

## All the Way at SLBC

### Sunil de Silva



In 1969 I joined then Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation (C B C) to have my in-plant training of the N D T course. The Late **Sunil Kodituwakku, Kingsley Abenayake, Thilak Malawara Arachchi and Jayampathi** were the other trainees with me. Jayampathi happened to be the first lady TA Trainee to join CBC that was in 1971 after completing the in-plant training period.

During this training period I had the opportunity of working at **Welikada Tx., Outside Broadcast Section (O B) and Control Room**. At Welikada Tx. I had the privilege of working with some senior TAs like the late **Mr Tony Fernando**, the late **Mr Titaus Wijesinghe, Mr. K.A.C. Perera**, the late **Mr. Edmond Perera**, the late **Mr. Kekulawala, Mr Rajith Wickramasinghe, Mr Steelman (junior) and Mr. Ramalingam. Tony Fernando** always behaved in an official manner. He did not talk to us much. Every instruction came to us on paper. **Titus** was a completely different person who did not take anything seriously and never panicked even in a TX. failure. He takes his own time and attends to it. When **Edmond uncle** was on duty, he always wanted us to be with him when he was meddling with the TX. He had a good knowledge on those TX's. He encouraged us to ask questions and to learn more about the TX. He was a radio amateur (Radio Ham) too. You cannot stop him when he starts talking about his TX at home which was built by him.. **K.A.C.** was a very good cook. He always liked to cook something special to have as bites for the boost up in the evening.

**Keku** used to have a bath every night and collected water in to the two barrels which were behind the TX. Hall. One day Titus, Keku and I were on the night shift and Titus brought some red coloring and put it in to the two barrels. At about 8.30 Keku went for his usual bath. That place was dark without any lights. After about 20 minutes I saw Keku coming to the Tx hall with his towel on, and as soon as he entered the hall he started shouting “**MACHAN..... BLOOD, MACHAN...BLOOD.....**” and came running towards control desk where we were seated. I could not stop laughing and ran out of the hall. After few minutes he realized what had happened and had a fresh bath before joining us for dinner forgetting all what happened.

From Welikada, I was transferred to the O B. It was an unforgettable period in my S.L.B.C. life. **Mr.H.D. Somapala**, the late **Mr. Titus Wijesinghe, Mr. K.A.C. Perera**, the late **Mr. W Subasinghe**, the late **Mr.H.D.Dayapala, Mr. S.P.Jayasundara and Mr. Ananda Wettasinghe** were some who were there during that time. The late **Mr. L.E. Thilakarathne** was the Eng.-in-charge. I had the opportunity of visiting so many places in the country. I was a member of the O/B party who went to cover the Nallur kovil festival that year. It was a memorable trip. We spent about ten days in Jaffna, doing recordings and live broadcasts from various places. Every day we were invited for dinner or lunch (with fresh toddy), by our

announcers and producers who were from Jaffna who went with us for the O/B. I can remember on the water-cutting ceremony day I was on the temporarily made platform closer to the water tank, with a mixer and a line amplifier. When the ceremony started, devotees gathered around the water tank and rushed towards the platform and it started shaking and was about to topple, when I started shouting asking people to move from there. few police constables came for my help. The OB was carried out without any interruption. After the festival main priest of the temple took us to a shop with full of brassware and wanted us to take anything we want free of charge. That was my first and the last trip to Jaffna till I left SLBC. **Mr. Dayapala** and **Mr. Ananda Wethasinghe** were very serious when they go out for an O/B. Mr. Wethasinghe gets up early in the morning with a muffler around the head sits near the 5115 TX. in the O/B. bus and starts tuning it to send the best signal to Colombo. He had an excellent knowledge in TX's. Mr. Dayapala too wants to get ready for the O/B. in time; he does not want to wait till the last moment. It was very interesting to work with **Titus, Jayasundera** and **Somapala**. They did not take anything seriously. When they go out for an O/B. they wanted to finish the O/B. and enjoy the trip. They did not hesitate to give us the responsibility in carrying out the O/B or the O/R. - of course under their supervision. In no time I was capable to carry out an O/B alone, thanks to them. Some times when we had a problem with police Mr. Jaysundara is the one who comes to our rescue, when he tells them "I am **"S.P."** Jaysundara" everything is settled.

I was a member of the SLBC cricket team from the day I joined. This was the time I came to know lot of senior TAs - **Senarath Jayawardena, Shanthi Jayaweera, Sri SkanthaRaja, M.A.H. Gunarathne ( MUDDARAYA )** the late **Lesley Fernando and Perera Pulle** who played in the team and **T.C. Senanayaka, P.S. Fernando, J.T. Mendis, Sarath Gamage, Devendra Weerasinghe, Ernest Corea, Late Rangith Edirisinghe, Marasinghe** and few others who came to the ground to cheer us. More TAs joined us after the match to have a drink and enjoy. It was really an interesting period in my SLBC life. When talking of SLBC's cricket **Mr. Wijegunasekara (Chief Security officer)** is unforgettable. He gave all the support to keep the team's moral high.

In 1971 April when the JVP insurrection broke out our In-plant training was discontinued. In August the same year we were taken in as TAs in training. We were paid Rs. 7.00 per day. I was to report at Weeraketiya Tx. as instructed by **Mr. David Buell, DDG (Eng) (One of the few great and honorable men served this institution)**. **Mr. T.D. Pathmasiri** was the Eng. In charge and **Mr. Rabel** was the O.I.C.. **Earnest Corea**, the late **Shirley Karunarathne, Range Chandrasena** and the late **Camillus Fernando** were some of the TAs whom I can remember, working at that time. I was there for about one year. I can remember Ernie taking me to Matara railway station early morning in the station vehicle to catch the Ruhunu Kumari train to Colombo for the cricket matches starting at ten in the morning on the same day. **Peter (HOOTAR.....)** was our cook. In the evening we use to go to the boutique in front of the gate and have a cup of tea prepared by **Sudasinghe's** sister **SUNDARI**. **Kalu Akka** and **Magnna** are some to remember.

I can remember one day about fifteen officers from Head Office came to Weeraketiya. A dinner party was arranged at the Junior Staff Quarters. Halfway through the party we heard someone hooting, to see one of our senior officers under the table with a glass in his hand. Every Sunday we used to go to Ranna to buy fish and a bottle for a small night party. After about one year I was transferred back to Colombo. Later I came to know that this was on a request made to the Director General by our Sports Secretary.

At Diyagama, Mr Pathmasiri and Mr Rabel were there as engineers when I was transferred to Diyagama in 1976. Mr. **M.K.A. Perera** was the OIC (Maintenance) and the **late Mr.O.O. (Doubleo) Perera** was OIC (Aerials). The late Mr. **Titus Wijesinghe, Mr. K.A.C Perera**, the late **Mr. L.P.Candrasena** were the OIC shifts. Mr. Chadrasena died while on duty due to a heart attack. **Mahendra Mapatuna, K S.Silva, M.J.S. de Silva**, the late **A.B.Fernando, D.P.de Silva and D. Somadasa** were some of the TAs worked in the shift. I can remember one day an employee attached to the security section came to the TX hall drunk and started abusing Mr. Rabel who was in his office room. M.J.S. and I were listening to this for sometime and went to Mr. M.K.A. Perera – OIC and told him that we were going to chase the fellow out. We hammered him until he went out of the gate and after that he did not report for duty at Diyagama.

**Guneris Mama** who made tea for us in the day shift was an interesting character. The fun we had with him is unforgettable. He sold cigarettes to the employees, about ten cents more than the usual price. To make him angry, we opened his cupboard and took the cigarettes and hid. When he found his cigarettes missing he got angry and started scolding everybody in the shift and sometimes complained to Mr.Pathmasiri. He was about 70 years old and used to cycle to Diyagama junction to get meals from **Thay Maama** who supplied meals for the staff

I had the opportunity to work with senior TAs like the late Mr. **K.P. Perera** , the late Mr. **K.M.C. Jayawardena, S.D.Fernando, the late Mr. A.P.Jayasooriya, Mr. Chandra Dharmapala, Mr. Arulananda Samy, the late H.D.Perera (KUKULA), the late Mr. Sahadevan**, as OICs, and **Thilak Ranasinghe**, the late Mr **Brian Jansz, the late Mr. Cliffed Dasanayaka, the late Mr. Gratian Dias, the late Mr. M.K.S. Perera, Rosmond Senaratne, M.A.H. Gunaratne P.S. Fernando, Jayantha Mendis, Anton Bolonne** were some who worked in the shift.. It was very interesting to listen to Brian Jansz talking about the film that he saw on the previous day. When Chandra was in the night shift, he made origami models and enjoyed it. He sometimes recalled the funny things they did in the past which were very interesting.

It was in 1977, SLBC T.O.U. went on one day token strike. I can remember TAs walking in front of the Corporation building holding placards and shouting slogans. There were about ten of our members who went to work without participating in the strike. I can remember even the non-technical staff showing their displeasure hooting at those TAs who did not participate in the strike. This hooting was there for about two days. Ernest Corea who was the Secretary of the Union was interdicted for hooting at then OIC Control room Mr. A.P.Jayasooriya, and later he was taken back. On the next day after the strike a Sinhala verse on the double-crossing of the ten TAs was heard over all VHF mobilophones links at the same time. Senior Engineers and management tried their best to find out the place where it was originated but failed. Later the SLBCTOU took a decision to suspend the membership of those ten TAs..

**M A.H.** was very famous for his stamp collection and as a result, he was nicknamed as “**MUDDARYA**” when he was on the night shift in commercial recording room, after every play back he ran back to the dormitory and took out few stamps from the envelopes which he put in the sink to soak and came in time for the next play back or the Recording. He is a chain smoker and loves to have a cup of plain tea with the cigarette. He is a great friend and a harmful person.

TAs dormitory became the boarding house of some of our friends who's residence are far away from Colombo. **Sumathi, Mare**, are some of those. I can remember Marsinghe playing his guitar with only a towel on, during his off time in the dormitory. When Thilak Ranasinghe was relieved for dinner when working in the continuity he never came back till close of transmission. He comes back at about 11.30 holding the walls of the corridor. One day When I was working in C3 had to play back a bana tape at 8 in the morning, and few second after playing back the tape noticed that I have played the wrong one, and as I cannot stop the tape I got the correct tape and cued it to the point where it starts Pansil And played the correct tape stopping the wrong one at beginning of Pansil. Any way After the P/B I went to then Director Sinhala Service Mr. H.M..Gunasekara who was in charge of those programs and told him what happened.

In 1985 I was promoted to TA 1. Later I was transferred back to Diyagama TXs. Mr. G.M. Fernando was the Eng. In Charge and late Mr. **Meril Botheju** was the O/C maintenance. I was appointed as one of the O/C in four shifts operated. An incident that I remember for a long time was the death of **Mr. Srinath**, one of our TA's worked at Diyagama due to a fatal accident. The day that **Anura silva** ( TA ) cut his own hand with a blade after an argument had with Mr. G.M. Fernando was a horrible incident I face at Diyagama TX's.

1992 I was attached to Control room. Late **Mr. Lal Alwis** was my Eng. in charge. In 1992 I was appointed as the senior O/C control room where I had the opportunity to work with late Mr. Alwis closely. He became a very good friend of mine rather than my Engineer. He was a person who could talk with for days. He read lot of books on Buddhism. He always liked to share the knowledge that he gathered from reading. He became a family friend of mine at the later stage of his life. Lal changed his life style completely after his retirement. I was near his bed for about two hours after the operation he underwent talking about S.L.B.C. Soon I returned home from hospital, Arunashantha from C/R gave a call and said that Mr.Alwis passed away, was unbelievable. I could not talk for some time. I passed this sad news to Rohini only after about 15 minutes.

When the new studio complex was declared open by His Excellency The President Hon. D.B. Wijetunge on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1993, I had the privilege to link the programs from the old studio complex to the new one at the auspicious time as the O.I.C. in the new C/R room. It was a memorable incident in my life at S.L.B.C.

In 1999 I retired, keeping all the happy memories of my 30 years of service at S.L.B.C. During this period, I had a great opportunity to come across excellent set of guys, who later became my friends forever.

I wish all present and past members of S.L.B.C. good luck and healthy life.