the Burghers.

At the flats, you never thought of what religion, language, race or community you belong to. You are connected to something deeper. To the place. To the ocean. To the spirit. To something beyond time that transcends words, thoughts and emotions. You feel, no matter where you live now, you are deeply proud to be a Sri Lankan. That was the spirit at "the Flats".

As some four Hundred and fifty people gather together from across Australia and the world, for the Greatest Flatters Get-together", if somewhat grey, burly and bald, there is nothing to stop the "flatters spirit" taking hold of them and infusing that unstoppable expression of celebration and camaraderie, even if it is done a little bit in slow-motion, due to age!

It is unlikely such a gathering will happen again in a hurry, so let's enjoy every moment of each other's company and friendship. Make sure you don't just hang out with the people you knew well. Make it a point to go and talk to some friends you did not know so well. Go Flatters!

Happy moment... by Shirani Perera (Jayakoddy)

I was only 13 when I left Sri Lanka, but one of the happiest moments from time to time was when my Dad Felix Jayakoddy (L block, 3rd floor) arranged for the British High Commission to show English Film shows at the flats...

Dad worked for the British High Commission and would arrange for the flatters to enjoy an evening of films, which all the flatters would get together. Everyone from most flats would come and stand or sit on the grass in the playing area and then this van would pull up and dad would organise for the film to be shown, this was once a month and I loved seeing these films, as we used to stand on the balcony and invite family and friends to come and watch the film with us...

Unlike now it was a great occasion, as we didn't have TV/videos or DVD players.

Sad moment

Was when I was 13 years old and my parents, brother Christopher and myself had to leave the flats to immigrate to England. It was for a better life, but it was very sad leaving all my friends and family behind. The flatters was one big family and you were never short of friends, as there was someone always knocking on your door calling you to play downstairs.

My Memories by Ravi Wijeyadevedram

Bambalapitiya Flats was one of the earliest apartment complexes built by the Sri Lankan government during the post Independence era. Being located in the heart of the Capital, it provided every conceivable amenity for young families. To say the least, one could not have chosen a better place to live, given the fact that there was a shortage of homes for working families involved in the period of nation building after independence. We as a family were extremely lucky to have found a home in a location blessed with such resources.

We moved into the Flats during the first week of January 1959, and were additionally blessed with the birth of our youngest sister within 6 weeks of our arrival. I was 9 years old at that time, and while I was keen to go out and play, I was extremely shy and nervous. During the evenings and weekends there were plenty of kids playing all kinds of sports in the streets skirting the apartments? Even though these streets were used by cars and bicycles to access the main road, surprisingly, I cannot think of an incident where there was a serious accident. Remarkably, not only were the drivers cautious, the children and teenagers showed a level of maturity well beyond their years in avoiding serious injury.

As weeks and months passed by, my family and I began to venture out into the neighbourhood seeking friends in this community. Contrary to my apprehension, the kids of that era were extremely friendly and accommodating, and willingly accepted us into their ranks in various events. The sports we played included cricket, French cricket, cowboys and crooks, soccer, and as we grew older, rugby. Little did we realize that this laid the foundation for several of us to find places in our respective school teams as years rolled by, without any cost.

Within 2-3 years of our arrival, my elder brother and I had several friends and during one weekend we all decided to take a trip to the zoo. About 12 of us boarded the bus to the Dehiwala Zoo. While we agreed to stick together as a group, we soon split off into small groups and followed each other walking and chatting and enjoying the animals, when someone noticed that we were one person short. After some anxious moments the missing person surfaced with a smile and when we asked him what had happened he explained that he had not followed the signs posted for convenience of tourists to walk through the zoo, and that he had devised his own route. When questioned more, he gave his reply; "because I am a free thinker"!! And that was Batho of G block fame and it brought rounds of laughter to all. Batho, if you recall, was such an entertainer who when he played with us, created his own rules but still was a fun loving soul!!

Looking back in time, the Flatters Community was truly representative of a multi-ethnic community. It gave the adults and the children a vibrant life which is hard to forget. Add to this the seasonal festivities, birthday parties, the Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations; the environment created was that of a dream land. It was all made possible by the several parents each year. Many of our mothers did not work and we survived on one salary...BUT there was always food on the table. We also survived being born to mothers who did not have medical checkups and popped into this world like any other soul.

We, as children, rode our bikes, or on borrowed bikes, with no shoes or helmets, and hitchhiked with friends, with no serious injuries. We drank water from the tap and shared a bottle of soda, and nobody got infections. We collected old drink bottles, Sunday news papers and cashed them to bothal karayas to buy toffees and bubble gum. We also ate prawn vaddais and boiled kaddala without getting diarrhoea and abdominal pains.

Hardly anybody was overweight, because we were outside playing. Whenever possible we would leave home on Saturday AM, and play all day, as long as we were back home when the street lights came on, or the church bell rang at 6.30pm. We played cricket on the streets and side streets and used the neighbourhood homes or the walls as the boundary lines, scoring by rules not found in the cricket book. There was no 2nd or 3rd umpire or match referees, but yet the competition was fierce. We also did not have televisions, videos or DVDs; no computers or cell phones, but we had such creative imaginations and were hardly bored by our routines

Each season, rugby, soccer, and cricket had a large pool of kids interested to play and not everyone made it into the team. Those who did not make it onto the team learnt to deal with disappointment. But nonetheless they all came to witness, and cheer when we played our friendly outings.

Schools were mostly unisex, but this did not affect us psychologically or emotionally, because we all found partners as time went by. During school, we got rulers landing on our knuckles or wherever the teacher could reach, and nobody reported them to the school board. The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law and we were punished or reprimanded a second time when we got home!!

We were taught to value freedom and responsibility, to handle success and to deal with failure. The day to day experiences in the Bambalapitiya flats within a multiethnic community slowly but surely ensured that we became contributing members to society.

The March 12, 2011 gathering of flatters in Melbourne Australia, I believe, is primarily an effort by the organizers to appreciate, endorse, and reminisce these life experiences and bring hordes of joy of our yester years, made possible by a wonderful community which transgressed every conceivable denomination, religion and color, to bring true meaning to life. I indeed was blessed to have been the beneficiary of these experiences.

You did choose a good month to celebrate because the event coincides with the cricket world cup in full swing, and the big games in Colombo among schools being staged this month, bringing in more excitement. While in the mood, I would like to list the following:

Cricket XI (50 Overs) from the Bamba Flats which could have matched the very best clubs or even beaten Zimbabwe or Bangladesh.

1. N. Ranchigoda	SJC	Block E
2. K. Boralessa	STC (Wkt Keeper)	K
3. Michael Muller	Royal	K
4. S. Rajapakse	STC (Capt)	F
5. Nihal Gunawardene	SPC	I
6. Ray de Silva	Royal	L
7. E. Hoffman	SPC	F
8. Ronnie Gunaratne	SPC	K
9. K. Balakrishnan	Isipathana	H
10. K. Sambanthan	Colombo Hindu College	H
11. D.D. Jayasinghe	Prince of Wales	L

Note: S. Rajapakse and DD Jayasinghe both played for Ceylon.

Wishing all of you lots of success and a bright future

School days at the Flats *by Fazli Sameer*

Every morning, like a prayer, the boys would get ready, ship shape with brylcream shining along the sideburns, in immaculate white shirt and long pants, stroll along to the Bamba Flats bus stand by 7:45 am for school. There was Sunil Kumar Abeysinghe and Lakshman Kiriella (now a UNP MP from Kandy in parliament) from the flats, Nihal Canagasabey from Frankfort Place, and me, from the top of Sagara Road. Books in hand and wild thoughts in our minds we used to come together in soft whispers and great intrigue of what was in store for us this new day. And then the lovely lasses strode out in their nicely pleated and ironed uniforms. Everyone went quiet for a moment. The late Siromani Dias Abeygunawardena of Visakha (may she rest in Peace), Tanya Wanigasekera of Bishops from Hildon Place, the Pieris Sisters of HFC from Mary's Road, Susan Bartels of Lindsay all the way from Dharamarana Road opposite the Savoy, Kurra and Aynul of HFC from Sagara Road, and the lovely Solomons sisters from the flats, who simply walked past all of us, making signs and gestures, on their way towards SPM on the other side of the street.

It was never a case of waiting for a bus. We just whiled away our time there in order to catch a glimpse of the best gals from the area before we hopped into a 134, 155 or 106 to take us to Royal just in time for the first period at 8:40. The school bus was always given a skip since it was much too early to take that and miss out on all the fun.

The feeling of ownership of the area and all its inmates was hard grown inside all of us. We were the boys who ruled the roost and everything in the locality belonged to us. Amidst a few intimate connections and relationships between the whole gang life went on as smooth as ever and this was the place to be in the 60's.

Novels, comic books and even LP records were the main medium of communication for discussion, exchange and sharing between the guys and the gals. We had to use something to break the ice and make the connection. Thank heavens for Gramophone. Elvis, Cliff, Ricky, Jim, Bing, Frank, Engelbert, Tom and the many great old crooners of the time were the topics of discussion most times. Everyone listened to Commercial Radio of the CBC, with Jimmy Bharucha, Vernon &

Vijay Corea, Leon Belleth, at the mic and loved it very much. It was the only media of music that was available in the nation at that time.

By 4:00 pm everyone was back home. Some of us engaged in cricket down the streets, in our backyards or even on the little space between the flats and the Indian Ocean. Later on, before the sun would finally set on the horizon there were opportunities to sip a milk at the Milk Bar, get some sweets from Woolworth's or even enjoy an ice cream at Picadilly, next to The Plaza Theatre, at Wellawatte. The Juke Box, recently introduced in there for the first time in Ceylon, was also an added attraction where, for 25 cents, we could taste the cold vanilla on our lips and enjoy Elvis gyrating to "Jailhouse Rock", over and over again.

I used to get Rs 1.00 per day, from Dad, as pocket money. 40 cents was spent for the bus ride to and from Royal. Another 30 cents was spent on food and drink at the College tuck. The remaining 30 cents was gold dust in our hands. Of course Mum and Grandma were always willing to dole out a quick fire Rs 5.00 on a weekend in the event something successful was lined up at the Savoy. Balcony tickets cost Rs 3.60 then. And what about Icy-Chocs, Cadju packets and Coke, during the intermission? You can't invite a lovely lassie to a movie and send her home hungry, can you? That was against the rules.

Sunday mornings on the beach at Kinross was another exciting event we all looked forward to. Easy and relaxed, in our shorts and t-shirts, we used to pass a rigger ball across and run along the sands, impressing the fairer ones with gusto and rhythm.

The community was one heck of a group where all races and ethnic groups came together in harmony as one. It is so sad that the same spirit of unity, love, and fraternity cannot be enjoyed by the modern generations of the people who live there now.

Childhood memories of Bambalapitiya flats *by Mangala Jayatunge*

When we were children we were brought up in a multi-cultural community at Bambalapitiya flats. We had Tamil, Muslim, Malay and Burgher friends with whom we played. Of course sometimes we had disagreements and fought and stopped talking to each other for a while. But we were happy children, never corrupted by the communal feelings which destroyed Sri Lanka.

When 1983 Communal riots erupted, Bambalapitiya flats was the only community Sinhala dwellers of the flats protected their Tamil neighbours. Hence not a single house was attacked. I still remember that day when a mob came to attack Bambalapitiya flats from the seaside probably on July 26, 1983 at about 3.30 pm.

We ran towards them (I was an A/L student at that time) Chamley Abeysuriya said to them in Sinhala "we are attacking here you guys go somewhere else" so the mob believed us and went towards Wellawatte.

Soon the Sinhala youth of Bamba flats organized a vigilant service to protect the lives and property of their Tamil neighbours.

Gamini Walgama gave the leadership to organize the day and night vigilance service. (Gamini is a STF officer now). Our family protected Mr and Mrs Emerson and their children. Emerson was a dentist.

He had his house near the Liberty Cinema and it was burnt by the mob. We kept them in our house until they were safely taken to a refugee camp. Later the Emerson family went to UK.

After finishing my A/L I went abroad to do my Medical Degree and I came to Sri Lanka in 1993, I worked in Matale, Negombo, NHSL and Chilaw, hospitals where I met good Tamil friends. When some Sinhala doctors from secluded communities were reluctant to move with their Tamil doctor colleagues I was able to freely move with them, to have a common bond.

I believe Bamba multi-cultural community erased my racial thoughts since I was a child. I still have great friends Dr. Ram Manohar (UK) Dr. Sudarshan (NHSL) Dr. Pathmaraj (USA), Dr. Govi (Negombo) Dr. Quantan Ratnadev (Chilaw), Dr. Sandirasekaran (Puttalam) etc. We all are like a big family always ready to help each other.

Bambalapitiya flats taught me a lifelong lesson - not to believe in communalism.

- Mangala Jayatunge also known as (Dr Ruwan M Jayatunge M.D.)

by Marie Allès

What I will always remember of the good times we have had at the flats are the following:

Movie nights on the green - we all use to look forward to these so that we could sit amongst the friends and have fun.

Carol singing over Christmas - we even enjoyed the practice evenings at Yvonne Lamarche`s house. Carol singing the week prior to Christmas going from flat to flat was fun.

Inter-block net ball matches - had a great bunch of girls and enjoyed every bit of it.

Watching the inter-block cricket matches.

I am not sure right now if I will be able to make it for this great event - will keep you informed.

MOST FRIGHTFUL DAY IN MY LIFE by TONI DEUTROM ALEXANDER

I had a habit of sweeping outside my front door since I was a child. I opened my front door whilst leaving it open, before starting to sweep, decided to have a chat with my ground floor neighbour (Mrs. Gladys Jayasundera). While chatting, I noticed a figure approaching down the stairs from the second floor. I couldn't help keeping my eyes fixed on this thing, considering the fact that it had no hands, legs, and head to be seen. At this point, I told my neighbour there's a ghost coming towards us and I am getting ready to run up the stairs to my house. On doing so simultaneously, my neighbour ran along with me, we shut the door and stayed till my husband arrived after work. I recollect my neighbour sleeping over that night. Years passed by, I never swept the outside again.

In the recent years before my husband passed away, the family was having a chat and to my utter disbelief my two children confessed it was planned and done by them both in order for me to stop sweeping at odd hours? I tell you, at this point it was a laughable story but at the spur of that moment re-calling the incident it made me shiver at the sight of this unknown being approaching us.

I take this opportunity to wish you all success in the flatters dance, wishing loads of fun and god's blessings on you all.

Reminiscences by Sherin Davoodbhoy

My time in the Flats was filled with poignant memories because of good people. One such person was Mrs Dulcie Gunawardene, mum to Winston, Stafford, Marie and Nihal. I was always welcomed in their home; her warm hospitality put you at ease, something all her children's friends experienced; even being invited to sit down to dinner with them. Her gentle mothering, I still remember fondly. I know how Mrs Gunawardene would go that "extra mile" for her children's' friends, to assist us in our special needs. I experienced it 1st-hand Grandma to Charmaine and Hiran, Mrs Ida Salgadoe's unshakable faith in St. Jude was admirable. Our 1st visit to Gampaha was with her, walking down that gravel winding road to the incomplete church. Her sweet smile is something everyone will remember. Another lady that stands out in my mind is Mrs Sheila De Zilwa, mum to Wilhem, late Patrick, Marlene and Erin. Mrs Zilwa never left us out of her children's parties, making sure we got home safely. I still remember Mum saying "How kind of Mrs Zilwa to

invite you to Wilhem's 21st when he has so many cricketer friends". I could easily chat with her on sensitive matters of mutual friends. This lady even tried to help me get my 1st "office job" in an establishment close to Galle Face Hotel. Mrs Joyce Cabraal, mum to Sharmini and Lester was the lady that taught me the art of "sweet making" in her own kitchen and with the Brown sisters cook "chinchoru" in their back gardens. These ladies did not know it but they left an indelible mark when I was "growing up". There were many others who come to mind too. I wonder if the Vanden Driesen brothers remember it was I their mum on occasion invited, when she needed an extra pair of hands during the music exams. We would go to the "Piano Tuners" Ephraim brothers' home in Havelock Town for these special days.

There are many personal memories too. One that comes to mind is when Mum Ruhize (Nikki) and I on a Sunday walking home after mass either from St. Mary's or our Holy Family Convent Chapel, would stop off at "Zam Zam Mahal" buy the plain hoppers or the "Hakooru Appa" and "Lavarria" for breakfast and devour them while reading the Sunday papers. Being Catholics, our 1st Friday night together with my Aunt Cynthia from "M" block together with our cousins, Tilanie and Johan De Silva, "meatless" dinners sometimes were treats at the "Greenlands" down Shrubbery Gardens or from the "Thosai Kade" their "thick" stringhoppers and "saambur" was a "heavy meal" not forgetting the "ulundhu and "masala wadde" which was enjoyed at all times. I know many flatters can remember the "Godamba Roti" man "clanging" on his cymbal-like instrument letting the "community" know he has arrived and is ready to take our orders. Everyone will remember the Boys' Inter-School annual cricket matches where cars driven by these youngsters constantly cranking those "noisy" gadgets and flags bearing their school colours would circle the flats from one entrance and out onto the Galle Road from another. Saturday afternoon "Rugger" Matches and the socials that followed thereafter was something many flatters including "yours truly" will look back on with nostalgia. Quite a few gentlemen from the flats were well known "Rugger Players".

I like to think that those of us who have been raised in the "Flats" were pioneers in what is known today as "diversity"; different cultures, religions, age groups, family makeup living together in close proximity. Residents of our community always showed empathy and feeling for those who might experience some "untoward" situation, rendering assistance wherever possible. The common goal was to mould their children as productive citizens always striving to accomplish and use their God-given talents to the fullest. Everyone who crossed my path during those years contributed something valuable that I have benefitted from and "hold dear". Borrowing a well known personality's famous line, may I say to all, "Thanks for the Memories".

A Story of the Bratters *by Mark La Brooy*

The period I reminisce on is between 1958 and 1962. In 1958 we moved to the flats from Wattala and into a brand new 2nd floor flat (E Block). The block was getting its finishing touches. A few families had already moved into their new accommodation amongst them the Mendis family.

At 8 years old there was a small amount of testosterone in the blood. At my first meeting with Mervyn Mendis we had a fight. After a bit of bruising we decided that there was no pecking order between us and so we became the best of "machangs". The bratters I refer to were generally the sub-12 year old boys that became very much a part of the ecosphere of the flats.

At the time we came to the flats F block was in an advanced stage of construction. Soon however families moved into F block including the Solomons, De Kretsers, Hoffmans, Kandiahs, Amarasekeres, Rajapaksas to name a few. In E block we had the Deens, Deutroms, Udalagamas, Wanigaratnes, De Silvas, Liveras and many more whose names I can't recall.

Combined, I refer to the E & F block people as "Effers". So whenever someone refers to me as an "effing" so and so I take it as a term of endearment.

Horas

It was in the DNA of some bratters to be thieves or "horas". I include myself in that category. Amongst the horas were Mervyn and Roger Solomons. We went after pera, umba, thambili, in short anything edible or saleable. The territory was usually the rear gardens of Frankfort and Clifford Place. This was a dangerous activity and occasionally we got caught. I recall Mervyn being caught in the rear garden of a Frankfort Place house just behind C block. We were after their

guavas. When asked what he was doing in their rear garden he sharply replied "I am looking for my ball". By this time he had passed over two guavas to me anyway. So albeit verbally chastised we came away having achieved the objective.

On another occasion, a lazy Saturday or Sunday afternoon, Mervyn and I came across some thambili overhanging the parapet wall from a Clifford Place property. This was right behind the Juvenile Court. The temptation got the better of us so I volunteered to climb the high wall and pluck some nuts. Mervyn gave me a leg up and I reached up the fruit and started twisting. I got one and passed it down. As I was twisting the second nut a man appeared in the shadows of the tree with a machete. He struck the wall with the knife. I got the shock of my life, let go the nut and fell backwards onto Mervyn. We got up and ran leaving the man who had now climbed the wall from his side screaming filth at us. The irony of thieving behind the Juvenile Court is forever scarred in my memory.

In between B block and Clifford Place was the famous Lekha Studio. This was quite a large property separated only by a short (about 1 metre) parapet wall from the rear of B block. For reasons unknown the studio had a chicken hatchery as a side business. The eggs that had failed to hatch, "pus bittara", were placed to one side and were easily got at by a quick jump over the wall. I recall one occasion when Mervyn, Roger Solomons and I armed ourselves with about a half dozen rotten eggs and then hiding behind the short wall that separated B block from the Galle road pavement we lobbed the grenades over traffic to the opposite side pavement. Innocent people either took a direct hit or caught the pavement splatter on their sarongs/sarees. By the time the man in his "pus bittara sarong" admired the damage and traversed the traffic to cross the road to catch us we were already on the beach. We could do the run in about 40 seconds flat, i.e. behind B, D, H blocks and the Juvenile court.

Owning comics amongst bratters was like a rite of passage. It meant that you had like values. Mervyn and I were invited once to a new bratters home in C block to see his comic collection. A bigger collection we'd never seen in our lives. Our hora instincts suddenly kicked in. Mervyn asked for glass of water. While the kid was getting the glass of water we took two comics each and put them inside our banyans and then folded our arms. Mervyn never drank the water. The comics were brand new.

The Slow Fuse and Christmas

At certain times of the year flatters became hostile towards each other. Christmas/New Year was notorious for this change of behaviour and it manifested itself through the use of Chinese crackers, dashing crackers and rockets exploded/fired at property and unsuspecting persons.

During Christmas and New Year war was customarily declared between the Efferes. In fact those blocks that closely faced each other, i.e. E, F, G, H, I & J fired at each other. The main weapon was the sky rocket.

As the precursor to the now infamous IED the bratters perfected the art of the "slow fuse"

This was a technique, which I won't go into for fear of getting a visit by the Australian Federal Police, aimed at timing the cracker to explode within close proximity to an unsuspecting person. Popular victims were Margot Ferdinands and Mrs Salgado. Worse, when an "ali dom" was lit with a slow fuse.

Sundays

To me anyway Sunday was the best day of the week. The family usually started with 6.30am mass at Holy Family Convent or St Peter's College. Breakfast was sometimes bought from the "iddi appa" vendors that served the flats between 7 and 9 am. String hoppers, seeni sambol and "oggu rulang" followed by more strings with jaggery was a favourite of mine.

After breakfast, bratters congregated at the beach for a "sea bath". The older boys also came down some carrying inflated car inner tubes. I was not one to venture out to the reef but others did. Strangely, parents were not to be seen.

The beach that was adjacent to the flats was hardly a beach. There was quite a lot of coral around so you had to be careful where you stepped. Wearing flip flops ameliorated the effects of the sharp coral. Nonetheless there were sandy spots where you could bath. Occasionally, we walked down the railway line, over the Wellawatte bridge to the Kinross beach. That was a beach. On the way back we might go under the bridge into the canal and catch guppies. Were there neon tetras in the canal? Does anyone know?

Around noon hunger beckoned and so we walked back stopping perhaps to watch a 1 cent coin getting hammered flat by a train. Lunch was always a good rice and curry.

By 1pm on a Sunday afternoon the flats came to standstill. People retreated to a quiet spot or sat in their living rooms under the fan or sat on the balcony. Bratters read their comics, a selection that included Buck Jones, The Durango Kid, Kit Carson, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Popeye. Who could forget the Fleetway library war comics with titles like "Fix Bayonets". It was also a time to catch up on the strip cartoons that ran in the newspapers. I had a liking for Garth, Mandrake, Henry, Little Lulu and Dagwood.

Listening to Radio Ceylon was also a relaxing way to idle away the time.

The quiet of the Sunday afternoon was only punctuated by a passing train or the distant squawk of a crow. Sometimes, the crow was accompanied by Hugh Hoffman playing his alto saxophone.

By 4pm bratters started to congregate on the playground. By 4.30pm we had chosen sides and were playing cricket, real football or even rigger. Rigger was more for the older boys but we would sometimes join in. Other pastimes included kite flying and kite fights and firing bamboo canons. Without going into the intricate details of how to make the cannon we had good fun listening to the boom of the cannon. We fired tennis balls and tin cans but they didn't go far because they were only held inside the first segment of the bamboo. Eventually the cannon would split open.

If playing sport, kite flying or cannon firing was not fancied then we would play Cowboys and Indians or re-enact a wartime battle and we used the entire flats to hide and fire our bows and arrows and fake guns. Sometimes the older boys would join the bratters in war games, but it was a no-win with the older guys because even if you shot them at absolutely point blank range, i.e. within a metre they would still say "aah, no no you missed". The tables were then turned and you got shot. You could never "kill" David Hoffman.

You knew it was time to stop and go home when you saw the bread vendors go around on their Raleigh bikes. Mum would usually buy a warm loaf. I always cut off the corner slice of the loaf, often both, spread lashings of butter on the bread, went to the balcony, and scoffed. Pure bliss!

We also kept a close watch on what movies were showing at the Savoy and Majestic. Must see movies were Tarzan and Hercules, Westerns and war movies. The challenge for me always was how to extract the money from the old man. You needed enough to buy a 60 cent ticket. This was the under-12 matinee price in those days, then a bit more for a choc ice, and a bit more still to buy a ripe "dimbul" or "ice palang" to suck on after the movie. All up about 1 rupee.

Marbles, Catapults and "Gul" Syambala Guns

Playing "marbles" was a favourite pastime amongst bratters particularly during the wet season. The ground was firmer and damp and this made for easy working of the ground for "tors" or "three holes"

Under the tutelage of Jackie De Silva (Gnd Flr, 4 E Block) I learnt to master the art of playing tors. He taught me how to screw...marbles that is. Screwing was a technique where the marble was held between thumb and middle finger and then spun along the ground in order to get a clean shot at a single marble without allowing any of the others to flinch. That was a winning shot. There was the forward screw that effectively ran like a off break and by twisting one's fist upward you played the back screw that ran along the ground like a leg break.

We had our "tokka" or favourite marble. This was a marble, usually heavily pitted due to many successful winning streaks. That's why it was called the tokka.

When our family left the flats in 1962 to emigrate to the UK I recall having four large Pascal sweet jars of marbles. These I gave back to the bratters that I'd "rooked" during those four years.

The alternative to tors was a masochistic form of playing marbles called "three holes". I rarely played this game and I've forgotten the rules. However, what is etched in my mind was the pain inflicted on the loser. He or she had to bare their knuckles to a barrage of marbles fired at close range. No prisoners were taken. Women and children were put to the sword. Exponents of this violent game were Nigel De Kretser, Everard Hoffman, Bertie Mendis and my bro Anthony.

Considering that television and the Internet were not heard of bratters occupied themselves in a variety of ways. We loafed around "Katussa" hunting with our catapults. Or we'd pester Judy the Solomons' dog. What an ankle biter she

was. Another favorite was the 10 cent “thosai” feed across the Galle road. I think the kade was called Asokha Lodge. The rats there were just as big as the ones at Saraswathi Lodge.

I think I’ve recalled enough but would like to remember those bratters that I had such great times with, namely:

Ranil Rajapakse, Maurice Ranchigoda, Christopher Amarasekera, Kumar Kandiah, Dana De Kretser, Rodney De Kretser, Mervyn Mendis, Harry Deutrom, Viji Srikanthan, Chandra De Kauwe, Bede Le Mercier, Johan Cooke, Joe Perumal?, Roger Solomons, Iqbal Fuard, Noel Ludowyke and Charlie Udalagama.

Among the older boys, just by two to four years whose protection we sometimes sought were:

Everard and David Hoffman, Asoka Wanigaratne, Vijay Lekamage, Daryl Udalagama, Jackie De Silva, Neville Ludowyke, Lucky Ranchigoda, Bertie Mendis, Nigel De Kretser, Patrick De Zilwa, Hilary White, Nimal De Kauwe, Russel Bartholomeusz, Sryantha Rajapakse, Balu and Anthony La Brooy.

I can visualize many more boys but their names don’t come readily. My apologies for that. Be happy.

ps Who remembers “Blow your Balls”, Frankfort Place. I think Bertie Mendis can tell us the story of how this unfortunate man got this name.

A Flatters Tale – *by Sarath Rajapatirana*

The Setting

We moved to the flats in late 1958. It was a huge change to come from Mount Lavinia where our families had lived for many generations. My mother was the prime mover behind this change. She wanted us to be close to our schools and to live in a more city setting. As usual, my father went along with her decision. Among the children, the five of us, my twin sister Lakshmie and I were in the university entrance class. Our brother Nath, similarly was to leave school early like my sister and I, he also had less contact with his age group at the flats, But our other two younger siblings, Nandanie and Thilak had more years to go in school. They integrated quickly into the flatters society. Within a year and a half, my sister and I entered the Ceylon University at Peradeniya. We were away for four to five years except for vacations. Nath was away in a year or so to try his hand as a trainee planter in an estate in Deniyaya.

For my sister and me, integration was less easy since we had already made lifelong friends through twelve years of school. But, the flats society was more open, more accommodating and welcoming than most other neighbourhoods. Nandanie and Thilak developed lifelong friendships with flatters. They keep in touch with many flatters across the oceans and they looked forward to come to this 2011 get together. On my part I decided to write this piece as my contribution to the Flatters society which I am happy to have belonged to. And, I also write this in part on behalf for my late sister, Lakshmie.

An Oasis of Peace and Amity

It was an oasis of peace and amity in contrast to the outside society which saw cataclysmic changes in the political order with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led coalition coming into power in 1956, with ethnic riots in 1958 and a spate of industrial strikes in the late fifties and early sixties. The economy was going down fast with many controls and restrictions of individual enterprise. Foreign travel was limited even for those who could afford it. There were many tensions and it led to a coup attempt in 1962 that failed.

The Flatters society was multicultural. They came from many ethnic backgrounds, from different parts of the country and with both professional and non-professional heads of house-holds but with equal status. All contributed to a dynamic, peaceful and friendly society. With new blocks constructed, new families arrived and assimilated easily. Many families from minority communities arrived after 1958. They felt safe in that environment. And, we from the majority community felt responsible that we should help and safeguard our neighbours from the tensions and travails the Tamil minority were to feel and experience outside the flats, thanks to the majoritarian excesses of the new political order.

Looking back more than fifty years later one has to ask why it was such a place- a Sri Lankan Camelot. First, the persons who became residents were from the educated middle class. Second, they had a common language to engage with their neighbours, unlike the country at large when different communities did not have a common language to communicate even in a basic way. Third, they were from leading schools which had multi-ethnic student populations that had good discipline. Finally, there were incentives for people to get along, living in a somewhat of a closed community where there were common interests to live well and amicably. These traits stood in contrast to what happened in the last fifty years to the country at large. Class differences magnified thanks to wrong-headed economic policies except for a brief period in late 1970s to early 1990s. Sinhala became the only official language and

the medium of instruction. The education system and its standards deteriorated. Meanwhile, denominational schools were taken over by the Government in 1962. Ethnic tensions magnified leading to an ethnic war, following the 1983 anti-Tamil riots when some thousand or more Tamils lost their lives. The flats remained largely protected from these outside divisive and disastrous trends.

Despite the language change in schools, the middle class educational background of the flats residents provided easy access to English, the common language of the children and adults. They could play, relate to and communicate with each other across different groups and as before, there was a commonality of purpose to live peacefully and amicably with ones neighbours. And, I was so happy to learn (living abroad for 35 years), that even in the darkest of days of ethnic strife, the flats remained an oasis of peace and harmony. And, what is more, a neighbourhood-watch protected the minority community from attacks from outside. The flats society provides a strong lesson for the country at large. Peace and amity comes from good government, social responsibility among neighbours and celebrating multi-ethnic societies rather than creating differences through language, economic policies and other divisive means.

A Flat's Culture

Outsiders identified flatters as fun loving, party giving, dance oriented group and were at the core of the so called "Bambalawatte" crowd. It had a distinct multi-cultural character with tolerance and friendliness to each other. They stood out in a crowd. Given the particular childhood experience at the flats, those children became responsible adults with broad outlooks and friendly-to-all attitudes. Even some fifty years later, those traits stand out among the flatters as evidenced by the great enthusiasm with which they meet and celebrate that culture in this event. What more proof does one need than this occasion when former flatters arrive from many parts of the world to celebrate their common culture of friendship, tolerance, respect and affinity to one another? What a tragedy that the country could not be like the flats?

Some Personalities

No account of the life at the flats and what it meant for us would be complete without a reference to some personalities. Among those I knew there, three stand out. They are Owen de Abrew, Dharmasiri Wickramaratne and Upali Amarawardena.

Owen was the famous All-Ceylon ball-room dancing champion of the 1950s. He was quiet, thoughtful and a gentleman to the core. Once I was walking up to the road, he spoke to me from the balcony of his mother's flat. He had learned that I had got into the university from his mother who was my mother's friend. He invited me to learn dancing from him, one-on-one basis, free of charge. So about twice a week he taught me to dance, in a most professional way. He was very light on his feet and did a woman's step with remarkable grace and ease. Those lessons- the fox trot, the jive, the cha-cha and the waltz stood me in good stead at the university. I took to it like a fish to water since I was somewhat of a drummer to the annoyance of my primary and secondary school teachers who called me a "tom-tom beater". On the strength of the dancing skill that Owen imparted and I learned well, a friend of mine-a fellow-Josephian and I created a dancing class at our hall of residence at Marcus Fernando Hall, at Peradeniya. Thus we broke the mistaken ultra-nationalistic aversion to ball room dancing by our hall mates. Owen contributed in an indirect way to fun and enjoyment to those whom he had never met-those hall mates of mine. And, I owe him a debt of gratitude on behalf of all of us.

Dharmasiri Wickramaratne was a classmate of mine. We used to meet in the evenings to walk along the railway line, sometimes as far as the Dehiwala railway station. We discussed many things. He had studied science and had a special interest in chemistry. He was working as an assistant pharmacist at the time. But he was much better known as a dramatist who wrote, produced and directed highly acclaimed plays. He was the author, producer and director of "Ranthodu", a controversial and popular play. He paved the way for many young talents to emerge and become well-known actors and actresses in the Sinhala cinema.

The third personality was Upali Amarawardena who took me to his flat long before we moved there when we had decided to go for a school event in the evening. Since I was residing in Mount Lavinia at the time, I went to his place to wait until the evening. They had a very nice flat. So when my mother suggested that we move to the flats, I was a strong supporter of the move. Upali was a more serious person compared to Dharmasiri. I learned that he suffered a debilitating virus-related paralysis but recovered and came back to his usual self.

Other personalities indicate the diversity of the flats. We had four immediate neighbours in Block J- the Browns, the Samads, the Subramaniums and the Thiruvnavkarasus. Everyone got along well. Even if there were some minor irritants as it was inevitable when people live so close to each other, there was always amity. We have kept in touch with some of them over the years, even though our family moved away from the flats in the early seventies.

A lesson

The get-together of the Flatters in Melbourne in 2011 is an occasion to celebrate, once there was a Camelot; people lived together, looked after each other and protected themselves from what was happening in the society at large. There is a lesson here for all of us. Good things are possible when there is great understanding among communities in a well-ordered open society.

My Memories *By Everard Hoffman*

Hi There All You Flatters, my name is Everard Hoffman and I am one of 8 siblings born to Parents Ernest & Noeline Hoffman. I was born at Rutnam's Nursing Home Skelton Road, Havelock Town in December, 1947 and my first abode was at 21, Edward Lane, Bambalapitiya till July, 1956, when with the rest of my brothers (4) and sisters (3) we moved to the Famous Bambalapitiya Flats. We lived at No.1 Block F. First Floor till October, 1971 when the whole Family migrated to Australia. That address is one I am proud of as I loved writing it on envelopes addressed to Pen Pals and Friends back Home and abroad. It sort of had an "Air To It". So I can truly claim to be a Bambalawatta Boy as my whole life in good old Sri Lanka was in Bambalapitiya.

My memories of the Flats are absolutely Fantastic and I am thankful to several people who helped in my development into adulthood and for who I am today.

One such Gentleman was Mr. Colin vanden Driesen, who I'm sure many of you will no doubt remember. Mr. Vanden Driesen was instrumental in helping us young Boys and Girls develop our sporting skills by organising the many tournaments we were all involved in. Who can forget the Up Country vs Low Country Cricket/Rugger/Volleyball and cycling meets. Then there were the famous Friday night Movies on G Block that gave us opportunities to have a bit of a Flirt with the Beautiful Maidens who we grew up with. Wow, what a beautiful feast of Lovely Pretty Girls that we all seemed to protect from any outsider who dared to enter the Flats, with any ulterior motive in mind. Yes, all beautiful memories of one Big Happy Family where all of us respected our Elders and protected each other. I guess this upbringing is what has held us in Good Stead all over the World today and we no doubt are indebted to the many many people who played a Big Part in our progress from childhood to adulthood.

There are several people who I am ever so grateful to for my development into the person I am today and I will always cherish the names till I die. I will not mention any as I would not want to leave any of them out, but I do say a Big Thank You to Mr. Vanden Driesen for his part in ensuring that we kids developed our Sporting Skills. To all the others who we referred to as Aunts & Uncles a Big Thank You too for your encouragement and caring nature.

We who are referred to as " Flatters" can hold our heads up high where ever we are today as the word Flatter has but one connotation and that is that we hail from the Bambalapitiya Flats.

There is no other place on this planet like "The Bambalapitiya Flats".

Thank You for the opportunity to share my thoughts of the FLATS with YOU.

Lessons in Love *by Herman Gunesekera* (with apologies to Cliff Richard)

It was one of those exciting evenings at the flats and a Friday as well. Weekends are looked forward to so much that we almost willed the week days to pass on quicker. This particular evening held a promise of excitement- not only for a particular guy in our group but to all of us as well. It was an occasion when our friend Rajiv was to meet (clandestinely of course) his girl friend- a tryst arranged after much persuasion. The venue was the lobby of one of the blocks. Flatters would recall that lobbies of blocks were the few or only places where young couples could meet for a few minutes and perhaps hold hands and maybe, just maybe progress to a kiss and talk about it till they met perhaps a month or more later!

As the clock ticked by Rajiv was a nervous wreck and kept asking us what he should do etc etc. Not many of us in the group had much experience either but we had at least read enough to know how to get started! As a nervous Rajeev began shifting about from one leg to another and rubbing his sweaty palms and virtually pleading with us to tell him what to do, Andy (an older member) put his arm around Rajiv in an effort to calm him and advised him thus. "Take her hand and feel her palm and kiss it and slowly progress up her arm until you reach her neck and lips and let things happen thereafter..." Rajiv's nervous mannerism took an even worse turn in response, when he shrieked and asked us if we were mad and how on earth we expected him to do something like that! The threat and possibility of losing the girl altogether if he just stared and grinned at her was effectively communicated to Rajiv and he seemed to realize that we were right.

Dusk had set in and it was time. News arrived through lesser mortals (there were no mobile phones then in fact, few had even land phones) that Rajeev's love had entered the lobby. We promptly closed in on Rajiv in an act of self-assurance and wished him luck. Still rubbing his palms and with a wide grin, Rajiv left us on his romantic mission.

Naturally, the first thing we wanted to know by day break was about Rajeev's escapade and our agony was stretched until the evening for reasons I cannot recall. Finally, Rajiv appeared before the 'board' and seemed confused-- in fact, he took on a somewhat aggressive attitude and accused us of misleading him! It was our turn to get confused and we asked him to explain every detail of his actions. He said that he had started with a peck on the arm (shoulder) of the girl who wore a sleeveless top. He had in fact proceeded with the kissing from the shoulder downwards and finally reached her hand and ended up at the palm! It was then that he was confused as he had reached a 'dead end'!! We laughed out so loud that we came close to bursting and there stood Rajeev, aghast at all this hilarity and wondering what really caused it!! This story also illustrates the innocence of the teenagers at the time when we regarded 'holding hands a huge achievement in a 'love affair'!

(Names used in the above story are fictitious for obvious reasons!)



Kumar and Andi Bhagwandas

I sincerely hope that you enjoyed reading the articles by the different flatters. I reserved the last space for me.

I lived in the Bambalapitiya Flats for just on 12 years. When my father passed away in 1967, and mum was left with the 7 of us, the idea of migrating to Australia became somewhat of a priority. We arrived in Australia in 1970.

As time passed more of my friends from the Flats started to arrive in Australia, mainly to Melbourne. Soon friendships were renewed and on such occasions the topic invariably ended up with the flats. Many a time one of these friends would suggest that it would be great to organise a Flatters get-together. Biting the bullet in 1993, together with a committee of 5, the first of the get-togethers was organised in March 1994. My thanks to David, Faizul, Georgie and Sheila. The night turned out to be electrifying. The 'magic' that is created by the sheer joy of friends genuinely thrilled to meet each other, was witnessed time and time again that night. No one seemed to mind that we had a DJ playing recorded music and literally getting ejected from the hall at midnight. A tow truck driver doubling up as a bouncer ushered us out. We the organisers did not take into account that daylight saving finished on this very night. The party moved outside to a grassy patch near the car park and continued for hours.

Here we are tonight at the seventh of the Flatters and Friends get-togethers. With the same great committee of Everard, Tony and Sheila helping to organise the last six, including tonight's. The organising of any event is only as good as its committee and I am blessed to have had the help of these great people.

Lastly, the rock in my life, the non Flatter who acts like she is one, for her support and patience, when I was stuck in front of the laptop hour after hour, night after night, you never once complained, this is for you Dear Andi, all the flatters and I thank you dearly.



Midnight Mist



Music for the night is provided by Midnight Mist

And The Catering has been provided by

Silverline Caterers

Bambalapitiya Flatter's Dinner Dance

Saturday 12th March 2011 at Springvale Town Hall

MENU

Cold Meats

Ham/Salami/Corned Silverside

Salads

Tossed Salad

German potato salad

Greek salad

Beetroot salad

Main

Yellow rice with deep fried shallots, roasted cashews and egg

Stir fried noodles Szechuan style

Chicken Curry

Beef Mongolian style

Roast pork with Pepper Sauce

Deville'd Calamari

Saute' vegetables

Stir fried beans with sprats

Cashew & Pea Curry

Brinjal Pahie

Malay Pickle, chilli paste, Papadams

Dinner Rolls / Butter

Desserts

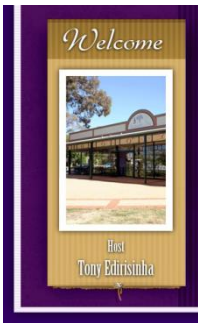
Bombe Alaska

Fruit Trifle

Tea or coffee

Dinner mints





**CASUAL MONDAY GET-TOGETHER
14TH. MARCH 2011 – LABOUR DAY HOLIDAY**

**VENUE: The Jacaranda Tree Cafe
2/28 Blackburn Road, Blackburn 3130**

**Time: From Midday onwards – Live Music
No Charge to attend – Bookings Essential
Food and Drinks at subsidised prices.**

Finally

- The Committee would like to thank all those Flatters and Friends who helped to make this Get-together the 'Best Ever'.
- To all those who came from Victoria, Interstate and Overseas, a special Thank You.
- This souvenir was made possible by a very generous donation by Ravi Wijeyadevedram. A very Special Thank You Ravi.
- Thank you to Ray de Silva. Your donation has been used to present some of our senior Flatters with beautiful bouquets of flowers.

'What was two years in the making is now a reality' – Kumar Bhagwandas

Disclaimer: The articles submitted have been printed without any editing. The committee and organisers do not take responsibility for the views expressed by the article contributors.