



# Professor Sudharshan Deepal Seneviratne: Reminiscences of life-long friendship

Devasiri Rodrigo<sup>1</sup>, Ananda Weerasuriya<sup>2</sup>, Sanjiva Senanayake<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Former Territory Senior Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Sri Lanka and Maldives

<sup>2</sup> Emeritus Professor of Neuroscience, Mercer University School of Medicine, Macon, GA, USA

<sup>3</sup> Former Senior Commercial Banker in Sri Lanka, South East Asia, and Australia; Senior Investment Manager, International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group) in Sri Lanka and West Africa

Corresponding author: [devarod25@gmail.com](mailto:devarod25@gmail.com)

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Sudharshan was a *kalyāna mithra* (an admirable friend) in every conceivable way. He enriched our lives by his simple, sincere manner and left a void that can never be filled. It was during our schooldays at Ananda College in the 1950s and 1960s that our bonds began to form. The illustrious history of Ananda College, the continuing sense of purpose and place, the quality of the teachers, the eclectic mix of students from all parts of the country, the balance between discipline and discovery that it fostered - all contributed to our long-lasting friendship and what we became. The four of us, by age, were about five years apart. Yet we were very much beneficiaries of the ambience of the admirable institution, our school.

Sudharshan was clearly a striking personality in school. Handsome, winsome and popular due to his open approach to building relationships, it didn't take long for the school authorities to recognize his talents and potential. In 1959 when the junior school staged "Mal Kumari", a play in the *nādagam* theatrical style, 10-year old Sudharshan was chosen unanimously to play the lead role of the handsome prince.

He was appointed as the first leader of the Ananda College Scout Troupe and participated in the Colombo Jamboree. In 1966, Sudharshan broke new ground as the captain of Ananda's first-ever rugby team (Figure 2).



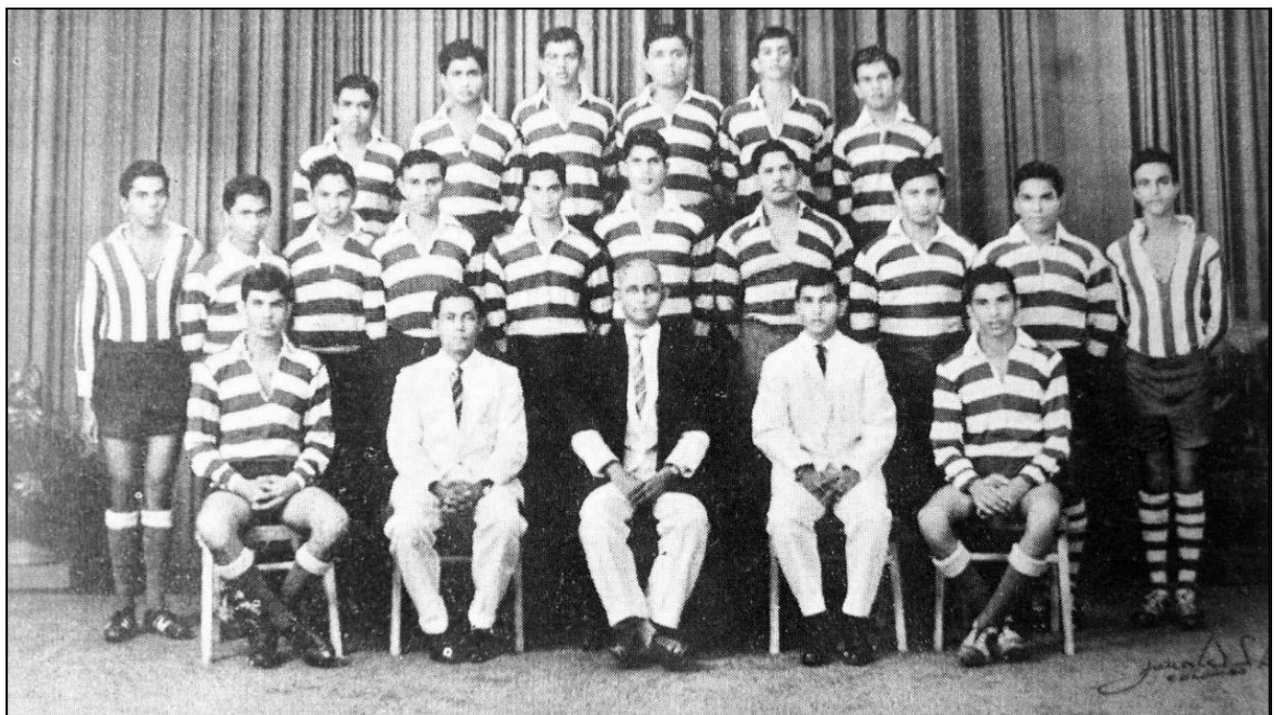
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**Figure 1.** (L) The budding musician and (R) in the Swinging Sixties (Left to Right: Sanjiva Senanayake, Ananda Weerasuriya, Devasiri Rodrigo, Sudharshan Seneviratne)



**Figure 2.** Ananda College Rugby Team, 1966 (Sudharshan - front row extreme left)

Sudharshan held several other positions of leadership in clubs and societies and became the head prefect of the school in 1968. In 1969, his final year, he shared with Sanjiva Senanayake the *Fritz Kunz Trophy* awarded annually to “the best citizen produced by Ananda College” (Figure 3).

When the annual Olcott Oration was revived at Ananda in 1995, following a lapse of a few years, it was Sudharshan who was called upon to make the oration.



**Figure 3.** Fritz Kunz Trophy for Best Citizen/s (L: Sudharshan Seneviratne, Centre: Sanjiva Senanayake)

From a very young age Sudharshan was drawn to archaeology and history and a die was cast. He was probably the only student at the time with this particular obsession. Was it preordained? Mr. K. L. F. Wijedasa (2024, 2025), who taught Sudharshan in the senior forms at Ananda, stated in an appreciation:

... I came to know Sudharshan when he joined the Senior Prep Form. On the first day of the class that I was teaching, I inquired from every student what they intended to do after their school career. When it came to Sudharshan's turn, he confidently said that he intended to do archaeology.

I was surprised to get that answer from a boy that young, and when I questioned him, he said that he has already read the *Mahawamsa* and the *Deepawamsa*. When I mentioned this to his elder brother, later Professor Harsha(lal) Seneviratne, the gynaecologist, he told me that when Sudharshan was in the middle school, he had gone to (a) second-hand bookshop and bought the book “*Indian Archaeology*” by Mortimer Wheeler a famous archaeologist.



Sudharshan developed some of his noble values and attitudes whilst at Ananda College, interacting with exemplary teachers such as the Venerable Dr. Kotagama Vachissara, who opened the minds of students to what the Buddha taught, disregarding the rituals that many who profess to be Buddhists in Sri Lanka implicitly follow. In the senior classes at Ananda he was influenced by teachers such as Mr. V. Thanabalasingham and read novels by diverse authors such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Steinbeck, Maugham and Camus, and the works of Tagore and Bertrand Russell. His attitudes and values were shaped by these experiences, though some of the reading was probably done at the expense of his studies. All these experiences and more melded together to make him open-minded to approach life and history with a non-parochial outlook and to always interpret events in the context of the time.

It's hard to pin down what actually bonded us together during our schooldays. While we were a mixed bunch, with diverse interests in subjects and extra-curricular activities (e.g., cricket, basketball, athletics, rugby, debating), some of us had common interests. We were never in the same class together. There were some family connections and common friends, as is usual in Lanka. Sanjiva lived close to Sudharshan's family home in the 1960s, and interacted as part of the local group of peers as well. Sudharshan was the life of many parties with his guitar and vocal skills, plus his Elvis Presley looks, of course. Admirers, drawn to him from various social strata, were many.

He held many noteworthy appointments in school, but two projects that brought us together stand out. The first was to edit the Ananda-Nalanda Big Match Souvenir in 1966 with Devasiri Rodrigo as co-editor. It was our first experience editing, publishing and managing commercial aspects of a publication. It was hard work, yet it was acclaimed for its quality and the many new features incorporated in a cricket match souvenir. It also brought us closer to Sanjiva Senanayake, who captained the cricket team in 1969, not through the connection with cricket but through the bond we developed with his mother Maya Senanayake who managed the printing press we selected to print the souvenir. Later, she treated us as her own sons and became a mentor to us.

The other collaboration was with the publication of the "SPARK" magazine. After a lapse of eight years, the Post Senior Students' English Literary Union, of which Sudharshan was the President and Devasiri Rodrigo the Secretary, along with Ananda Weerasuriya (by that time a close friend of ours), who was co-opted as a co-editor of "SPARK". The final product met the high expectations of the erudite former Principal, S. A. Wijayatilake under whose stewardship the first "SPARK" magazine was published to

"stimulate...among the members of the Union and the rest of the College a keen and abiding interest in the use of clear and effective English, both spoken and written, and in the boundless literature, on every conceivable subject."

We all contributed articles to "SPARK" on various subjects. Sudharshan wrote several articles including one on archaeology and his mature impressions on the tribulations of adolescence were reflected in another article. Sudharshan also contributed articles to the annual school magazine, including one in 1967 on the discovery and significance of the "Rosetta Stone".

The foundation for the formation of the “G4”, the name we gave our life-long alliance, was laid. After leaving Ananda, we went our separate ways, but were in Sri Lanka and always in close contact despite the absence of email and mobile phones. We met at social functions, shared meals and chat sessions that went on into the night at our homes or in a car parked at Galle Face.

In 1969, fresh out of Ananda, Sudharshan apprenticed under Dr. Siran Deraniyagala on the Anuradhapura Citadel excavations and built a life-long friendship with him. Later in life, they were Co-Directors of the Anuradhapura Citadel Archaeology Project. Subsequently each of us went abroad at different times, to different places and returned at different times during our long association: Sudharshan to India for his studies in New Delhi; Devasiri to Tanzania and the UK; Ananda to Germany and then USA; Sanjiva to the United Kingdom. But the G4 survived and prospered, undeterred by having only basic communication channels by today’s standards.

As time passed, our spouses were also drawn into the group. We had the unforgettable good fortune to be able to enjoy fabulous tours of Sri Lankan sites of historical importance – Anuradhapura, Dambulla, Mihintale, Galle – in the company of Sudharshan. There were many other trips too, purely to enjoy each other’s company.

No account of Sudharshan, the man, is complete without mentioning his devoted wife Harsha. If not for her unrelenting efforts, Sudharshan’s health would have prevented him from achieving much of what he did in the latter part of his very productive life. Harsha was truly a soul-mate and help-mate combined. He was a devoted family man, and we know the pleasure he took in guiding his daughter Shavera in her progress.

Commemorating Sudharshan, other contributors will write about Sudharshan the academic, the professor, the practicing archaeologist, the ambassador, the intellectual – the list goes on. But we were uniquely fortunate to have shared so much of his life and to experience the essence of this unique and exceptional human being.

We can only reminisce about Sudharshan, our brother who left us prematurely and echo the words Shakespeare gave to Mark Anthony at Julius Caesar’s funeral

“When comes such another?”

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