

# St. John's College, Jaffna

## Media Report – AW Rajasekaram's Family Visits St. John's

On 23.10.2017, Mrs. Mathini Navanayagam and Mrs. Kamalini Sathyendran, eldest and youngest daughters of our Late Principal, Mr A.W.Rajasekaram, visited St. John's College. The former had been a teacher of English, Christianity and Singing at St. John's from 1968 to 1975 in the Lower, Middle and Upper Schools. Mrs. Kamalini Sathyendran brought her son, Dinesh Sathyendran, grandson of the past principal along with her. The trio was from UK and was on a short stint in Sri Lanka.

'St. John's went through a period of rough sails during my father's tenure as its Principal,' recounted the youngest when the Editor of the Media Club asked her about her past memories of the College. 'It was during his time that the College had to make the hardest decision ever – whether to allow itself to be taken over by the state or to opt to become a Private and Non-Fee-Levying School. The school sold the Mahogany trees inside its campus, sold its properties and channeled all funds to the running of the College. My father had to sell the Principal's car to pay the teachers' salary; staff, old boys, parents and well-wishers chipped in as much as they could. Back then, it was a closely knit community and everyone helped. Now, we too feel like doing something for the College.'

Asked how they would like to help the college, she replied, 'Rajasekaram Block needs a facelift. We want to do something about it. Since my father's passion was Mathematics, Christianity and English, we are thinking of creating a Prize Endowment Fund. We are yet to decide. We also have some charity work in Puthukudiyiruppu.'

'My father passed away at 59. I was just ten then. Only my eldest sister of the five siblings was working at that time. It was purely God's Grace that saw us through the challenges. We now wish to pass on God's blessings to those in need,' she added.

The last time I came to St. John's was in 2004 – during Mr. S.Thanapalan's time. It was a quick visit. This time, we have got more time to spend. We are very happy to read about our father from the archives.'



'As we went on a tour of the school we took a walk down memory lane. The different blocks awoke in us memories of the past. We won't ever forget the early memories at St. John's – our childhood days here were absolutely super,' she reminisced. She looked ready to trade everything she had for a day with her dad and family at St. John's.

Mrs. Mathini Navanayagam expressed similar sentiments. 'I am thankful for the time I got to serve as a teacher at St. John's. The present Principal, the Rev. N.J.Gnanaponrajah, too was a student of mine,' she said with a note of pride in her voice.

'The respect that the Sri Lankan students have for their teachers is really laudable. My students in the UK, still call me 'Miss.' Talking of discipline, I am reminded of an incident that happened in

the life of my husband. He went to UK for his Advanced Levels. On the very first day, when the teacher stepped into the classroom, he jumped up from the chair to greet the teacher. Laughter followed. He looked back and to his embarrassment, saw the entire class seated, laughing at what had just then happened.'

'The way children are brought up in Jaffna and disciplined by St. John's is creditable,' she continued. 'It is basically the upbringing that we had that enabled us to give our children the values that they now have. Crooked at the beginning...crooked all the way.'

Dinesh Sathyendran, grandson of Late AW Rajasekaram said, 'It is a real honour and I consider it a privilege to come here and see the legacy my grandfather has left behind. It is very nice to see the school doing extremely well despite the challenges it had to face, especially after its decision to fund for itself. I am also thankful to the Principal and St. John's for the hospitality extended to us.'

The other times we were in Jaffna, we were usually on the move or locked up

inside houses. This time we had some walking to do. It was nice walking inside the school, walking along the streets and being told by my mom and aunt about the stories of the past. I got to see the room where my mom sat and studied and the rooms where my aunt taught. It was nice to somehow be a part of the experiences they had much before I was born. I was taken back in time to history.



Asked whether he would come again, he replied, 'The Principal suggested that I come during my summer vacation and share my time and expertise with the students at St. John's. Who knows? I may come here more often than you dare to think.'

### **A Short Biography of Late AW Rajasekaram, Principal of St. John's College from 1957 to 1966**

Mr.A.W.Rajasekaram succeeded Mr.P.T.Mathai in May 1957 as the Principal of St. John's College. St. John's made the bold decision to opt to become a Private and Non-Fee-Levying School during Mr Rajasekaram's principalship. The move, taken in faith, was greatly supported by the Old Boys' Association and well-wishers. It was an uphill task for the late Principal till he bade an early farewell to St. John's in December 1966 due to stroke and subsequently to the world in 1968 at the age of 59.

Writing of his retirement, Mr Preman Rajadurai pens down, 'In the administrative scene, 1966 saw the sad parting of Mr A.W. Rajasekaram one of our finest principals. I can still remember how he broke down during his farewell address.' In his recollections, Mr. Preman notes the demise of the Principal, thus: 'During the latter part of 1969 we lost one of our best loved and revered Principal, Mr A.W. Rajasekaram who guided the school during the most difficult period of modern St Johns.'

The Late Principal was held in such high esteem that Dr.Devanesan Nesiah opened a block in honour of 'one of the finest, best, loved and revered Principal of St. John's College' in 1983.

## A Note from the Principal

We are very much grateful to the children of our late Principal, Mr. AW Rajasekaram - Mrs. Ruth Mathini Navanayagam (former teacher), Miss Christina Ranjini Rajasekaram (former Accountant) and Mrs. Evangeline Kamalini Sathyendran for creating a Memorial Trust Funds in remembrance of their father, Mr. AW Rajasekaram and their brother Mahilrajan Rajasekaram (old boy). Details of the Trust Funds are given below:

AW Rajasekaram Memorial Trust Fund for the maintenance of the AW Rajasekaram Block –	Rs. 1,000,000/=
AW Rajasekaram Memorial Gold Medal Trust Fund	Rs. 300,000/=
AW Rajasekaram Memorial Trust Fund Prize for Christianity	Rs. 100,000/=
Mahilrajan Rajasekaram Memorial Prize for Mathematics	Rs. 100,000/=
TOTAL	LKR. 1.5 Million

Generations have looked up to our late Principal, Mr. AW Rajasekaram for his bold decision to resist allowing the College to be taken over by the State. It was the Rev. Joseph Knight who sowed the seed that is now St. John's. Though over the years the various Principals pruned it, it was Mr. AW Rajasekaram who stopped the tree from changing course.

The College is grateful to the Rajasekaram family for the Trust Funds created. Generations of children who walk in through the gates of the College will benefit from this benevolent gesture.

May the souls of this gallant Principal and his brother rest in peace.

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