

1977 Science Faculty Batch Get-together

Forty years! That is nearly half the life expectancy. That was when the batch of '77 entered the Science Faculty of that hallowed institution – University of Colombo – the oldest institution of modern higher learning in Sri Lanka. On December 8, 2018, a get-together involving a large number of alumni both in Sri Lanka and abroad was held at the Pegasus Reef Hotel, Wattala. True, the fortieth anniversary should have been in 2017 but the well-organized event more than vindicated the one-year delay.

The 1977 science batch was selected based on the 1976 April Advanced Level results (nearly 60,000 sat for the exam) and they started the freshman year just prior to the July 1977 General Election. There were 120 students in the physical science batch with 40 each in the three combinations (Applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics; Applied Mathematics, Pure Mathematics, Chemistry; Applied Mathematics, Pure Mathematics, Physics). There were 60 biological science students (all did Botany, Zoology, & Chemistry). Nearly 90% of the physical science intake was males while the opposite was true for the biological science. That total intake of 180 was much smaller than the current intakes.

Nearly one-third of the '77 alumni were able to attend the event. The get-together included a cocktail event followed by dinner and a dance that lasted past mid-night despite the fact that all the batch mates are nearly 60 years young! There were 13 CUFSAA alumni from the batch of '77 present plus a mystery guest. Hint: He was a Lecturer in 1977 with a newly minted PhD.

The Founding President of CUFSAA, Dr. L.M.V. Tillekeratne, who was the mystery guest of honor, came straight from the airport. Dr. Tillekeratne was also a popular Student Councilor at that time and was a regular participant at the batch trips and of course at the annual Tamasha.

The CUFSAA alumni from the '77 batch who were present at the event were: Padmatilleke Abeysinghe of New Hampshire, Bimsara Disanayake of Minnesota, Priyanthi Fernando (nee Arsakularatna) of Ontario, Sarath Hewage of Arizona, Nimal Jayasuriya of Connecticut, Palitha ('77 batch) & Indira ('78 batch) Jayaweera of California, Chula Karunathilake of California, Rienzie Perera of New Jersey, Unil & Shrima Perera (both '77 batch) of Georgia, Nalin Samarasinha of Arizona, Priyalal Wijewarnasuriya of Maryland, and Geetha Yapa (nee Samaranayake) of California. Unfortunately, some North American alumni of the '77 batch who are in the academia, including current CUFSAA President, Chandana Goonetilleke, couldn't make to this early-December event.

The event was an occasion where many CUFSAA members met some of their fellow-alumni after 35+ years. It was a pleasure to meet many of them after so long and to find out what they did after graduation. It is a testimony to the caliber of our alma mater and to the Professors of the Science Faculty that irrespective of the careers alumni have chosen, the training has imparted valuable analytical, decision-making, administrative, and entrepreneurial skills. As corroboration, present among the alumni were a former Chair of the University Grant Commission, current General President of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, current senior-most Sri Lanka Administrative Service officer who is also a permanent secretary to a key ministry, and a number of successful CEOs and Senior Executives of private-sector companies. Of course, we cannot forget the immense contributions to the society by the alumni who are/were Advanced Level science teachers.

We hope that the next major '77 alumni event in 2027, the Golden Jubilee event, can be attended by an even larger number of alumni both from Sri Lanka and abroad including CUFSAA members as by then many will be retired or in semi-retirement. Of course, finally, a big Thank You should go to the alumni in Sri Lanka who took time and effort to organize this and to make it a memorable event to all the participants.



A group photo taken at the event showing a majority of the alumni who attended it.



Alumni from the chemistry special batch including CUFSAA members Nimal, Bimsara, Palitha, and Chula posed for a photo with Dr. Tillekeratne.



CUFSAA members from physics special and mathematics special batches: Unil, Rienzie, Abeysinghe, Nalin, and Priyalal.



Dr. Tillekeratne reminiscing events from nearly 40 years ago brought back nostalgic memories as evident from the facial expressions of the '77 alumni.



A drawing by the alumnus Jayantha Cooray showing the iconic mathematics department building with names and signatures of the alumni who participated at the event.