

Newsletter

VISAKHA VIDYALAYA OLD GIRLS' ASSOCIATION

133, Vajira Road, Colombo 5. www.visakhav.org

December 2016

“Visakha Vidyalaya has become a hive of activity as students, staff, past pupils and School Development Society prepare to celebrate the Centenary which falls in January 2017. I observe the keen enthusiasm of the members of various organizations and societies associated with the school, rallying round to line up an extravagant calendar of events to showcase 100 years of the illustrious history.

Publication of a special newsletter is most appropriate to record all these events, and I am indeed privileged to send this message of appreciation as the Principal of this great seat of learning as well as the President of the VVOGA.

The issue of a Commemorative Coin and a Stamp (with first-day cover) to honour the distinguished founder of Visakha Vidyalaya Mrs. Selestina Jeremias Dias will be the highlights of a lengthy program of events. I have no doubt that the present and past pupils will also take this golden opportunity to pay tribute to past Principals who successfully steered Visakha Vidyalaya to be the leading girls' school in the Island.

We are extremely fortunate to celebrate the Centenary, while generating excellent performances in the fields of education, sports and extra-curricular activities, gaining recognition as the leading Girl's school in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, I thank the members of the Visakha Vidyalaya Old Girls' Association for the commitment and dedication towards their alma mater and invite all of you to be a part of the memorable events lined up for the year 2017.

Wish you all great success in your future endeavors.”



Message from the president

Mrs. Sandamali Aviruppola



A journey of a Hundred years

Shanta Gunaratna

'She enjoyed giving' said a grand daughter of Mrs. Jeremias Dias in 1967. 'She' was our benefactress who founded Visakha Vidyalaya. Born on the 11th of November 1858, Selestina Rodrigo was brought up in a traditional Buddhist environment. Her destiny would be determined by her parents who arranged for her a marriage to Jeremias Dias, a well-known and prosperous businessman with investments in properties, distilleries and graphite.

Selestina settled and grew into her role as the supportive wife, and mother to eight children. She probably never thought of herself as a businesswoman. However on the sudden demise of her husband in 1902, she inherited his entire estate and investments. This role too, she appears to have undertaken with the practical good sense that marked her life, with assistance from her older children and relatives. Although she managed her affairs well, her life was not without sorrow and heartache. In quick succession, she lost her son Edmund Wilson who worked hard to help her recover from a financial set-back, and a daughter Ellen after an illness. Selestina faced all her trials and tribulations with courage and determination.

Selestina who had only studied up to grade 5, valued education. She sent her daughters to schools in Panadura and the youngest to a denominational school in Colombo supposedly disregarding the objections of

her conservative relatives, an indication that she was a woman with progressive sensibilities and of independent thought.

After visiting her daughter's boarding school she decided to set up a school for Buddhist girls in Colombo. She also had in mind to create a lasting memorial for her son Edmund Wilson and decided to utilize her son's inheritance for this project. At this time there was only one other school in Colombo exclusively for Buddhist girls.

'Buddhist Girls' College' - a residential English medium school for girls was started on the 16th January 1917 with 20 children. Selestina, (Mrs. Jeremias Dias) set up a trust with W. A. de Silva as a Trustee (at the time, the President of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, Colombo) to start the school, utilizing the money from her 'Good Hope' estate. A property known as 'The Firs' in Turret Road (now Dharmapala Mawatha) was leased for the school. The

school's first Principal was Dr. Bernice T. Banning, an American Theosophist. Buddhist practices were established from the first day of school with *pansil* and the chanting of the *mangalasutta*. Within one year, the school had enrolled 100 students.

The journey thus begun progressed slowly but steadily. Dr. Banning resigned after one year. The second Principal Ms. J. Ganguli was from Bengal. After two years she too resigned and we saw several changes of Principals in the next six years. However, these years were very eventful with the English School Leaving Certificate (ESLC) examinations being introduced in 1921, the first Prize Giving and Sports Meet being held the same year and the first Head Prefect and two prefects being appointed in 1923.

The management too saw some changes. W. A. de Silva resigned from his post as the school's Manager, and Selestina appointed D. B. Jayatilaka, D. S. Senanayake and her son-in-law Thomas Santiago de Silva as Trustees in February 1920. She maintained her interest in the school and requested to have a report on the progress and finances of the school sent to her annually. D. B. Jayatilaka functioned as Manager of the school until 1939.

In 1921 the school was recognized for government aid, and, as a secondary school. This meant the establishment of classes for higher public examinations such as the Junior Cambridge. Later, Senior Cambridge and Matriculation classes were introduced with excellent results. **A one hundred percent pass rate was recorded at the very first public examination establishing the school's academic standards for the future.**

During this time, the enrollment continued to grow, requiring larger premises, bigger residential facilities, and space for outdoor activities and for future development. Selestina purchased a three-acre land in Vajira Road, and started the construction of the hostel and classroom buildings in 1926. On 21st November 1927, the school moved to its present premises and Lady Stanley (the Governor's wife) re-named the school '**Visakha Vidyalaya**'.

The Principal at the time was Ms. Gweneth Pearse who had joined the school in 1922 as a teacher. She introduced Guiding to Visakha in 1923 - the 11th Colombo troop, the first in a Buddhist girls' school in Colombo. She also started a literary union, and during her seven-year tenure as Principal starting in 1926, she oversaw the setting of standards for academic excellence. Marie de Zoysa (Mrs.Hewavisenthi) came **first in the island at the 1929 ESLC** examination and opted for a teaching career. In 1932 the school reported excellent results at the first Matriculation examination with three students gaining admission to the University College.

Mrs. Jeremias Dias, would have been proud of the girls' examination results and by the progress of the school achieved within a relatively short time frame. She was a regular visitor to the hostel bringing vegetables and fruits from her garden and traditional sweets for the children. The British Colonial Government acknowledged her philanthropy by bestowing upon her the honour of Member of the British Empire (MBE) in 1929. Her commitment to the school continued until she passed away on the 26th March, 1933.

Very soon thereafter, the Principal Ms. Pearse got married (becoming Mrs. Dawes) and resigned from her post to return to Britain. Mrs. Clara Motwani, an American, succeeded her and was Principal for 12 years. During this time, the school became very active in extra-curricular activities such as drama, dance and music, a tradition that has continued to this day. The Visakha Vidyalaya Old Girl's Association (VVOGA) was also formalized, and a Parent-Teacher Association was formed. The first school magazine was published in 1934. A 'home making' course was introduced which became very popular.

The World War II forced the school to close down and relocate to three different places until 1944. Charles Dias, a son of Mrs. Jeremias Dias managed the school from 1939 to 1944.

In 1944 an eminent lawyer, N. E. Weerasooria KC., became the Manager of the school and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Mrs. Motwani resigned in 1945 and Mrs. Susan George Pulimood, from South India, was appointed the new Principal. A science graduate, she quickly set about introducing science into the curriculum. This proved to be a decision that propelled Visakha to the highest pinnacle of academic achievement and fame. On the very first occasion when the school entered students for science at the University Entrance examination, a Visakhian was selected as one of the six girls to gain admission that year to the faculty of Science. Over the following years, excellent results placed Visakha as the top **among all girls' schools**, and often at the **top among ALL schools, beating the boy's schools as well to become one of the leading academic institutions in the Island**. This status she continues to enjoy even today, as this heritage of excelling in every discipline is passed down from generation to generation of girls who pass through the school's portals.

Visakha became a Super-Grade school in 1957. The 22 years of Mrs. Pulimood's stewardship is referred to as the 'Golden Era' of Visakha. The School song was composed by Ananda Samarakone in 1947 and a Sinhala opera based on the story of the illustrious Visakha the 'Visakha Geetha Natakaya' was composed by Chandraratne Manavasinghe in 1958 with several public performances over the years. It was not 'studies only' for Visakhians as they excelled in extra-curricular activities breaking records and bringing home many coveted trophies. Visakha became a very '**big**' school. In appreciation of Mrs. Pulimood's service the VVOGA established the annual 'Pulimood Memorial Oration' in 1991, to recognize the achievements of illustrious alumnae, and to bring them back to school.



In 1960 the Board of Trustees decided to hand over the management of the school to the State, and, on 12th December 1961 it was vested with the state. The first Sri Lankan Principal, Mrs. Hema Jayasinghe took over from Mrs. Pulimood in 1967. Her biggest challenge was to get the infrastructure developed which she did admirably. She was responsible for getting the three storied classrooms built with state assistance. The construction of the Jeremias Dias hall- a monument to our Founder -was started, ably supported by the VVOGA. She also obtained adjacent land for a new playground from the State. At the same time, a significant government policy change saw the primary school been closed down in 1972. After a lapse of six years, it was re-introduced following a change of government in 1978.

With the introduction of the Grade Five scholarship examination in the 70's Visakha opened her doors to children from all over the country who came with dreams and aspirations for a quality education. After 16 years of service, Mrs. Jayasinghe was appointed Deputy Director General of Education and Mrs. Eileen Siriwardena, a well known author, was appointed Principal. The year was 1983. In the history of our country, this period was a tense time with civil unrest in the North and the South and constant threat of bombs. Students and parents will remember the security checks and vigilance committees. Despite threats, much of the school activities were conducted unhindered under the watchful

eyes of the staff, parents and Old Girls who donned new hats- that of security officers.

In 1984 Visakha Vidyalaya was declared a National School. Mrs. Mercy Nalini Edussuriya who took over in 1988, continued for nearly 12 years introducing the gymnasium and a permanent archives. The school progressed steadily gaining many accolades, academic and extracurricular. We celebrated our 75th Anniversary with the first 'Visakha Walk'. Visakha also became international with a student exchange programme established with the Junten high school in Japan. This was also a period of uncertainty in the country but we did well. After her retirement in 1999, the school had several short-term Principals - Mrs. Leela Jayasekera, Mrs. Indra Siriwardena and Mrs. Rupa Amarasinghe, each one giving her best for the up-liftment and sustenance of the school. Mrs Amarasinghe (2003-2007) oversaw the construction of the school's swimming pool and the VVOGA Dinner Dance became a reality.

Mrs. Sandamali Aviruppola took office in January 2009 and Visakhians continue to raise the bar at public examinations and in extracurricular activities. The school recorded the highest number of entrants to the medical faculty in the last several years bettering the numbers each year with 56 students entering this faculty in 2015. Mrs. Aviruppola steps in to the centenary year with pride with students winning the Inter-School Shakespeare Drama Competition twice, all island 'Sirasa Debater' contest, many sports championships and several international awards. With funds collected from school concerts and state assistance, she launched the construction of a 4-storey library building with expanded facilities, the 'Geethanjali Amarasuriya Centenary Library'.

Additionally, the VVOGA plans to donate a new primary school building for Grades 3 and 4 to mark the Centenary.

In retrospect Visakha has achieved great heights with a visionary founder, good governance, committed trustees and custodians, and concerned and caring Principals who went beyond their call of duty to uplift the school, maintain traditions and give the best to her students. These efforts have been supported by that special cadre of teachers and staff who remain beloved by their students long after their tenures have ended.

A dedicated Old Girls' Association has further strengthened the support structure of the school as past students continue to give back to their alma mater with their time, expertise and funds. As Visakhians continue to achieve great personal and professional success after they leave the school both in Sri Lanka and abroad, their successes and conduct matter to the school and enable the school to keep the flag flying high. Today more than ever, Visakhians' ethical conduct in both visible professional roles and in the private realm will reflect on the school and its community.

The notation that Visakha is not simply a school you attend, but the person you become, must be instilled in every student so that they wear their pahana with pride, knowing that it distinguishes them in life.

The future looks bright and as we reach 100 years and continue our journey into the 21st century, let us look back at the words spoken at the unveiling of Selestina's portrait in 1934 - **'The true memorial to Mrs. Jeremias Dias is in the work that the college would continue to perform in this generation and succeeding generations.'**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF VVOGA - 2016/2017



Seated (from L to R)

Ms. Sabitha Gunatilake, Ms. Anoja Fernando, Ms. Sujeenie Gunasekera (Treasurer), Ms. Renuka Dharmadasa (Joint Secretary), Ms. Shanta Gunaratne (Vice-President), Ms. Sandamali Aviruppola (President), Ms. Anoma Perera (Vice-President), Ms. Darshi Neelawathura Bandara (Joint Secretary), Ms. Achintha Jayawardena (Assistant Treasurer), Ms. Buddhini Medawatte (Staff Member), Ms. Punsirini Malavi, Ms. Samiddhi Dewapura

Standing (L to R)

Ms. Sashikala Perera, Ms. Sarangi Perera, Ms. Vajira Samithasiri, Ms. Sashi Liyanarachchi, Ms. Arosha Hemali, Ms. Ayomi Kaviratne, Ms. Irosha Chandrasekera, Ms. Nadeera Rajapakse, Ms. Nishanthi Wimalaratne, Ms. Akila Senaratne, Ms. Harshini Yapa, Ms. Chathuri Amaradiwakara, Ms. Pabalu Tennakoon, Ms. Chamindi Ekanayake, Ms. Nimali Heenpella, Ms. Dilanthi Koralagama, Ms. Kaushalya Mendis, Ms. Eranga Karunaratne, Ms. Udeshika Samaraweera, Ms. Harshini Madurapperuma, Ms. Anjana Hettiarachchi

Absent

Ms. Anula Wijesundara, Ms. Visakha Samaraweera, Ms. Priyangani Ratnasekera, Ms. Anju Ukwatte

CONVENERS 2016/2017

Archives Dilanthi Koralagama

Correspondence Ayomi Kaviratane

Equipment Nimali Heenpella

MO/Sick Room Kaushalya Mendis

Newsletter Nadeera Rajapaksha

School Matters Buddhini Medawtta

Social Activities Harshini Yapa

UK Bursary Nishanthi Wimalaratne

Cafeteria Shashikala Perera

Education Sarangi Perera

Fund Raising Pabalu Tennakoon

New Members Harshini Madurapperuma

Religious Activities Chamindi Ekanayaka

Secretariat Arosha Hemali

Website/Foreign Branches Chathuri Amaradiwakara



The heart of education is the education of the heart

Next year our alma mater marks the 100th anniversary of its founding. From very humble beginnings when the 'Buddhist Girls' College' opened in 1917 with just 20 students, Visakha has marched forward, unhindered growing in number, scope and prestige to be the leading girls school in the country today. As we celebrate in honor of its colorful history, one cannot help but feel an immense sense of pride and joy in being part of its glorious journey.

With an array of centennial events lined up, we are well poised to celebrate this momentous milestone in grand style. As our respective schedules get filled with organizing activities, it is important to remember to set aside some time to spend in quiet contemplation in honour of the memory of two great ladies who have been role models to all Visakhians - Mrs. Jeremias Dias, our iconic foundress, and Visakha Situ Devi, the great Buddhist lady who lends her name to our school. Both women with great wisdom, morality and charisma made profound impacts on society through their acts of compassion and selfless generosity. The story of the birth of our school and the inspirational lyrics of our school anthem bears testimony to the abundance of love, kindness and generosity they carried in their hearts toward fellow beings.

Times have changed significantly with humanity caught up in a relentless quest for material success. In today's fast paced world, where success is measured in terms of 'what I can achieve' rather than 'what we can contribute', one wonders how much our words, deeds and thoughts are informed by our hearts - those selfless qualities that our role models epitomized. The pressure of achievement is like quick sand - it drags you in before you even know it. When morality looks faded in the face of personal success, then we really need to ask ourselves if education has met its purpose. Education is simply not passing exams with flying colors. It is incomplete if we forget how to be respectful, kind-hearted, generous and genuine when dealing with one another.

We often hear adults complain about misplaced values of youth. Perhaps the messages that adults are sending is at the heart of the problem. As we all know, we adults have a tremendous impact on children. We need to ask ourselves how we set direction in their lives, if we take more interest in their material success than in their happiness. Grooming children to be a go-getter doesn't always lead to their moral and emotional well-being. Teaching children about caring and sharing by example will help build their emotional intelligence and think in terms of, 'not what society can do for you, but what you can do for society?'

The gift of education was Mrs Jeremias Dias's noble intent when she wanted a school for girls that upheld Buddhist values and morals. Visakha has paid her noble vision the greatest tribute by counting a century of excellence in all forms of academic and non-academic spheres. As we enter our second glorious century, with more Visakhians bound to lead the way, we must be more resolute than ever to be mindful of the perils of modern society and bring knowledge synergistically together with the right Buddhist values, so that we will become compassionate professionals, wise mothers and true Buddhist women who our visionary founder inspired us to be and who can truly live up to our school's motto - **'Pannaya Parisujjhati' - 'by wisdom is one cleansed'**

Knowledge alone does not produce wisdom. Transforming knowledge into wisdom requires input from the heart.

Editor
Nadeera Rajapakse

OGA Projects

Primary School Building

The VVOGA has embarked on an ambitious project to construct a 3-storied building for the primary section of the school. A long-felt need, the project will enable Grades 3 & 4, which are currently housed in the senior school, to be brought together with the rest of the primary classes bringing the primary school into one area. It will also include a parents' pavilion on the ground floor.

Planned to commence in mid-November 2016, the building is expected to be completed within six months. This is by far one of the most ambitious projects undertaken by us and a fitting gift to the school on the eve of its 100th year anniversary.

The cost of the project is estimated at Rs. 52.97 million. While thanking you for the generous support already extended, we appeal to you for your continued generosity in making this endeavor a reality.

Project Co-ordinator

Priyangani Rathnasekera

0777382705

Renovation of School Archives

A project to renovate and upgrade the school archives is underway, with plans to install new panels complete with photos and descriptions and to preserve its historical records and artifacts that are now deteriorating. The proposed improvements are designed and developed by the Department of Archaeology and the Department of Archives in close collaboration with the Archives Sub-Committee of the VVOGA.

As a repository for the collection and preservation of historically valuable records, the Archives hold a special place in our school, where Visakhians, young and old, can benefit from researching their school's rich history and culture. Therefore, we appeal to our old girls to help us realize this project in time for the centenary year with your kind contributions by way of sponsorships and donations.

Further, those who are in possession of any historically important documents, photos and artifacts relating to the school which can be used in our on-going efforts to develop the archives are kindly requested to share with us.

Project Co-ordinator / Convener

Archives Sub-Committee

Dilanthi Koralagama

0718350897



Hundred
years
on and
still growing
strong!

On the 16th of January 2017 Visakha Vidyalaya will turn 100 years. It was on a day like this, hundred years ago, that the foundation for a great vision was laid. There will be a special ceremony in school to mark this momentous day starting with a bodhi pooja in the Visakha Bo Maluwa followed by a special assembly.

VISAKHA CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS COMMITTEE

Chairperson

Mrs. Sita Siriwardena

Committee Members

Mrs. Shanta Gunaratne

Mrs. Anoma Perera

Mrs. Renuka Dharmadasa

Mrs. Darshi Neelawathura Bandara

Mrs. Sujeenie Gunasekera

Mrs. Achintha Jayawardena

Mrs. Sharmali Kodagoda

Mrs. Srimathi Jayasooriya

Mrs. Anoja Fernando

Mrs. Anula Wijesundera

Mrs. Punsirini Malavi

Ms. Savithri Nagodawithana

Mrs. Nadeera Rajapakse

Mrs. Sarangi Perera

Mrs. Harshini Yapa

Mrs. Arosha Hemali



Let's Celebrate





Centenary celebrations kick off with **DINNER DANCE**

The old girls of Visakha Vidyalaya kick started celebrating the legacy of 100 years of their alma mater with the 'Centenary Dinner Dance' that took place on the 29th October 2016, at the Oak Room of Cinnamon Grand. This is the first of a long line up of centennial events planned. It was a night to remember when nearly 500 guests came together for a joyous reunion of friendship and fellowship shared during school days. On all counts, this event of sophistication and charm was well planned and exquisitely presented by a fantastic committee whose untiring efforts have paid rich dividends, all of which is to support the English medium of study at Visakha.

Upcoming Centenary Events

Commemorative Coin

The VVOGA will launch a Commemorative Coin as a souvenir to mark the school's Centenary year. The frosted proof, gold and silver plated coin, issued by the CBSL, will have a rendering of the school logo on the observe side and a portrait of Mrs Jeremias Dias on the reverse. While it will be officially issued after its ceremonial launch on the 16th of January 2017, reservations are being accepted now by the VVOGA on full payment of its issue price of Rs 12,300. This coin will be a limited edition with only 900 pieces on sale. This unique memento is a beautiful way to remember the school's 100th year milestone. So hurry! Do not delay, reserve your coin soon.

Enquiries

Punsirini Malavi 0777 222 988

email - punsirini@yahoo.com

Visakha Centenary Walk 2017

Visakhians, young and old, are set to conquer the streets on the 11th of February 2017 when the 'Visakha Centenary Walk 2017' takes off amidst pomp and pageantry. The walk will commence at 7.30 am from school grounds and proceed down Havelock Road, Baudhdhaloka Mawatha, Galle Road, Dickman's Road and back to school via Duplication and Vajira Road, after which arrangements have been made for entertainment with food and music to keep toes tapping till 1.00 pm. All funds raised will be channeled to the primary school building fund. So dear friends, join hands with us in organizing this momentous event with your generous contributions, both in cash and in kind, and participation!

For details, please contact;

Nadeera Rajapakse 0777 377 121

email - nadeera@kuransa.lk

Pabalu Tennakoon 0770 717 160

email - pabalup@gmail.com

Visakha Centenary Carnival!

The Visakha Centenary Carnival is set to rock the city on the 7th and 8th of April 2017, when it will come alive with music, food, rides and entertainment for the whole family. The organizing committee is currently working out the initial arrangements and we will update you on the details through our website. As you could imagine, organizing a carnival is no small feat, so we need lots of volunteers and contributions, in making this an experience that will be etched in our memory forever.

For details get in touch with

Achintha Jayawardane 0773 626 164/0777 915 412

email - achinthatj@srilankainsurance.com

Visakha Centenary Exhibition

The talent and creativity of our school girls will be on display, when the Visakha Centenary Educational Exhibition opens to public at the end of March 2017 on school premises. We seek the valuable support of our membership, both in cash and in-kind, to make this event one of the best of its kind.

For details kindly contact

Ms Buddhini Medawatte 0772788401

email - buddhiniemedawatte@yahoo.com

Almsgiving for 100 Bhikkunis

On Saturday the 21st of January 2017, hundred bhikkunis clad in saffron robes will solemnly walk into our school hall to accept alms given in a traditional Buddhist ceremony in memory of the school's Centenary anniversary. On this very special occasion, we will come together with this monastic community to invoke blessings on our school and wish it strength in carrying forward its noble mission.

Enquiries can be made from

Chamindi Ekanayaka 0776 161 475

email - chamekanayake@yahoo.com

Centenary Magazine

We request old photographs from the 1920's -30's up to 1960's of school events for the Centenary Magazine. High resolution scanned pictures are ok. Also, we request all Head Prefects to send in a photograph taken during the year, eg. from the pahan ceremony if you haven't already done so. Old school magazines too are welcome.

Please contact

Shanta email - shantagun@gmail.com

Achievements In House

D S P Amashi Niwarthana, studying in grade 13, led the team who won the Gold Medal for the Earth Science Project at the 10th International Earth Science Olympiad held in August 2016 in Mie, Japan.



Visakhians were adjudged **the champions at the 43rd Inter-school Shakespeare Drama Competition** held in September 2016. They also bagged the awards for the Best Stage Craft, Best Actress – Sashini Mudalige (Romeo) and Best Supporting Actress – Rumashi Dissanayaka (Mercutio).





The performing art talents of Visakhians were on display when they took to the stage to perform a hilarious drama about an unlucky innocent named **Candide** in July 2016, presented by the Drama & Debating Society of Visakha Vidyalaya.



Visakha won the **13th annual Water Polo Championship by retaining the M N Edussuriya Trophy for the 6th Consecutive year** in October 2016.

Visakha Vidyalaya came out the **winners of the National School Games Table Tennis Title for under 19** in October 2016.

Achievements of Old Girls

First Sri Lankan on UNESCO IBC

Head Girl in 1963, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology Anoja Fernando, MBBS, BA, FRCP (Lond), was recently appointed by Director-General Irina Bokova to the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee (IBC), a body of 36 independent experts that follows progress in the life sciences and its applications in order to ensure respect for human dignity and freedom. The IBC provides the only global forum for reflection in bioethics. She is the first Sri Lankan to be appointed to this prestigious UNESCO committee.



In 1981, Anoja was the first Visakhian to be appointed a Professor in a Faculty of Medicine, and was the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, from 1990 to 1996. She delivered the inaugural Susan George Pulimood Oration in 1990. Anoja was president of the Sri Lanka Medical Association in 2001 and was elected the first woman president of the Asian Bioethics Association in 2010. Currently she serves as the President of the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association. While congratulating you on keeping the school flag flying high, we wish you the very best in carrying out this important work.

Visakhian to a top Yale position



Nilakshi Parndigamage, head prefect in 2000, has been appointed as the Dean of one of Yale University's undergraduate colleges, Ezra Stiles. Nilakshi earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Yale in 2006 on a full scholarship and then went on to receiving her Juris Doctor degree from the University Of Virginia School Of Law.

During her time at Visakha, she has won several international public speaking contests and was honoured at the Buckingham Palace by Prince Phillip for winning the ESU International Best Speaker Award, where she beat over 50 competitors from around the world to clinch the title. She has also represented Sri Lanka at various UNESCO conferences and has won many accolades during her university career at Yale. You make your alma mater proud and we wish you the very best in reaching greater heights.

A Leading Woman in Engineering

Jeewika Ranawera is a principle hardware engineer who develops high-speed microprocessors at Oracle in the Silicon Valley. She received her Bachelor's in computer science and engineering from ISPJAE in Havana, Cuba and her Master's and PhD in electrical and computer engineering (ECE) from the University of Toronto, Canada. Jeewika is an IEEE senior member and is active in IEEE Women in Engineering (WIE). She authored an e-Book for WIE: "My three journeys - finding professional and personal fulfillment as an engineer" to inspire others to become engineers. She accredits ECE programs at universities as an ABET evaluator, and judges local and international science fairs. Jeewika has four U.S patents and has authored many papers published in international journals and conferences. Our heartiest congratulations to you, for steering such an illustrious career in a field that is typically dominated by men.



Events Concluded

Medical Camp

The annual medical camp organized by the Medical Sub-Committee of the VVOGA was held on the 08th of May 2016 on school premises. About 240 people comprising past and present teachers and their family members were seen by over 20 consultant specialists on this day. The occasion was graced by Dr Samindi Samarakoon, the Deputy Director of National Hospitals, who was the Chief Guest.



Esala Sil Programme by VVOGA 19th July

The Esala Sil program was held on the 19th of July at the Visakha Bo Maluwa amidst a well attended gathering of past and present principals, teachers and old Visakhians. Organized by the Religious Sub-Committee of the VVOGA, the program included sermons from several revered Buddhist monks, a meditation program conducted by an eminent lay practitioner and bodi poojas in the morning and evening.



AGM & Sing-Along

The Annual General Meeting of the VVOGA was held on the 25th of June 2016 at the Jeremias Dias hall to appoint the new executive committee for 2016/2017. After the formal proceedings were over, members gathered in the old hall for an evening of fun and fellowship with a sing-along that went on till late evening.





Pulimood Oration

'Safeguarding children and childhood from environmental hazards' was the topic of the 26th Pulimood Oration when Professor Manouri Senanayake took the stage to deliver a very apt message for present times to a well-attended audience, on the 23rd of July 2016. A past Visakhian, Professor Senanayake is a Consultant Pediatrician and a Senior Professor in Pediatrics in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo.



Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony

The foundation Stone laying ceremony for the "Geethanjali Amarasuriya Anusmarana Siyawas Pushathakalaya" was held on the 26th of August in the school.



Sumana Saparamadu author, journalist, and stalwart of the WVOGA joined Visakha in 1930. After leaving school and graduating with first class honours in Sinhala and Pali in 1946, she went to Australia on a scholarship to study psychology. On her return she joined the Lake House group of newspapers to become a journalist instead of joining the university as a lecturer. She worked at Lake House for more than 40 years. She championed the cause of women and children and was appointed Editor of the 'Tharuni' Newspaper and later 'Mihira' a children's paper. Her love for children was very evident when after her retirement, she was invited by Mrs. Rupa Amarasinghe the Principal of Visakha, to reside in the hostel. As a resident, she took it upon herself to mentor the scholars who came from far way places and were often homesick. She saw to their needs and counselled them. She encouraged them to play saying "children need to play not study all the time." In return the children loved her. She taught them English and made sure they practiced the language with her, and shared her vast knowledge of Sri Lanka with them telling them about our ancient history, geography and heritage. She also taught them etiquette to help them conform to social norms and participated in a dahampasala on Sunday mornings. Her concern for the children was seen when she helped with the preparations for the performance of the Visakha Geetha Natakaya in 2007. Rehearsals went on late into the night. She provided biscuits and tea to the participants and stayed till the last child went home after rehearsals before retiring for the day.

Sumana was a very active member of the WVOGA participating in all the fund raising events Mrs. Pulimood put together, and functioned as the chairperson of the 50th anniversary seven day carnival held at the Race Course in 1967. Having being an editor, Sumana was particular about the correctness of documents and procedures.

She gave sound advice on many matters pertaining to our association. She was disappointed that education in recent times did not emphasize values adequately and was impatient with people who were ignorant of our culture, and traditions.

Sumana was very interested in the history of the school and was consulted when clarifications were needed and she never failed to enlighten us. Her memory, even recently was very clear as she recalled many events and names for the centenary publication. Most of our junior members are not aware of the tremendous service she rendered to the school. In any controversy she was consulted. She stood up for what was right, and was respected for doing so. She was an independent thinker. We admired her courage and her forthrightness. She advocated justice, fair play, honesty, integrity, and transparency. Her stand on any issue was never personal but on principle, and always motivated by her deep love for the school. Sumana served the WVOGA as a member of the Executive Committee, as Secretary and several times as Vice- President. She was a Trustee of the Susan George Pulimood Educational Trust and was involved in the organizing of the Pulimood Oration from the inception.

Our association with Sumana dates back to the 60's. She was an ardent admirer and supporter of Mrs. Pulimood and later of Mrs. Jayasinghe. Through her contacts in the media she gave much publicity to the schools' achievements. She was proud to be a Visakhian.

Sumana wrote many children's stories and some based on Jataka stories which she connected beautifully to the present. Although she was a published author, she never sought publicity or accolades for her work. When she left the hostel, she was missed by the students. She continued to participate in the Sunday Daham classes until travelling became difficult due to



Remembering Sumana Saparamadu

Shanta & Savitri



advancing age. As a Buddhist she did not believe in rituals but in self-development and meditation. She was a loyal and caring friend to all those who knew her well.

Sumana had a long unbroken partnership with Visakha and was perhaps the longest serving, and active member of the WVOGA. Her loyalty to Visakha and the WVOGA can never be challenged. She was one of the few 'Old Girls' who supported her Alma Mater whole heartedly right through her lifetime with no vested interests. We were privileged to have known her and the hostellers who were guided by her were indeed very fortunate.

May she attain the supreme bliss of Nirvana.

Sub-Committee Announcements

Volunteers Needed

We need volunteers to serve at the VVOGA Secretariat and to undertake photocopying responsibilities during school hours. Those interested should contact,

Arosha - 0772 519 975

Teachers for Dhamma School

We need teachers who have passed the Sunday School final exam to teach at the Dhamma school conducted by the VVOGA for hostellers. Those who are eligible and interested please contact,

Sabitha - 0717 448 899

Obituaries

It is with deep sorrow that we notify the demise of Mrs Lakshmi Pasqual, retired teacher of Visakha Vidyalaya, who passed away in September 2016.

We are also saddened by the death of Dr Nanda Gamage, a past Joint Secretary and a past active member of the VVOGA, who passed away in October 2016. She was a retired medical officer of the Chest Clinic.

'May their journey through samsara be short'



Registered at the Department of Posts of Sri Lanka
Under No: QD/175/NEWS/2016

Visakha Vidyalaya Old Girls' Association
133, Vajira Road, Colombo 05.

