

Jawaharlal (Lal) Asoka Herath

Lal was the second child born to Alfred and Stella Herath on 15-May-1937 in Negombo.

Alfred Herath was a Co-operative Inspector and an admirer of Indian leaders who duly named his only son after Nehru, the former

Prime Minister of India. Both Alfred and Stella were originally from Katugastota in Kandy; they also had two daughters,

late Indira Ratnayake and Situmini Tyagi, Lal's siblings.

Lal's early education was at Dharmaraja College, Kandy. He was a capable academic securing the mathematics prize every year.

He also played cricket with friends and was an athletic youngster. When he was 17 his father passed away and Stella and the

children moved to Colombo, mainly for Lal's senior school education at Ananda College, Colombo followed by his higher education

at University of Colombo. Lal often remembered with gratitude how his mother managed to bring up three children and university

educating him with great difficulty with just a widow's pension.

Graduating from the Engineering Faculty with an honours degree in 1960, Lal had a short stint at St Thomas' College,

Mount Lavinia as a graduate teacher, during which he took the College Cadet Platoon on their Annual Camp to Diyathalava.

Following that he accepted an engineering appointment by the Public Services Commission of Ceylon, working for the Overseas

Telecommunications Service (OTS - now SLT). In 1962 he was awarded a scholarship by the Colombo Plan fund to be trained as

a Telecommunications Engineer at Cable & Wireless Training Centre in Penzance, Cornwall. During his 18 months at the training

centre Lal became the captain of its athletics team, winning the "Victor Ludorum" shield in 1963, the first Asian to do so.

His main events were 100 yards sprint, 4x4 relay and the javelin throw. He was also a member of the hockey team.

Returning to Ceylon after his training in England he married Cynthia Jayakody in early 1964. Lal continued with the OTS and

worked at various transmissions sites in Negombo area. As he gained engineering and management experience in the field of

Radio & Electrical Engineering he acquired his professional status (charter) at the age of 30. He also gained two additions

to his family - Lakmini & Roshan were born in 1964 and 1966 respectively.

In 1971 Lal decided to take a career diversion and joined the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation (CBC - now SLBC) as the Super

intendent Engineer Transmissions. Many radio transmitting facilities all over Sri Lanka were under his technical management.

It is no secret to those who worked with him how passionate he was about his work and the integrity with which he carried out

his duties at all times. For Lal, work did not finish at 5pm in the office, he took work home and experimented, discussed,

studied and spent time on work projects, at home. He often got his family involved in his work related projects, through which

they also learnt about radio broadcasting!

Lal was a leading member of the engineering team who partnered the Japanese engineers in pioneering Television in Sri Lanka

in the late 70s. The television project happened to be the last major project Lal was involved with before another career

diversion.

An opportunity to work overseas came up in 1979 and reluctantly Lal accepted a post in the UAE. He worked for Emirates

Telecommunications (EMIRTEL - now ETISALAT) for a number of years on microwave telecommunications projects and then a similar

post in the Sultanate of Oman.

He returned to Sri Lanka with many years of overseas experience and joined the SLBC again as the Deputy Director General of

Engineering. He left the SLBC after completing a major FM radio transmissions project in 1994. Prior to his retirement in 1997

at the age of 60, he worked as a Project Manager for Sri Lanka Telecom Services (SLTS).

Lal was a practical, hands-on engineer. His work ethic was exemplary for many of his colleagues and juniors follow; planning his

work with meticulous attention to the last detail and handling every aspect of work with utmost integrity. Another rare quality

which must be mentioned is Lal's complete lack of hesitation in commending and recommending engineers or technicians who worked

hard, even if it meant they would overtake him on the career ladder. If Lal's work life could be condensed in to three words,

they would be commitment, passion & integrity.

In February 2010, the untimely death of his daughter Lakmini (Lucky) who served in the US Army, was a difficult episode

in Lal's life. Following this loss, after a short period of illness Lal passed away in July 2010. He leaves Cynthia, his wife

of 47 years, son Roshan, daughter-in-law Stefanie and four grand children; Ceylon, Rebecca, Kristian & Jonathan.