

# A.G.A.BARRIE

**TURNING ADVERSITY TO  
EXCELLENCE**



**BY: DAYA C LELWELA & DR. M. HARIS Z DEEN**

**With the Finest Compliments to:**

**From AGA Barrie**

**Dated:**

17<sup>th</sup> July 2009

**Biography of A.G.A.Barrie.**

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## ***FOREWORD***

I am indeed privileged to write the Foreword in the book “BORN TO SERVE – TURNING ADVERSITY TO EXCELLENCE”. It is the biography of Al Haj Abdul Ghani Ahamed Barrie - well known as ‘Aga’, a sobriquet derived from his initials – an inspiring story of an excellent gentleman and pet student of Marhoom Dr. A.M.A. Azeez, erstwhile Principal of Zahira College, Colombo.

Aga was born on the 8th of March 1936 in Beruwela. He was only 6 months old when his father, Abdul Ghani Alim, passed away suddenly at the age of 38 years. It was a significant blow to Aga, a loss that facilitated his care by his mother, elder brother Azeez, and uncles. From humble beginnings and encountering difficult times, he overcame each with his belief and devotion to Allah via prayer, thereby attaining the highest positions in life. His fascinating story is a lesson in patience, perseverance, and progress.

Amidst financial and other problems faced by Aga, he continued to take an interest in his studies, encouraged by his relatives. In 1947 he entered Zahira College, Colombo, excelling quickly to obtain a First Division pass in the Senior School Certificate examination in December 1953. His financial constraints, however, worried him. He was distressed that he could not look after his ailing beloved mother in Beruwela, and so decided to seek employment. In 1954 he saw an advertisement to join the Navy as an officer cadet, for which he had all the required qualifications. The naval application was forwarded to the Principal of Zahira College, Mr. A.M.A. Azeez, for his approval and signature. Mr. Azeez, upon seeing the S.S.C. results, summoned Aga to meet him, inquiring as to why he wanted to curtail his studies. After listening to Aga of his plight, Mr. Azeez tore the application form and made arrangements for Aga to receive assistance from the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund (CMSF) and join the hostel. This was the turning point in Aga’s life. His phenomenal achievements thereafter are well documented in the following biography, a book that highlights his many commended feats in civil engineering domestically and abroad.

Mr. Azeez was born and had his childhood and entire schooling in Jaffna. He was the first Muslim civil servant in 1935. He realized that education was the key to the progress of the Muslims who were backward and that the needy should be supported financially. This vision culminated in the inauguration of the CMSF in 1945. He sacrificed an alluring career in the Ceylon Civil Service to become the Principal of Zahira College in 1948 and was an eminent educationist. Zahira benefited and became one of the finest public schools in the Island excelling in studies and other activities.

From this red-letter day in Aga’s life, he was the pet student of Mr. Azeez. The then-principal of Zahira College kept a vigilant eye on Aga throughout his career until Aga left for Canada in 1969. My father, the aforementioned Mr. Azeez, often related the story to me with a clear sense of pride. From that time, I became friendly with Aga, a close correspondence that has spanned for over 60 years.

An amusing incident worth mentioning. In this biography, one will find a photograph captioned ‘Bearded Group at Faculty of engineering 1960’. During his undergraduate days, Aga was a frequent visitor to our home ‘Meadow Sweet’ to meet my father. His visitations ceased for a few weeks, within which my father heard that Aga had grown a beard and was avoiding meeting him. One day my father, mother and I were travelling along the road opposite the Town Hall. There we spotted Aga riding erectly on his push cycle with some friends on Alexandra Place from Maradana, just before the turn-off to Barnes Place. We slowed down and waved, much to Aga’s surprise, who then bent down to ‘duck’ but could not. We laughed and continued on our way.

Aga was planning to retire by the end of 2004 and leave for a visit to Canada in February 2005. He had hardly packed his bags, when the tsunami of 26th December 2004 completely devastated the coastal areas of Sri Lanka. This included Beruwela where he was born and spent his childhood. Along with his cousin, Zam Refai, a relief fund was inaugurated. Aga travelled overseas to meet his contacts and collected funds. The housing project for those affected in Beruwela was completed.



Honed by his educational background, Aga pursued the noble cause of advancing the institutional careers of Muslim students in Sri Lanka. In 2012, he compiled a comprehensive study and prepared the report *Problems, Causes and the Solutions of Education of Muslims in Sri Lanka*. This case study allowed him and Zam Refai to undertake a collection of projects aimed at the educational enhancement of Sri Lankan Muslims across the country.

Aga and his cousin Zam Refai were old boys of Maligahena Muslim Mahavidyalaya in Beruwela. When they visited their old school in 2004, they found it in a deplorable state. They decided to improve all the facilities, including new buildings, under the ZAM TRUST. With Aga's professional advice and qualifications, the project was completed in stages. They have completed projects in schools in Colombo too, where assistance was needed.

Daya Lelwela was a very close friend of Aga in the University and after qualifying they were engineers in the Ceylon Government Railways. Later Daya became the General Manager. He came forward to write the biography of Aga and prepared a comprehensive draft of his family history, academic and professional attainments *et al*. Daya fell seriously ill and passed away few years ago. I enjoyed Daya's informative articles during his days spent in the CGR. Daya helped Aga to supervise and build his mansion "Waters Meet" in Maggona, planned and designed by Aga himself and completed in 1983. I gave Aga more than a surprise by visiting him without prior notice with my father's faithful driver Ibrahim, who was very fond of Aga. He was thrilled to see us.

Aga's contemporary at Zahira, Dr. Haris Deen, continued with Aga's story. I am impressed with the contents of the book, which is well written in simple, understandable English and will serve as a useful book in the preservation of an interesting family history.

I wish to mention another fact of Aga's dedication. He left to Canada in 1969 and on his first visit in 1973, he met Mr. Azeez and gave him a gift of a lovely travelling alarm clock. This was appropriate as my father travelled overseas quite often, and it was kept carefully in his office at 'Meadow Sweet'. My father passed away suddenly in November that year, but he travelled to South India in May and September to preside at educational conferences. I acquired the clock and have taken it with me in all my travels, which helped me to be punctual, particularly to be on time for flights at ungodly hours. The clock is still in my possession ticking away efficiently, which I cherish very much.

As a tribute to Mr. Azeez, Aga wrote an article in 2006 titled 'A.M.A. Azeez at Zahira – Glorious Era'. It gives Aga's days spent at Zahira. It was Allah's Will that Aga had to enter Zahira College and meet Mr. Azeez under exceptional circumstances. This was the starting point of Aga's success in life.

During recent years Aga and I have been associated with the Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Foundation, the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund and the Sailan Muslim Foundation. His support and advice have been valuable in conducting various social activities. The Sailan Muslim Foundation in Canada has, Alhamdulillah, seen success due to Aga's instrumental dedication. His efforts and presence are cherished by all, and one would find it difficult to find a Sri Lankan Muslim who has not heard the name Abdul Ghani Ahmed Barrie.

I wish Aga an active and long life, Insha Allah.

Ali Azeez B. Sc. FCA.  
Chairman, Committee of Management  
Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund.

## **PROLOGUE**

*This is the story of a man, born to a family not so rich financially but of immense religiosity and moral values. The story of a man who faced tragedy in infancy due to the loss of his beloved father, but subsequently overcame all adversity. He won the hearts of family members, relations, friends and associates who came in contact with him from the very early days of his childhood and, through grit, determination, hard work, and perseverance, rose to become one of the most successful professionals among his peers. He is a highly respected and influential member of his community, a friend among friends, whilst at all times following a life of supreme sacrifice, not forgetting to go back to the roots ever so often, and helping all around him whenever there is an opportunity.*

*May his life and this narration about him inspire all young readers. May they enrich their lives through it and do equally well if not better, and make the ultimate contribution expected of them, to the society they live in.*

***A movie-length conversation with 85-year-old Captain Aga Barrie (Engineer and chairman of the World Forum for Sri Lankan Muslims) is available on YouTube. He paints a firsthand account of what life was like in the 1950s/60s in Beruwela, Colombo, Zahira, and Canada. He also shares some vivid memories of Colombo, Zahira, and Dr AMA Azeez. Aga Barrie is the author of A-Z Steps to Leadership: from the Quran and Words of the Prophet Muhammad.***

***A good listen for those who appreciate old times. Here is the link:***

***<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GYTnOxpVfg>***

## ***HOW OUR ACQUAINTANCE STARTED***

**Daya Lelwela**

The year was 1957 when we entered the University of Ceylon, Colombo campus, from where my story begins. We had just walked past Professor Bhaliga's parked "thallu" Ford and into the Chemistry Lab at the erstwhile University of Ceylon, Thurstan Road Colombo for the practical examination in Chemistry. This was to be the first of several examinations we were to take up in pursuit of a degree in engineering. There were three parts to the examination: a titration using an inorganic salt, an analysis of an inorganic salt, and the analysis of an organic compound. The titration was the most difficult, most time consuming, needing the most accuracy and consequently the most rewarding in terms of marks to be gained. But of the three parts it was also the surest to get right if done with the necessary caution and care. Accordingly, every student knew its importance. It was given the highest priority within the time limit of three hours allowed for the examination. Everyone wanted to ensure getting it right first before moving on to the other two parts.

The 'salt' had to be precisely weighed to the nearest milligram and dissolved in the right amount of water as the first step. We had to have the box of weights with 'milligram weights' in it and use the lab precision balance available for weighing the salt. Students in engineering never owned a box of weights, as a pass in Chemistry was considered only a necessary 'evil' for getting through to the engineering faculty. So, it was not surprising that I did not have one. Before the examinations were to start, I looked across the table and whispered to the guy opposite me that I did not have a box of weights. "Take mine," was his prompt answer. "But what about you? How are you going to weigh the salt?" I asked him and thankfully said to him "Give it to me when you are done". "Never mind that. I could do the titration later" So saying AGA gave his box of weights to me.

I had hardly known this guy at the time, except for a nodding acquaintance. Although we were in the same batch, we had little time to move around due to the tight 8 to 4 daily class schedule during the first year and the fact that he and I were seated far apart in classrooms arranged alphabetically. The magnanimity of his gesture had a profound effect on me. Had I not been able to do my 'titration', I would have been out of engineering, and I may not have come to know him, ever. Similarly, had he not been able to complete his titration because of the box of weights, the consequences to him would have been equally disastrous. Instead, we both passed the examination and eventually passed out as engineers together. Thus, was born a friendship that has lasted to this day through all the vicissitudes of life.

The incident lingers on in my memory, fresh as the day it happened. We got closer to each other as time went by. I took the opportunity to study more about this extraordinary man, his selfless sacrifices, his modesty in the face of superlative achievements, his sense of humour and camaraderie, his team spirit even at times of adversity, his origins, and the evolution of such a complex personality. And today, enriched by the facts I learned and know about him, and his supreme companionship, I have taken it upon myself as a duty first, a responsibility to remember him and his exploits and to write his story. I have great pleasure in writing the story of this extraordinary human being as it unfolded over the last six decades and more, having in the end accomplished all he wished to.

## Haris Deen

My acquaintance with AGA commenced at Zahira College, where we knew him as “Angora House” bright star. For some time, he used to travel with us by the Kelani Valley small train to Cotta Road Station when he was staying in his uncle’s house in Rajagiriya. He was a smart cadet along with me in both the Junior and Senior Platoons and used to help me in the 202-small bore firing range. Being a good friend of my cousin Mahsoom Haniffa, who was another good shot, AGA used to urge me to do better all the time. This acquaintance was nurtured into a full-blown relationship when I was recommended by AGA for engagement as the Contract Administrator for Consolidated Contracting Company, a Palestinian firm for Medina replacing Ian Rutherford, a British Quantity Surveyor. My family thereafter got to know his family and eventually my eldest son was married to his daughter Raihana. That was the start of a lasting relationship.

Despite unfortunate incidences, we have maintained our relationship and hopefully continue in the same manner throughout.

It was Lelwela who started this work, of course, with AGA’s permission. Therefore, the readers will find references to personal information given by Lelwela as researched by him. Therefore, a major part of this biography was written by Lelwela, while I undertook the task of editing and formatting the manuscript. It should be noted then that credit goes to our good friend, the late Daya Chatrapriya Lelwela.

Lelwela wrote that when he mentioned to AGA his intention of writing this biography AGA was at first reluctant. On persuasion, he later agreed, subject to the proviso that it may be written in such a manner that its subject matter should benefit his grandchildren and all other readers, enabling them to appreciate the difficulties in life that one would encounter, acquire the courage to surmount them, and reach the goal in their lives by following and practicing the teachings of Islam. AGA also made it mandatory to mention the fact that he was appealing to Allah to forgive him for mentioning some of his achievements on record, as all praise should belong to Allah and Allah alone and as nothing is achieved without the will of the Almighty.

Accordingly, he gave the writers full and open access to complete and unabridged records regarding his life and his achievements which were not known to us through our association so that this story could be put on record without omissions.

The readers will find in this biography incidences of private family nature, which AGA, with sincere humility, wishes to be retold purely to relate the circumstances that he and his mother had to endure after the death of his father.

## ***INTRODUCING AGA.***

### **AGA Barrie's Belief and Devotion**

What struck us most about AGA, was his devotion to his faith, Islam. He always used to say that it was with Allah's help that he was able to accomplish his ultimate goal which would be everyone's dream. The grateful man he is, he would not forget to mention the contribution made by and the continuous prayers of his dear departed mother, his close relatives and close friends, and above all, that of his devoted partner in life as well as the consistent support offered by his other family members.

AGA firmly believed that Allah created the whole world and all its belongings. It was easy for Him to provide whatever he hoped, through His mercy what was good for this world and the hereafter. AGA's constant prayer was *Alhamdulillah* - "All Praise belongs to Allah".

Time and again AGA would say that the secret to success is to please Allah in all dealings. AGA always desired and abundantly possessed the virtues of caring for his parents and his kith and kin, of being content, patient, helpful, sincere and eminently responsible. AGA, therefore, lived by the precept that he should satisfy the purpose of creation: "One must live by Islam". INTENTION, SINCERITY AND CONFORMITY.

AGA, a man of constant prayer, would always pray to Allah, asking His mercy and forgiveness and would remember that without His will nothing could happen. *Alhamdulillah*, *Masha'Allah* (Protection from Allah), he is blessed with good children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who he believes will continue to pray and ask Allah for His forgiveness, *Insha'Allah* (Allah willing). AGA, a man of constant prayer, would always pray to Allah, asking HIS mercy and forgiveness and would remember that without HIS will nothing could happen. *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah), *Mashaallah* (Protection from Allah), he is blessed with good children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who he believes will continue to pray and ask Allah for His forgiveness for all, *Insha Allah*.

### **BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD**

#### **Introducing Beruwela – AGA's Birthplace and his Ancestry**

There is a rich history woven around the coastal town of Beruwela where AGA was born. Arab traders of the fourteenth century who travelled across the globe in their sailboats and ventured into the Indian ocean saw a number of towns along the western coast of Sri Lanka as potential berthing facilities and breaks in the long sojourns. Beruwela was known to be the most prosperous among them. Beruwela had derived its name from two Sinhala words *Be* and *Ruwala* meaning '*the place where the sails were lowered*'.

In this township, in a village called Maligahena ('*the Palace compound*') there lived the family of Abdul Ghani Aalim, a piously religious man and his wife Haseenah Ummah. He was a prominent citizen in the village and was well known for his Bukhari Thakiya activities. They had a large family of seven children but most of them died at a young age. By the beginning of March 1936, Haseenah Ummah was expecting the eighth child.



**AGA BARRIE's Mother Haseenah Ummah (1902-1966)**



**and father Abdul Ghani Alim (1898 -1936)**

Abdul Ghani Alim hailed from Galle and his ancestors were linked to Kumuster Villa of Beruwela. Incidentally, Kumuster Villa is associated with another location called Notaries Villa. Kumuster and Notary are titles conferred upon person who is retained by the Singhala Royalty to administer their affairs and as legal officers to the royal family living in Maligahena, Beruwela. It is also of record that AGA's ancestors were living in the flower gardens of the royal family, hence the location's name, "Poothottam".

Haseenah Ummah was the elder daughter of Samsudeen Marikar, a son of the Kumuster of the Palace of Beruwela. The marriage between Abdul Ghani Alim and Haseenah Umma was mainly initiated by none other than his Holiness the Sheikh Abdul Sanad of Beruwela Thakiya. As Samsudeen Marikar was one of the leading figures in the Bukhary circle, his daughter's marriage to Abdul Ghani Alim, a leading alim, was deemed a good match.

### **AGA's Birth**

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1936, was a very special day. On that March morning was born the eighth child to Abdul Ghani and Haseenah, a son. Although the birth took place without much fanfare, it was cause for a quiet celebration in the family, as he was the second living son. In true conservative tradition the parents resolved that they would provide him all the protection and, when the time came, the best possible education. The newborn son was named Ahmed Barrie bin Abdul Ghani, also known as Abdul Ghani Ahamed Barrie, AGA.

It was normal for Haseenah Ummah to come to Beruwela for childbirth. Afterwards, when she was able to manage the newborn by herself, she returned to Galle. For AGA's birth, this routine was no different. Life went on as normal for the family who were happily passing their time in Galle.

## **AGA Loses his Father and Life as an Orphan**

Hardly six months into the life of this young infant, tragedy struck when he lost his beloved father. They had been living in Galle at the time. AGA sadly recants the story narrated to him by his mother in later years about his father's last few hours on that fateful day.

Just before he left home to the masjid for the sunset prayer that day, Abdul Ghani had been making mock faces at AGA trying to scare him and make him laugh. He had then walked up to the mosque and led the prayers there. Death the great leveller, being no respecter of persons, claimed the life of this man while he was engaged with God! But it was at a time when AGA would have most wanted him to be around. He had carried no serious illness that would have warranted such a sudden demise. AGA's mother therefore had been shocked beyond belief when she heard the sad news. Consequently, she was left stranded in unfamiliar surroundings, away from their birthplace, with a young family of three children: AGA's sister of twelve years, his brother of ten years and himself.

Desperate situations often demand desperate remedies. This may be why AGA's uncles prevailed upon his mother to arrange for his sister to be given in marriage. It is known that marriages at a very young age are not so uncommon among Muslims even these days. But the marriage did not last, as his brother-in-law did not support the family. AGA's mother's troubles were compounded as a result. She now had to support her daughter's family with two children as well. AGA's uncles realized that Galle, unfamiliar to his mother, was certainly not the best place for her in the circumstances, and hence persuaded her to return to Beruwela, where she would have her close relatives to offer her a helping hand. Accordingly, AGA, his mother, and sister with her two children shifted to Beruwela. But soon the episode was to end with more tragedy, for within a short period of their returning to Beruwela, both his sister and one of her children fell ill and passed away. AGA spent his early childhood in Beruwela with his niece at his mother's ancestral home and commenced his elementary education at the Maligahena Muslim school in 1941. He continued his studies there up to the 5<sup>th</sup> standard in the Tamil Medium until 1945, during which period he also studied the Quran during evening sessions at the Bukhari Madrasa. His elder brother moved to Colombo to live with his father's nephews and attend school.

Before long, AGA got the first taste of real life. His mother decided to shift from her ancestral home to a new home, an abode partway through a rebuilding operation. As a child he had to learn to think and execute work that only a grown up could and should undertake. The rebuilding of the house had to be completed before shifting. AGA was entrusted with the supervision of the work as there was no one else available to oversee this important task. For a period, he slept alone at night in this partially built house, watching over materials. During the day he had to help Appuhamy, the man who worked as mason, carpenter, and painter altogether.

It was the era of the common man. The village had not seen the sophistication of water pumps, concrete mixers, block making machines and the like. Yet AGA's task was arduous all the same. He had to make clay brick out of mud, the water utilized in its mixing drawn from a deep, freshly dug well. Midway through the day he would wonder whether the well was a bottomless one.

AGA was under ten years old at the time. Living in that house was daunting and demanding; AGA was on his own, devoid of any direct adult supervision. His reaction to the work and solitude, however, was and is a testament to his character. He saw it as a challenge that Allah had given him all the courage to go through with.

Even at that young age, AGA did not lack enterprise, which in later life was to blossom into full-grown expertise in his chosen discipline. He would construct steps and a footpath leading up to the nearby public

road so as to provide easy access for visitors. He took pleasure in planting tomatoes in the yard besides the house, reaping a rich and abundant harvest of the vegetable. For this purpose, he would use the seeds from tomatoes brought from Colombo by his brother on one of his visits.

AGA to this day carries nostalgic memories of his childhood. He would on occasion hold mock elections along with his cousins and friends in the neighbourhood, on the lines of the then political battles of the day, even using colour coded symbols etc. At times he would play “mother” in real life and did not relent performing this role as well. The dramatized matriarchal mantle he donned when his mother once fell ill, and he had to prepare meals for his niece Husseina and himself. He successfully managed on that occasion to make some “rotti” which they both ate with sugar. Although he could afford enjoying a five-star meal complete with caviar today, he is equally happy to recall the simpler days of rotti and sugar.

Soon AGA along with his mother and sister shifted to her parental home known as “Kumuster Villa”. AGA showed the first signs of his intellect about this time. With the help of his mother and her sister, and with the blessings of Allah, he excelled both in school and in the madrassas. He realized that although his mother was easy going, her sister Nafeesa Chachi was very strict on them. He still remembers how she would discipline them, sting them like a bee and even administer corporal punishment at times. She was asserting the authority of a male, and in the absence of such, playing the role of matron of the house. Despite her rough exterior, she loved all the children very much. Every one of them, however, boy or girl, was awfully frightened of her.

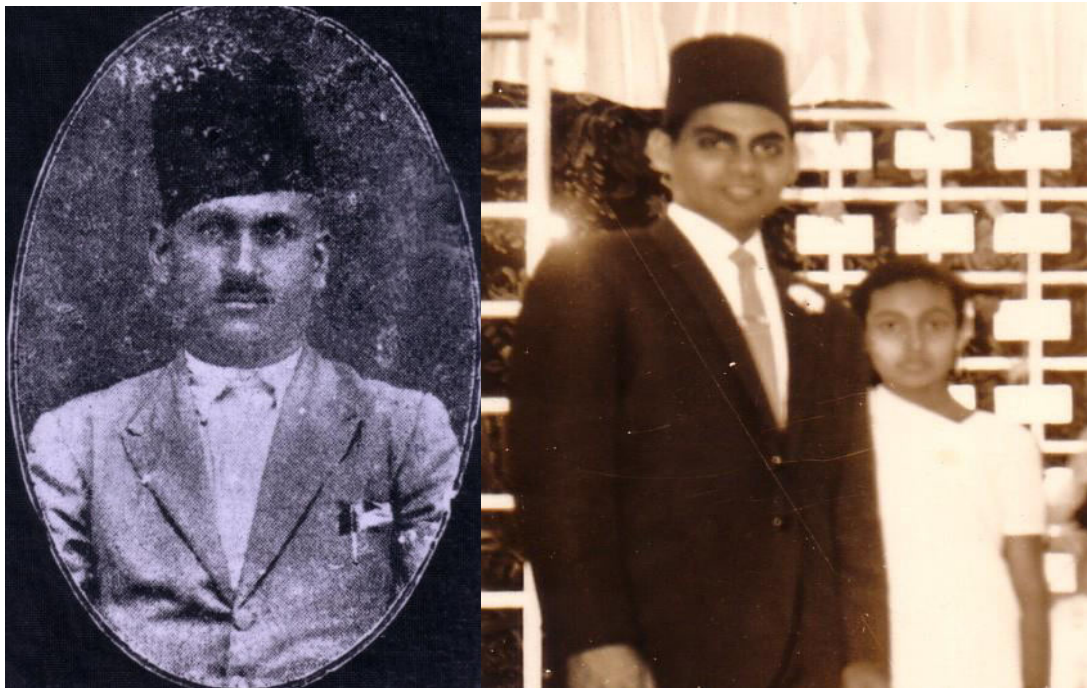


**NAFEESA CHACHI AGA'S MOTHER'S SISTER**



AGA also has very vivid memories of a semi-rustic countryside living. His home was large by any standard, but old fashioned. The number of rooms totalled one, yet the large passages were wide enough that beds and sofas could be placed in them without being obstructed or isolated. Modern conveniences had not reached the village, hence they had to manage with kerosene lamps instead of electricity. The kitchen, though typically large, was furnished with a conventional open fireplace with three stones, chopped firewood being fed between these stones to keep the fire burning. A rack above the fireplace made of coconut palm rafters carried the daily firewood, the cooking utensils, and the provisions. Water drawn from the well would be stored in earthenware pots, providing drinking water with a fine aroma of burnt clay and kept as cool as modern refrigeration.

Even as a child, AGA had the knack of winning the hearts of everyone around him including the neighbours. He had mastered most of the domestic chores such as husking a coconut, weaving coconut palm-leaves used in the laying of roofs with Cadjan, making coir out of coconut husks etc. AGA was content with what he had and enjoyed life. One of the most interesting and memorable features of country living was setting up and running of small shops. This normally takes place during the months of Ramadhan. Temporary shelters are built using poles and woven Cadjan (woven dry coconut leaves). The items to be sold are either purchased in small quantities or picked up from the gardens. Though more oriented towards fun than commerce, the stock of items is removed overnight for safety. AGA recalled how his small shop was set on fire overnight but back on business next day.



**MATERNAL UNCLE ZAINUL ABDEEN MARIKAR & AGA WITH HIS NIECE HUSSEINA HUSSEIN**

Whilst keeping the elders happy and satisfied in the above manner, AGA continued to do well in his studies with the help of Allah. He was delighted when his cousin Abdul Rahman Alim of Galle, who was the eldest son of his father's elder brother, Abdul Majid Hadjiar, presented him a copy of the Quran. That enabled him to complete his reading of the Noble Book.

AGA remembers with gratitude the farsighted nature and the wisdom of his eldest uncle Zainul Abdeen Marikar, who insisted that he should proceed immediately to Colombo and get on with his studies in English. Having experienced the value and importance of English during his days as a council member of the Beruwela Urban Council, he wanted all the boys in the village to do well in their studies of the language. Conversing in English was considered elitist. It could be said that Zainul Abdeen was the driving force in the family who stood above the rest of the pack. He was one who always liked to get involved in a conversation in English with others and would make special mention of the conversations that he used to have with his cousin Sabir Pasha. He therefore concluded that it was in AGA's best interests that he moved to Colombo to pursue further studies and made all necessary arrangements towards realizing that.

## வேருவிலை நகர சபைக்குரிய பொதுஜன வாக்காளர்களே!

விரியுங்கள்!

விரியுங்கள் !!

உங்களைக் கவர்த்த கொண்டிருக்கும் இரு அபேட்சகர்களில் ஒருவரை நம்பிக்கையாய்த் தெரிந்து கொள்ளுங்கள். வாக்காளர்களே, முஸ்லிம்களின் பூர்விக ஸ்தலங்களும் தெய்விக ஸ்தலங்களும் புடைசூழ முஸ்லிம்கள் அதிகமாய் வசிக்கும் வருதியாகிய 5-வது வோட்ட. இவ்வோட்டுக்கு இரண்டு அபேட்சகர்கள் முன் வந்திருக்கிறார்கள். அவர்களில் ஒருவர் கனம் D. G. F. வோல்ட்டர் பிறக்ட்டர், இவர் பப்பாகலை? துள்ள ஒருவர். ஆனால் இப்பகுதி ஜனங்களுக்கு அறிமுகமானவரல்ல. அன்றியும் ஜனங்களுக்குச் சேவைகள் புரிந்த வருமல்ல. இவரை மன வைக்கியமுள்ள ஒருவரின் துணுகோளின் பேரால் இப்பகுதிக்கு அபேட்சகராய் அனுப்பியிருப்பதை எவருமறியீர்கள்.

இது நிற்கப் போலி முஸ்லிம்களில் சிலர் வயிறுப்பிடுகக்காக வரல் பிடித்தத் திரிநிறுர்கள். என்னே இவர்களின் மத்தப்பதி மானங்கெட்டவர்களின் கோலம் இதுதானே? வாக்காளர்களே, அடுத்தவராகிய கனம் S. M. முகம்மது செயின் மரைக்கார், இவர் சாதி அபிமானமுள்ள ஒரு பக்திமான். இவர் மருதானை முஸ்லிம் சங்கத்தின் கொளவப் பொக்கிஷாதிபர், களுத்தறை, பஜார் முஸ்லிம் சங்கத்தின் செக்ட்டேரி, சென்மறல் யுனைட்டட் ஸ்டேர் வர்த்தக சாலையின் சொத்தக்காரர், மருதானை முஸ்லிம் பாடசாலையை உண்டாக்க முயற்சித்தவர்களில் ஒரு பிறதானி, இப்பாடசாலையில் தற்போது [100] அந்நூக்கிதிகமான சிறுவர்கள் கல்வி கற்ற வருகிறார்கள். மேலும் அப்பாடசாலையில் மார்க்கக் கல்வியை அச்சிறுவர்களுக்குக் கற்பிக்க உதவி புரிகிறவர். இன்னும் சென்ற மாதம் 26-ந்திகதி கோள்டன் ஸ்டார் மண்டபத்தில் கூடிய கூட்டத்தில் இப்பகுதிக்கு இராப்பாடசாலைபொன்ற உண்டாக்கவந்த தீர்மானத்தை ஆமோதித்து அதை ஸ்தாபிக்கும் சுமயத்தில் அதற்காக வரும் செலவுகளை ஒதுகிக்கொண்ட ஓர் புண்ணியவான். இவர் நற்குலத்தையும் சார்த்த குணத்தை யும் உடைபவர். பாருடனும் கட்பரல் கடப்பவர். எழியோர், வலியோர் என்ற சித்தியாசம் பராட்டாதவர். சாதி முன்னேற்றத்தையும், ஒற்றுமையையும் ஈகக்கொண்டவர். நகர சபையை கட்டத்தக்கூடிய கல்வியை உடைபவர், ஏழைகளுக்குச் சுமத்தும் சமைகளை இலேசாக்கக்கூடியவர். இந்த இடைசனங்களையுடைய ஓர் முஸ்லிம் அபேட்சகர் எங்கள் பகுதிக்கு முன் வந்திருக்க பிரஜாவருயும் சமசத்தவருயும் உங்களுக்கு அறிமுக மற்றவராயும், எங்கள் பகுதி ஜனங்களுக்கு ஒரு கருமக்களும் செய்பாதவராயுள்ள ஒருவரை நாங்கள் எப்படித் தெரிந்து கொள்வோம். சாதி அபிமானிகளே, உங்களின் மன வைக்கியத்தை அகற்றினால் சாதியபிமானத்தின் இன்பத்தை அறந்தகொள்ளுவீர்கள். ஆண்படியால் முன்வரும் 19-ம் திகதி அல் அமீனியாப்பாட சாலையில் போய் உங்களின் வாக்குகளைக் கனம் S. M. முகம்மது செயின் மரைக்கார் அவர்களுக்கே கொடுங்கள், கொடுங்கள். அதைத்தவற்றால் மேலேக்கு அன்னியர்கள் மிகைத்து உங்களை அடுமைப் படுத்தப்பிரியம் கொடுத்தவர்களாவீர்கள்.

இப்படிக்கு

சாதியின் முன்னேற்றத்தைக் கருதிய

O. L. M. அப்துல் வதூது.

பொலிட்டிக்கல் செகிரட்டேரி,

முஸ்லிம் வாலிபர் சங்கம், — மருதானை, வேருவிலை.

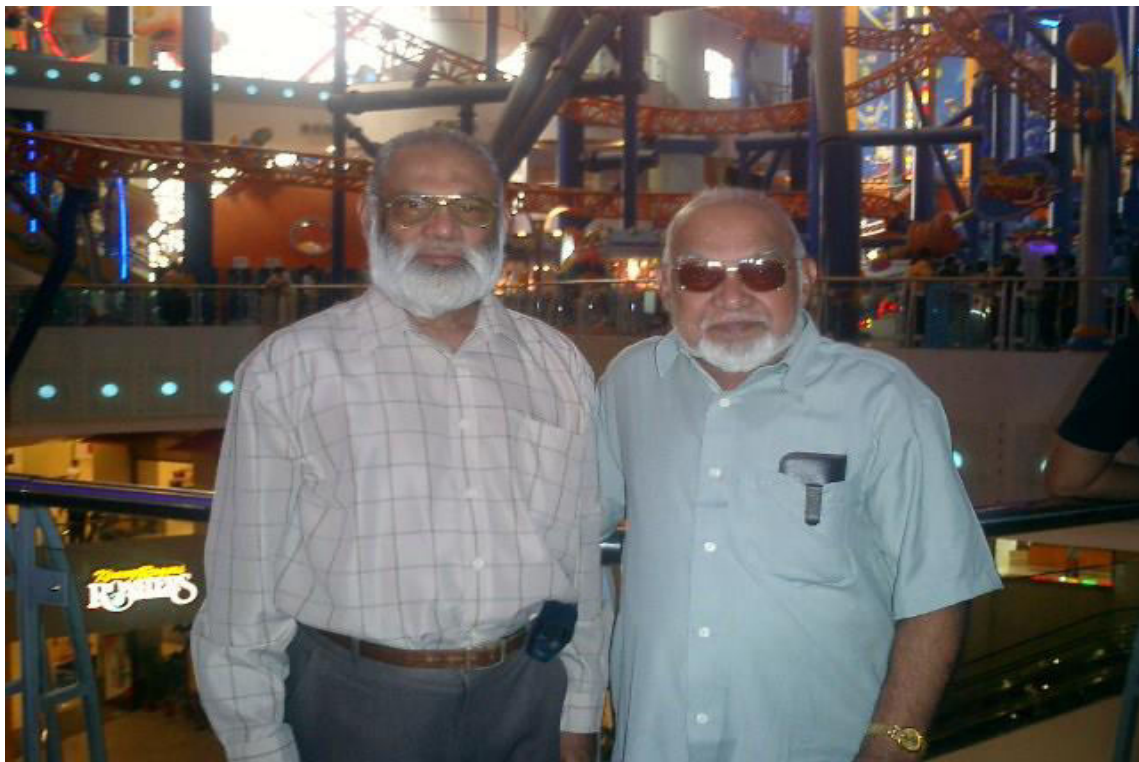
THE NOTICE PUBLISHED IN SUPPORT OF ZAINUL ABDEEN MARIKAR AS A CANDIDATE

FOR

THE BERUWELA URBAN COUNCIL ELECTION IN MAY 1935



**AGA BARRIE AT 10 YEARS AND HIS BROTHER AGA AZEEZ 20 YEARS OLD**



**AGA BARRIE WITH AGA AZEEZ IN MALAYSIA IN OCTOBER 2004**

## **Move to Colombo for Further Education**

This arrangement to move AGA to Colombo from Beruwela gave rise to a cultural clash in the family. The loss of his beloved father was immediately felt, for had he been alive he would have been the ultimate arbiter. AGA belonged to an orthodox family that lived a very simple, unsophisticated and peaceful life in the countryside. English was by no means a necessary part of such an environment. His dress was the typical country dress of shirt and sarong complete with the white cap on the head most of the time. Life in Colombo would mean a total break from tradition. There was, however, an important member of the family who was opposed to this proposal: his uncle Abdul Hathy. As AGA was the son of an Alim and doing extremely well in Quranic recitations, uncle Hathy raised objections. He wanted AGA to be like his father. His mother, as the living guardian closest to him at the time, expressed her feelings openly; she would hear none of it. At the same time, she was heartbroken and caught between the devil and the sea as she couldn't displease her elder brother who was the head of a very united family.

Despite all the conflicting viewpoints, it was finally decided that it would be in the best interests of AGA that he proceed to Colombo for the purpose of pursuing higher studies. He left on this mission to Colombo early in 1946 and was duly admitted to the Hameediya School. As he was not proficient enough in English at the time, he was enrolled in a special class. AGA shared accommodation with ZAM Bari who was living in the hardware shop run by Thahir uncle and owned by Zainul Abdeen uncle. It was then called "Allied Trading Agency" and was the nexus for the "Allied International Traders", which later came to be owned by AGA's nephew Ifthikar Ahamed Thahir.



**THAHIR UNCLE**

**HATHY UNCLE**

**ZAIN UNCLE**

**THE THREE GREAT UNCLES OF AGA BARRIE**

After a year in this school, AGA was admitted to Zahira Evening School in 1947 and placed in the second standard. A condition stipulated that if he completed three classes of studies in that year, he would be placed in the proper Zahira College. AGA was then eleven years old.

## Continuation of Studies at Zahira College

ZAM Bari was twelve years of age then and was in the third standard of the same school. As children of that age were wont to do, the two cousins first had a love-hate relationship that gave rise to a couple of skirmishes. AGA recalled an incident when ZAM had fallen out with him and had travelled at the back of the Tramcar, which caught fire and Zam was hurt. Immediately AGA came to his rescue and mentioned that if ZAM would have been with AGA he wouldn't have had such a mishap. In the course of time, they became inseparable friends more than cousins, and would depend so much on one another for mutual help and inspiration right throughout life. While they were consolidating their relationship in Colombo, not being allowed to visit home in Beruwela, ZAM Bari's brother ZAM Refai did his schooling in Maradana, Beruwela traveling from home.

AGA knew fully well that Zahira evening school was not what was envisaged on his journey to Colombo. He was a determined fellow, who didn't take any task as unattainable. He firmly resolved that he would take one hurdle at a time and targeted the admission to Zahira College as the first. He trebled up his courage and worked towards the admission to Zahira College after just one year, although the content of study would fill a period of three years. He succeeded and was placed in the third standard after six months at Zahira Evening School. The success gave him further encouragement to continue the good work in the new class. He was by now able to go home for Ramadhan and take part in fasting.

Whilst spending the first holidays at home in Beruwela, an event of unparalleled significance took place. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, Ummul Husseinah, the wife of his maternal uncle Hathy was in labour. There were no organized maternity wards then, much less hospitals for emergencies, no scanners nor doctor visits. The need of the day in such an event was to make the home of the expectant mother as comfortable as possible so that she could deliver the child with the aid of the village midwife. However, there had to be someone available to do the running around. Being the obedient boy, AGA had to fill that role. He was up the whole night, looking for the midwife, medicines, and all the odd things that the young mother would need after delivery of the baby. She gave birth to a sweet little girl. It looked very much a calculated move by AGA, as subsequent events would unfold. He was richly rewarded for all the effort as that sweet little girl turned out to be none other than his dear beloved future wife.



AGA BARRIE AND JIFFRIYA IN JIFFRIYA'S BIRTHPLACE

AGA returned to school after Ramadhan and continued with his studies. Persistent hard work until the end of the year rewarded him with a double promotion to the 5<sup>th</sup> Standard at the beginning of the next year. In 1948, the year when Al Haj A.M.A. Azeez took over from Al Haj T.B. Jayah as Principal of Zahira College, AGA was transferred to the morning school - Zahira College.

AGA was to part company with buddy ZAM Bari however, as he was admitted along with his brother Refai to Zahira College Gampola and were boarded in the boys' hostel. This to some extent reflects the financial status of the family. AGA was alone in the hardware shop. His brother Azeez would occasionally drop by and help him in his studies. It was his brother who took AGA for the first cinema show in his life. Had the uncles come to know of it, the consequences would have been of course disastrous for both. It was a Tamil film and he had enjoyed it.

### **Circumcision Ceremony Recalled**

AGA's mother was a lady that would follow tradition to the letter. As he was growing old, she was determined to arrange to perform a very important ritual on AGA- his circumcision. She got his brother Azeez to fix the ceremony. It is a major function in any Muslim family and normally done on a grand scale. Being the first function after coming to Beruwela, his mother had planned a "big do" and had invited a large crowd. It included uncle 'Star' of Maradana, a controversial figure whose intended visit to the ceremony would bring about a spicy situation. Having heard about this invitation, another prominent member of the community, a Khateeb, Zainul Abdeen Lebbe of Bukhari Thakiya refused to come to the function. Whilst Uncle Star has already arrived, AGA's brother Azeez proceeded to Lebbe's place to bring him along. His mother, who saw the impending danger was pleading with Uncle Star to leave the place so that the function could take place without a problem.

The Khateeb Lebbe did not wish to face a confrontation with his rival, could not be persuaded. Yet neither could Azeez to leave. A man with a short fuse, when AGA's brother's tongue failed to convince someone, he would not hesitate to use his limbs. Having used all his powers of persuasion, he soon reached the limit of endurance. In a lightening flash, he pulled out his slipper and was on the verge of dealing a blow on Lebbe when Hathy uncle intervened and stopped him. They both returned home without the Katheeb. The consequences of this action were disastrous as none would dare to raise a finger at the untouchable Lebbe let alone a slipper. What an irony, AGA the son of a former Bukhari Thakiya incumbent could not get the services of a present incumbent for his circumcision. The function proceeded however, and AGA returned to Colombo, now as the only lodger at the hardware shop since the ZAMs were away in Gampola.

AGA seemed to enjoy his success in gaining admission to a well-known and well-run Colombo school as well as the school's environment. At the first term test he was placed twenty-sixth in the new class consisting of thirty-two students. He was unhappy about this disappointing performance, as he knew that he was capable of much better results. With none to console him, he started praying to God. He realized that it was within him to shed the shackles and overcome whatever obstacles that lay in his path towards further success. He was determined that this was possible with the help of Allah.

It didn't take long for his prayers to be answered. He was a serious student, steering clear of the usual distractions that most other students of his age would have indulged in. He spent every spare minute on studies and succeeded in achieving far better results in the second term, becoming ninth in class that term and fourth in the third term. On the basis of these grades, AGA was promoted to Form 1C and placed alongside equally bright students. He remembers the names of those who were ahead of him in the first second and third positions viz. Galaeli, Iyer and Seth respectively, but has since lost contact with all of these friends.

There was one duty after school, not connected with studies, that AGA had to perform. As part of a daily routine, he had to spend a few hours in the hardware shop helping his uncle. It was his nature that in whatever he undertook, he was systematic in his approach to the task, enthusiastic, and applied himself with complete dedication. Whether by accident or by design, it so happened that the familiarity he gained by dealing with items in the hardware stores helped him later in life when he became an engineer.

Having scored good grades in class, AGA was feeling happy and at ease. He paid a visit to Beruwela and spent some time with his mother, who was constantly praying for his success. This short holiday away from books, together with his mother's prayers and the encouragement he received from his family, brought his confidence back. He was now able to perform even better in his new class. Keeping all his critics at bay, he came first in his class in the first term test. Thereafter he was unassailable. Never could anyone come close to him again in any of the examinations until he completed his studies at Zahira.

AGA believed that success was and always is mainly due to help from Allah coupled with hard work. His first priority was studies without which he knew that he would not be able to achieve economic emancipation in later life. It was his conscious decision not to involve himself in any sports until he was well settled in studies. His first exposure to any form of extracurricular activities was in the year 1950 where he joined the Junior Cadet Platoon. He was to face disappointment here too, for he was informed that he would not be taken to the camp that year, as he couldn't afford a good pair of leather shoes. At the time he was still living in his uncle's hardware shop, "Allied Trading Agency, 129. Messenger Street, Colombo".

## ADOLESCENCE

### **Growing up under Uncle's Guardianship**

When AGA moved to Colombo to pursue his studies, his youngest uncle, Mohamed Thahir, became his guardian and took complete control of his life. AGA has mixed feelings about this uncle of his. He loved him for taking him under his care and providing for his stay in Colombo. He respected him for the disciplined, orderly and dignified life he was leading. He feared him for the manner in which he admonished him for various minor offences that his uncle thought was serious enough to warrant such pursuant action.

There were also times AGA had disagreements with his uncle. For instance, when AGA returned from a haircut, his uncle would make him go back for a second haircut simply because he felt that the hair was not short enough, although AGA didn't quite agree.

AGA recollects with a mischievous smile the equally mischievous boyhood prank he once played on Thahir uncle. Having lived in the bosom of his mother all through life, he felt quite lonely when he came over to Colombo and fell under the searching eyes of his uncle. Going home and seeing his mother was therefore an event that AGA always looked forward to. But travelling home had been restricted in order to give emphasis to studies and AGA had to find a way of circumventing this hard rule. Bypassing Thahir uncle, he therefore directly approached Periyamama (who was getting ready to go to Beruwela one day) and succeeded in joining him to go home on the pretext that he had to take treatment. The fever was 'created' by AGA for the occasion by placing an onion under his armpit and staying in the sun for a while!

Despite whatever misgivings AGA would have had about Thahir uncle, he cannot but accept one fact. Life in Colombo brought with it the temptation to be swayed from the studious path, a risk that could have endangered AGA's future endeavours. However, with that initial grounding, the next important change in AGA's Colombo life was to take place in the year 1951. Thahir uncle had decided to have a shop of his own and started 'Thahirs'. The hardware shop 'Allied Trading Agency' was thus left with no one to manage. AGA therefore found it difficult to remain there. Yet soon AGA's guardianship was passed over to Hathy uncle, who had him moved over to Welikade to occupy a room in the "Jiffriya Textile Shop".

AGA describes the place as no second to the infamous Welikade Jail. The room he had to occupy was the attic of the shop. An attic being the topmost section of most homes in the western world, is carved out of

the area beneath the steep roof slopes of the house so as to make use of space that otherwise would go waste. Such an attic would be laid out with appealing interior décor and provided with central air conditioning so that it would be an invigorating experience that the occupant could enjoy.

The attic AGA occupied, however, was nowhere near that description. True enough this attic too had been created in order to make use of some space which otherwise would go to waste. But the only purpose it could have been used for was storage. In a tropical city, and in a congested business area where adjoining roofs are butting each other, with temperatures of around thirty to thirty five degrees Celsius, and a humidity of around 80 to 85%, such a room would be thoroughly unsuited for human occupation. Besides, AGA describes the access to the room as being provided by way of a ladder, climbing which required a trapeze act, and the help of a hanging from the roof. Meals were supplied by Pasha's father Ismail Marikar, the owner of the main shop a little distance away.

AGA was beginning to feel the real taste of life under these extreme forms of restraint imposed upon him. When Hathy uncle found it difficult to believe that AGA had extracurricular activities in college, he decided that he should test out the truth of this fact himself. And so he set out from home that evening, went to the school playground, and, expecting to find AGA missing from the playground, hid behind some trees, and kept looking for him. Although AGA had on some previous occasions sneaked out with friends, it was very fortunate that uncle on that day could spot him from a distance and was happy to see him doing cadet practice.

Things came to a head, when one day, Hathy uncle punished AGA for something which in his own mind he felt did not warrant action. AGA both feared and respected Hathy uncle and was obedient to him and hence kept himself clear of any unsavoury conduct. Therefore, in this instance it was difficult for him to bear. He showed his resentment by walking out on him and going to Thahir uncle's place to stay for the night. By evening however, Hathy uncle was at the doorstep, his eyes filled with tears, looking for AGA. He saw that as an acknowledgement of Hathy uncle that an injustice had seemingly occurred in his decision to punish AGA. On his part AGA realized that it was a magnanimous gesture that should be honoured and he therefore promptly walked back to the room with his uncle. That ended Hathy uncle punishing him ever again.

What irony the incident later proved to be. It resultingly prompted Hathy uncle to offer the supreme apology by giving his eldest daughter in marriage to AGA! Or was it any other sinister move, known only to Hathy uncle, but made in the best interests of AGA himself? Was it in anticipation of a gift that he intended offering AGA in due course when the time was ripe? It was indeed the most precious gift that AGA could have ever imagined when he was given Hathy uncle's daughter Jiffriya in marriage!

### **Success in Extracurricular Activities at Zahira**

AGA continued his pursuit of academic grades relentlessly. He secured the prize for General Proficiency from Form One through to the University Entrance class and invariably picked up a couple of other prizes as well. He won the first prize for shooting once and got a travel bag which he proudly presented to Hathy uncle.

The next hurdle for AGA was the first selective test at Grade 8, the Junior School Certificate examination which, one had to pass for the purpose of proceeding to continue higher studies. He got through this examination with consummate ease, topping the class and becoming one of the few candidates in the island to have scored 100% in mathematics.

Having passed the Junior School Certificate examination, he was placed in the Senior School Certificate (preparatory) Form IV science medium, where he opted to follow all mathematics-related subjects. After



school, he had to work in the shop where he virtually became a jack of all trades – he learned a little bit of all the different tasks related to textiles. He was getting good at tailoring and earned a few cents stitching sarongs in the foot machine. From there onwards everything that he lay his hands on, be it trades or studies, he gave hundred percent and succeeded in maintaining an average grade of over ninety percent every term, while having plenty of spare time to indulge in sports and extracurricular activities in school. By virtue of his ability and performance he was appointed a sub prefect of the school.

For the first time in his school career AGA, obedient by nature and upbringing, came to a confrontation with his teacher at the time Mr. S. Natesan, a brilliant mathematician. But it was not due to misconduct or insolent behaviour. It was because AGA, an equally brilliant student, used to prompt the answer to a question even before the teacher had completed writing it down. While that was no crime and should have made the teacher commend him and further encourage his participation, Mr. Natesan sent him to the last row of the class and debarred him from repeating such insolence. AGA responded the next time by letting Mr. Natesan know that he had completed all the questions before the teacher could teach that lesson in class. It came to a point when there was no question that the teacher could find that AGA couldn't do. He was therefore successful in being permitted to take up the examinations for both the Junior and Senior Mathematics prizes in the year 1954. AGA's contender was another mathematics wiz kid Pararajasingham who had already gained admission to the university, and Mr. Natesan's blue-eyed boy. Of course, Pararajasingham walked away with the prize leaving AGA the Junior Prize and close second in the Senior Prize. This was a record, as none had competed in both Junior and Senior Mathematics in the same year. This was the year AGA carried away the most number of prizes. On the insistence of the Cadet Master Mr. Muhlar, he was donned in the cadet uniform when receiving the prizes in order to prove the axiom that brains and brawn could go together.

About this time, the results of the Senior School Certificate examination were released. AGA obtained a First Division pass with distinctions in Mathematics, Chemistry, Islam, and Tamil(Lower). Hathy uncle was overjoyed by his success and feted him at the Pillawoos Hotel for this performance. There was an additional bonus – a visit home to meet his mother and convey the good news himself. Like any mother, she was extremely happy, and only gave him her blessings to continue with the good work he was doing and go as far as he would want to. His mother and the uncles had seen to it that he would not feel the loss of his dear departed father. Joining in the celebrations were his other uncles, cousins and friends who had also been anticipating the results.

With the recently acquired success in this important public examination, and all the congratulations and blessings offered by his relatives, AGA was further encouraged to do even better than before in his studies and other extracurriculars.

AGA remembers beating the Warrant Officer Sgt. Major Ben of the Ceylon Army at both the .22 and .303 calibre Snap Shooting Competition by scoring the “possible” (35 out of 35). In both matches the Sgt Major had scored 34 out of 35 and expected to win but couldn't believe that a schoolboy had beaten him by scoring the “possible”. This performance is yet to be equalled by anyone, remaining as an unbeaten record in snap target shooting.

The Shooting Competition at the Galle Gymkhana Club was an event to remember for AGA, for more reasons than one. He was travelling to Galle with Mr. Muhlar the cadet master in his car, along with other students taking part in it. The hospitable AGA invited all for tea at his home in Beruwela on the way down. Every good deed brings something in return. Stopping at home gave AGA the opportunity to see that that his mother had been ill but was unable to see a doctor for want of money. It struck his chords immediately. Why on earth was he pursuing a distant goal of success for himself, when there was none to take his mother to a doctor? Without a cent in hand, he assured his mother that he would return home the next day after the events and take her to the doctor. They stayed the night at his brother's place in Galle

Fort and participated in the competition the next morning.

### **The Three Musketeers**



**Mulaffer Khalid, M.B.M. Ghouse and AGA Barrie**  
**IN GALLE GYMKANA CLUB SHOOTING COMPETITION 1955.**

AGA's latent talents emerged that day when participating in the many events he was chosen for. All were shocked beyond belief at his unexpected success. Furthermore, success brought in its wake monetary gains for him as well. He earned a total of a hundred rupees in prize money, a princely sum in those early days. He immediately thought of his beloved mother, reminded of the saying: When the infant baby cries, a mother's blood, on hearing those cries, is transformed into milk, the food for the baby. In Geometry, there are some theorems of which the converse is also true. Is this why, when AGA's mother fell ill and was waiting in anguish for some treatment, that an opportunity was created firstly for AGA to come to know about it? And next, for a penniless AGA to get the required money through sheer determination and honour so that he may do a son's bounden duty in return for all his mother had done? Perhaps so, for he rushed back to Beruwela even before the rest of the tournament was over and saw that his mother was taken to a doctor and given proper medical treatment. That was when his mother prayed for him and assured him that Allah will never let him down and that his help will always be there for such a dutiful son. AGA felt that there was a powerful force behind him, directing his way towards righteousness all the time.

Despite a slightly naughty streak, AGA was highly respected in school for his achievements. The post of prefect of college was therefore offered for his all-round performance in college. There was a hitch, however. In order to do the duties of a prefect he had to be in long trousers - certainly not in the cadet trousers that he was wearing at the time. There was none to buy him that and he didn't wish to earn the nickname "Cadet Pattai". It was Hathy uncle who came to his rescue. Knowing the seriousness of the case, AGA's uncle was able to get two pairs of pants for the purpose. That was indeed the first time he

wore a pair of pants! Another incident which AGA recalls with pride is the priceless gift from one of his class teachers Mr Ali Ossen. This teacher was very famous for recognizing the able students and punishing the notorious ones. As AGA had done well in the Senior School Certificate examination and that he had been appointed a prefect, Mr. Ossen presented AGA with a suite length. AGA, however, instead of stitching a suit, had stitched two pairs of pants which was very useful at that time.

Every moment AGA had time to relax, his mind would dwell on the extreme difficulties his mother was undergoing. His worries were twofold: being away from her and lacking the funds to supply her with the care she deserved.

Although he excelled in his studies and had the desire to do well in a future life, he thought the present was of greater significance to him as a son eager to return his gratitude to an ailing elderly mother. It was under such circumstances that he, one day, saw an advertisement calling students under the age of eighteen who had excelled in science and been in the cadet corps to apply to join the Navy as Naval Cadets to be trained in Dublin.

The application had to be signed by the parent/guardian and forwarded through the principal of the school with his signature. AGA was very anxious to get this assignment. He cleared the first hurdle of getting his uncle's signature and then approached the Principal Mr. A.M.A. Azeez. That was the first time he met the principal of the school personally. Mr. Azeez consented first and was perusing the documents to place his signature. AGA saw the Principal's face changing when he came to the document containing the results of the SSC examination. An erudite scholar himself, the Mr. Azeez asked him why he was leaving studies. AGA explained the circumstances. He said he was driven by sheer necessity to start earning to look after his family as there was no one who could afford the expenses of a continuing education.

The Principal had an alternative proposal to help circumvent AGA's difficulties. He knew that AGA was the kind of student who would not only add glory to himself but enhance the reputation of the school as well. If given a helping hand, he would deliver the goods. He suggested that AGA move into the hostel and assured that he would authorize the Ceylon Muslim Scholarship Fund to pay half the boarding fees. He could earn the other half by giving private tuition to some needy students. AGA agreed and moved into the hostel. He got two hostellers as his students – the Alvie brothers from Singapore. These brothers were not ordinary students. They were from a well to do family from Singapore and were excelling in sports but needed some assistance in studies. As these boys were under the Principal's care, he had the choice of selecting a tutor thus getting two birds in one shot.

Mr. A.M.A Azeez, the Principal, was no ordinary man. He was a brilliant civil servant who gave up a potential career as a public servant to devote his full time to the cause of education. He was a scholar, teacher, reformer, and educationist all rolled up into one, and finally ended up as a Senator nominated for his extraordinary talent, achievements and his contribution to the cause of education. AGA was simply stunned by the Principal's response to the proposal he had in his hand.

In the first place, in a school with a student population of over four thousand, a student will not have the need or the opportunity to see the principal of the school in his entire school life, unless he is at the receiving end of a punishment for some act of misconduct. Next, a random advertisement for an opening for a cadet that exactly fitted AGA's qualifications and would fulfil his desire to help his ailing mother and dependent relations, with a requirement in the application that he should get the principal's signature, brought him to the Principal. Instead of placing his recommendation on the application and satisfying AGA's immediate needs, the wisdom and foresight of this great educationist saw that the country and the world at large would have been the losers if AGA, a potential engineer, ended up as a mere marine officer. What a great benefactor Mr. Azeez was! AGA therefore took upon himself the added responsibility of seeing that he would return this enormous favour in equal measure.

From then onwards, AGA's respect and admiration towards Mr. Azeez began to grow. Even after he left school, Mr. Azeez continued to show interest in the progress and welfare of AGA and was in constant touch with him. In later life, this relationship, which commenced with a chance meeting, developed into one of mutual respect and admiration for the manner in which AGA kept rising as a star in the engineering firmament of the country.

Inspired by this extraordinary gesture of his principal, his willingness to give a helping hand to a hardworking student deserving such help, and his appreciation of the genuine efforts he was putting in, AGA set about systematically applying himself to all aspects of student life. He thus began to flourish both in academic work as well as extracurricular activities. The fact that he ceased to become a burden any more on his mother or any of his relations was a great relief to him, keeping his mind distraction free. He could now concentrate fully on school activities. It gave him the impetus to focus more closely on higher goals - the post of Senior Prefect, and the ultimate accomplishments of any student in college: winning the gold medal for the best all round student. He had no doubt in his mind that both these goals were well within his reach if only he could ensure continuous hard work with firm commitment, the prayers of his mother and other relatives, and help from Allah. There was a hitherto unseen advantage in AGA living in the college hostel. As a college prefect and a popular student leader, he was financially benefiting from the many rich hostellers who needed his help – assistance that he gladly supplied.

It is an irony of Sri Lankan society that one has to be rich or powerful to command the respect of subordinates. Although AGA was neither rich nor did he come from the upper echelons of society, he was able to win the hearts and minds of those around him by his amiable ways and his desire to help everyone in every regard. He had mastered the subject of mathematics to such an extent that he was sought after by hostellers for help very often and almost became indispensable.

### **AGA in the Zahira Hostel**

Moving into the hostel changed AGA's personality completely. From a lonely, somewhat frustrated book worm confined to a jail cell in Welikade, he converted himself into someone enjoying the company of a large number of youths of his own age. He was much sought after by peers in matters as diverse as seeking help in class subjects such as mathematics, having innocent boyhood fun, organizing events and pleasure trips, and pulling someone's leg. AGA's assistance was sometimes even called on by superiors in bringing the tough nuts under control. The outcome of one such tale is worth narrating.

There was a fellow from Puttalam, Nizar, nicknamed 'cocco' who was a good friend of AGA. A group of hostellers collectively agreed one night to scoot out from the hostel and spirited into the silent darkness of the night city. It didn't take long for them to realize that 'cocco' and a few others from the group were missing. The rest of the crowd carried on regardless and returned to the hostel in the wee hours of the morning. Those who went missing had, however, returned earlier and informed the Boarding Master Mr. Abdul Cader that AGA and the rest of them were out of the hostel the whole night pretending that they were the good guys. Cocco, however, had a serious credibility problem as everyone knew that he was only plying his trade of putting others in trouble with concocted stories. Hence AGA had no difficulty in proving to the Boarding Master that it was in fact his friend who promoted the idea and that he was present all throughout the night with the rest of them but returned early enough to be ahead of the others so as to make the report. Cocco could not avoid the punishment that was imposed on everyone for the offence committed. That was the day AGA was found in the wrong camp much to the surprise of the Boarding Master.

The story does not end there. AGA and his friends decided to teach 'cocco' a lesson for life. This time the victim was Zubair Alim who had the habit of waking everyone up long before the morning bell, as he was

leaving to the mosque for Fajr prayers. He was a religious man starting the day very early on a religious note, but he could have done so leaving others to decide their own destiny. The plot was that those who were sleeping closer to the exit door which he had to walk up to the mosque, would be exposing their person. As they slept in their sarongs it wasn't difficult to pretend that that would have happened accidentally in their sleep. On the night the plot was carried out, some of the boys slept near the exit as others couldn't be convinced. It was a sight that not only Zubair Alim but anyone would have not wished to see first thing in the morning. As he switched on the light and passed the nude colony to walk out of the building, he was visibly annoyed and began to yell obscenities in his angry stupor. Those who were watching the fun, jumped up from their beds and pointed and accusing finger at Cocco and joined in pulling him up for this dastardly act, also shouting that they saw him covering himself up as soon as Alim arrived on the scene. Cocco had to settle matters before the Boarding Master later that day.

On a sultry sunny day in the month of July, AGA woke up as usual and got ready to go to school. He felt a new awakening and a sense of freshness. There was a spring in his step. Was it the good grades he was getting in school? He always considered that to be the most important duty he had to perform. So that day couldn't be so special on that score. Or was it the fact that he was excelling in sports and extracurricular activities? He couldn't say. But he suddenly remembered that it was the year 1954, which was indeed very special to him. In a short while, he received a message that asked him to return to Beruwela for a Mowlood. "How could that be without any prior knowledge or notice about it?" thought AGA. Regardless, he set out to go home - something for which he was always ready.

That was the era of trains run by the government and buses run by privately owned bus companies. AGA travelled up to the Pettah bus stand and got into a bus travelling up to Galle. He sat in a corner seat and soon got into a deep pensive mood. His memory flashed back to his childhood days. He felt a sense of joy, accomplishment and happiness that, despite the fact that he was not blessed with some of the goodies of life, and had to undergo tremendous difficulties, he had an abundance of love from his mother, the blessings of Allah, and his close relatives. He was uncertain about the future. He had faith that it would bring goodness if he followed the same principles he had done hitherto.

AGA looked out of the side window of the bus. He saw 2 coconut palm trees, one tall, one short, standing together, swaying together in the gentle afternoon breeze in unison and in a simple harmonic motion, as if to say to the world that they would stand together in peace and harmony, no matter what, be it rain or shine. That picture on that day registered in his mind firmly. He didn't feel the time of 2 hours pass by and suddenly was awakened from his daydream by the conductor's shout "Hettimulla bahinna" as if the fellow had known exactly where he was to get down.

### **Registration of AGA's Marriage to Jiffriya**

AGA didn't take long to reach his home. He was somewhat surprised to see his brother Azeez already there as he had not been informed about his coming. His curiosity was further aroused when he saw his brother whispering to his mother about the registration. It was the registration of 'someone' whom he knew from the day 'that someone' was born. He lent his ear to the conversation with more interest. That 'someone' was none other than Jiffriya. He felt a sense of trepidation but couldn't explain why. His mother saw him visibly agitated. Then she explained to him that it was Hathy uncle's wish to get Jiffriya's marriage to him registered without any further delay. AGA didn't waste any time in saying that he had no objection to it. The marriage was something he had always looked forward to, as other his uncles had boys in the family and Hathy uncle had only girls. And so, the marriage between AGA and Jiffriya was registered on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of July 1954, witnessed by his brother Azeez on his behalf, and by his mother's uncle Ismail Marikkar on behalf of Jiffriya. AGA was, for all purposes, legally married.

From then onwards, Jiffriya was his “Special” and he watched her grow day by day. This event further confirmed his belief that the year 1954 was the turning point in his life, both academically and personally. It was from Allah and everything happened for the ‘best’, Alhamdulillah.

Jiffriya was just seven years old at the time, an age at which other children would have been playing marbles in their backyards. In the years that followed, she proved to be a formidable partner. She was a beacon of hope to everything that AGA wished; a paragon of virtue to be admired by any husband; an epitome of kindness and companionship to him; an elixir for all his ailments; a soothing balm for a tired and fatigued AGA ambling home at the end of each working day in search of peace and solitude; a fountain of love to him in which he would immerse himself and bathe to his heart’s content, day in day out; an old (If she hits you now, don’t blame her for my sake) bespectacled village school mistress to him with cane in hand whenever he exceeded his limits of mischief and became naughty, naughtier than their children, and naughtiest of all their children and grandchildren put together. Above all, however, she was a guide, philosopher and friend to him, standing by his side at all times just like the shorter coconut palm tree that he saw standing beside the taller one the day he travelled down to Beruwela to take her hand.



**RADIANT JIFFRIYA IN HER FIFTIES LIVING IN MALAYSIA**

### **Changing to the Zahira Senior’s Hostel and Experiences Therein**

AGA’s responsibilities were gradually mounting. As a married man, he had to think of a future together with Jiffriya and do some forward planning. With the privileges he now enjoyed, he felt that he should be further encouraged to continue the good work he was already doing. It was time now for him to shift over to the senior’s hostel down Forbes Road. This senior hostel was a haunted house, rife with horror stories. It had once been the site of a gruesome event - the place where a teacher, Mr. Gomez, committed suicide.

After shifting to the senior’s hostel, it was expected that senior students would have a better, secluded and quieter environment to concentrate on studies even more, as the University Entrance examination was fast approaching. AGA’s next objective was to enter the University. He knew that it was a twenty-four-hour commitment. There was no difficulty in getting all the necessary help and cooperation from all the teachers in this endeavour. As almost always with students following mathematics, chemistry was his weak subject. His teachers mirrored his uncles by strictly enforcing punishments and even suspended his prefect-ship several times when the score for chemistry fell below average.

On the eve of the examination, AGA had to first settle the big question whether he would apply for engineering, his life's ambition, or be satisfied with a science degree. The University Entrance was a game of touch and go where one could not be sure of victory unless they scored straight A's in all four subjects. AGA therefore had to aim that almost impossible target. The subjects were: Mathematics, Applied and Pure, Chemistry and Physics. While Chemistry was his weak subject, the teacher of Physics, Mr. A.A.A. Gaffoor, was a chronic absentee and AGA had to study the subject by himself. His class teacher Mr. Roy de Mel expected him to score an average of over 90% at the weekly tests. In the circumstances AGA was in, that was not possible, even with his 100% in mathematics he invariably got. To bolster his application, AGA felt it wise to do as many extracurricular activities as he possibly could - simultaneously. He was a college prefect, and was taking part in athletics, boxing, wrestling and was a member of the college shooting team as he was a crack shot, representing Colombo in the Empire Cities Competition. Could he reach his target? One teacher, the deputy principal, Mr B.J.H Bahar thought otherwise.

Mr. Bahar had a very sound, logical reason for believing this. Since the year 1945, no one from Zahira College had entered the university to do engineering. It was Mr. Bahar's considered view that AGA should apply to do a science degree with the prospect of entering the university rather than fail to gain entry by applying for engineering. He had quoted the examples of Pararajasinghem and Haja Mohideen, the best mathematics students before AGA, who failed to enter the university to do engineering. AGA was by then almost convinced that he should apply for science. It was the Principal Mr Azeez, who once again used his casting vote that AGA should apply for engineering as he had nothing to lose by doing so.

Finally, the long-awaited exam came around, and AGA did extremely well with the help of Allah. He obtained the maximum possible four A's and was called for the interview to enter the engineering program. Four out of five who had applied for engineering were called from Zahira College that year. This was the best result Zahira ever had for the subject. Of the four only two were selected, and only AGA entered the university as the other student, K.R.L. Perera, opted to join the Navy. After appearing for the examination, he continued to stay in the hostel and took part in all the extracurricular activities. He was promoted to Senior Prefect and was concentrated on shooting and his place in the cadets. That year they won the Herman Loos Cup for the Best All Round Platoon, under Mulaffer Khalid, the sergeant, while AGA served as lance sergeant. They also won the National Championship in Shooting.

As a mark of appreciation for the good overall performance of graduating students, Zahira had a tradition of awarding a prize to the best all round student of the year. For this purpose, the selection was done by a panel of teachers. AGA was one of the four contestants. The other three were T.M. Rajudeen, a Sandhurst Cadet, P. Balasinghem, a University Entrant and V. Narendra an All-Round Cricketer. By an overwhelming majority, Aga was selected 'The Best All Round Student of The Year', Balasinghem 2<sup>nd</sup>, Rajudeen 3<sup>rd</sup> and Narendra 4<sup>th</sup>. With the help of Allah, both intentions of AGA were achieved. Alhamdulillah, Allah answered his prayers.

**‘PEAK OF AGA’S PERFORMANCE 1955’  
GOLDEN ERA OF ZAHIRA**



**Picture of AGA Wearing the medals**

**Recipient of:**

- **PRIZE FOR SENIOR MATHEMATICS**
- **PRIZE FOR GENERAL SCIENCE**
- **PRIZE FOR GENERAL PROFICIENCY**
- **PRIZE FOR BEST CADET**
- **SENIOR PREFECT OF COLLEGE,**
- **LANCE SERGEANT OF THE PLATOON, WINNING THE HERMAN LOOS CUP,**
- **MEMBER OF THE SHOOTING TEAM AND REPRESENTED COLOMBO CEYLON IN THE EMPIRE CITIES SHOOTING COMPETITION,**
- **AWARDED THE GHAFOOR GOLD MEDAL FOR THE BEST ALL ROUND STUDENT OF THE YEAR,**
- **ENTERED UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON, FACULTY OF ENGINEERING**





**ZAHIRA COLLEGE MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB CHAMPIONS 1955**

Seated L to R B H Sariffodeen, Mahsoom Haniffa, Mr Muhlar, Principal Azeez, SJA Doray, A Caem Ms. Amit  
 Standing First Row AGA Barrie, MW Amit, Mulaffer Khalid, MB Ghouse, MHM Ameen, Siddique Sally  
 Standing Last Row BA Sariffodeen, TM Rajudeen, MG Amath, Haniffa



**WINNERS OF HERMAN LOOS CUP FOR ALL ROUND EFFICIENCY 1955.**

Winning the most coveted award, the Abdul Ghafoor gold medal, called for celebrations. AGA's hostel mates demanded a treat from him and he had to comply. He arranged to take them to dinner and for a show at Liberty Cinema, Kollupitiya. It was near midnight when the show was over. The group of exuberant youth, enjoying the recently acquired success in gaining admission to the university, were walking back to the hostel after the show. As part of the extended 'celebrations', AGA was forced by his friends to direct traffic standing at the centre of the Flower Road / Dharmapala Road Junction. It must have been one of those queer coincidences and a stroke of bad luck for AGA that, just as AGA was performing this act, his Deputy Principal Bahar passed by in his car. In the nick of time AGA saw him but was too late to avoid being seen by Mr. Bahar. It was the sarong, the piece of garb that often comes to a man's rescue, that saved AGA in this instance too. He raised the sarong high enough to cover his face yet not so high enough as to uncover his private parts. But the length of the sarong is a finite quantity. He had to do some juggling with its two ends to satisfy this infinite condition.

If, by any chance, AGA had been seen by Mr. Bahar in this midnight madness, all of AGA's lifetime achievements of good grades, impeccable behaviour, prefectships gold medal etc. would have been instantly brought to naught. Having escaped him, it was laughter all the way to the hostel that night.

The life in the hostel was another gift from the Almighty. AGA always recalls the great friends he had from every nook and corner of Ceylon. Wherever he goes he meets an old Zahirian. The hostel had attracted all the affluent Muslims children from the entire island. This was very evident when he served in both Ceylon Government Railways and the Ceylon Transport Board, where he met most of his colleagues. He always thanks Allah for his achievements as he was able to accomplish all his goals as a college student. It is this training and experience which gave AGA a jumpstart in his life. He mingled with different friends coming from various backgrounds without fear or favour. He learned to deal with all of them equally and was able to win everyone's heart. He learned what to say and when to say it, resolving conflicts at his own expense. He learned to further serve; the hallmark of a noble and Godfearing man.

AGA's experience in the hostel can be summed up in his own words but picked up from many, as:

- ***Your fences need to be horse-high, pig-tight, and bull-strong.***
- ***Know the wheeler dealers and keep them at a distance.***
- ***Life is simpler when you plow around the stump.***
- ***Words that soak into your ears are whispered...not yelled.***
- ***Meanness don't just happen overnight, but it grows within.***
- ***You cannot unsay a cruel word.***
- ***Every path has few puddles.***

- *When you wallow with pigs, expect to get dirty.*
- *The best sermons are lived, not preached.*
- *Don't judge folks by their relatives.*
- *Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.*
- *Live a good, honourable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll enjoy it a second time.*
- *Don't interfere with somethin' that ain't botherin' you.*
- *Be friendly at any cost.*
- *If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'.*
- *There is no substitute for hardwork.*
- *Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.*
- *Letting the cat out of the bag is a whole lot easier than putting it back in.*
- *Easy to attain but difficult to maintain.*
- *Take defeat like gentlemen and victory like men.*
- *Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to Allah.*

# LIFE IN THE UNIVERSITY

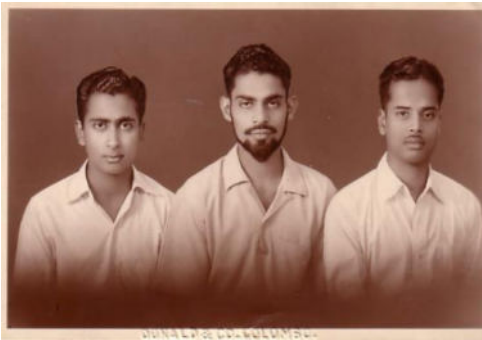
## Adjusting to University Life

AGA thought to himself that he had achieved the ultimate fulfilment that a young man of his age could aspire to. He had cleared one of the most worrisome hurdles for a student in passing the examination scoring 4 straight A's, faced an arduous university interview to become an engineer, was being helped financially by the grant of a bursary by the same university, offered a subsidized lodging by the old school Zahira in recognition of his outstanding achievements, had officially registered his marriage to an extraordinary girl. What more could one hope for? He was feeling, quite so, at the top of the world.

AGA was earning a little extra pocket money by tutoring in addition to a bursary of fifty rupees from the University. Sharing his room were two other Zahirians who had also entered the University from college, Tuley de Silva and M.Y. Mohamed. It was a good arrangement as all three of them were keen students coming from the same school, the one difference being that his two friends took life more seriously. Their residence was away from the humdrum of the city and the surroundings were quiet and conducive to doing studies. In the upper floor of the same building, there were three members of the Zahira College Staff- Messrs I.L.M Suhaib, A.C.A. Rahman, and M. Zackariya.



1958



1961



2000

University Room Mates – Tuley de Silva, AGA Barrie, M.Y.Mohamed

AGA spoke of an unforgettable experience he had while living in that room. One night, both his roommates were away, having gone for a midnight movie, while he was sleeping alone. In his sleep, he suddenly felt as if someone was squeezing his neck, holding him down. He was unable to move. After a great struggle, he was able to jump off the bed. He was half dazed and, coming out of his sleep, wondered if it had been a dream. Those sleepy thoughts quickly vanished and reality soon began to dawn on him. He was convinced it was no dream but a ghost. He was told later that the house was haunted. The next day he was down with high fever and had to go home for treatment. Never again did he stay in that place alone.

There was sufficient incentive and time for AGA to make regular weekend visits to Beruwela. Now it was not only seeing his mother, as much as his mother liked to see him, as he used to do when in school. He was also indeed privileged to find Jiffriya too, the love of his life looking forward to his visit every Friday evening. AGA began to understand her and appreciate her more. He could see new and emerging good qualities in her which he had not much recognized in her earlier teens. Innocence was written all over her. She seemed incapable of playing any of the wily tricks that most women are wont to do. No sooner he

arrived at home, Jiffriya would show up and be with him and close to him all the while. AGA of course would keep her entertained.

Every day in the university was a fresh experience for AGA. The first was his confrontation with seniors. Traditionally, freshers (freshmen) were subject to a rag, part of which was paying the seniors a sum of money known as 'poll tax'. In those early days it was mostly fun. However, AGA went one step further than any fresher would ever have dared to. He pretended to be a senior himself and started collecting 'poll tax' from other unsuspecting freshers who had entered the university from other schools. As bad luck would have it, a senior who was a Zahirian had recognised AGA and promptly exposed him. He was still lucky enough as he would have been summarily dealt with if he ever got caught by someone more serious. This incident, ironically, brought AGA and the senior together as close friends.

It was in one of these encounters that Lelwela happened to meet AGA. Lelwela thereafter became AGA's closest ally in class, at home, on the way, and everywhere, and has been the best of friends ever since. Lelwela always considered it a rare privilege to have come across a friend like AGA and has held him close to his heart always. The two of them held the forefront in their batch, and were at the bottom of many mischievous acts, brought plenty of laughter to all around them, and were prepared to take up any challenge, despite Lelwela's frail physical structure.

It didn't take long for Lelwela, also known as 'Lel', to realize that AGA was an easy-going fellow ever ready to have a little fun. As the two were gathered at the entrance to the physics lecture theatre for their very first class, AGA suggested that they should welcome the teacher with a 'Right Royal Hoot' (a chorus of cheers and/or rambunctious utterances) before the lecture commenced. Those who heard the suggestion readily agreed at the door. A hoot is highly contagious, and they had no doubt that the whole class would willingly and enthusiastically join them into a huge chorus. They had been in the university for less than a month, and most of them were seeing each other for the first time. Hence, except for a very few of them, they didn't know each other. As they walked into the lecture theatre, one student who was planning to take part in the hoot, instead of joining them to take his seat, was seen walking up to the rostrum. For a moment they thought that this student was attempting to do one more than they had originally planned. But to their amazement, he stood behind the lecturer's desk and began introducing himself as the lecturer, with a wry smile on his face. Nevertheless, they went through with the plan. He was a decent fellow, and one who could take a joke in the correct spirit. They later became good friends.

Hooting is a national pastime in Sri Lanka. They hoot as a part of celebrating a success, substitute the hoot for a hurrah, hoot when they want to humiliate someone, hoot when an audience wishes to voice disapproval and hoot for no reason at all. In Universities, hooting figures prominently. The following hilarious incident turned sour and ended up with the parties that hooted getting off scot-free, and an innocent student being punished and thereafter nicknamed "Hoota Pieris".

It took place in the same lecture theatre. The subject of the lecture was once again physics but the person taking the lecture on this occasion was a 'phenomenon'. He was Professor Mylavaganam, affectionately known as Myla. Myla was a brilliant product of the university and a strict disciplinarian. He would have seen several generations of students passing through him during his outstanding career first as a lecturer and then as Professor of Physics. Hence when AGA's batch entered the university, Myla's reputation had already spread the length and breadth of the campus. No student would want to face the misfortune of getting caught by him for any misdemeanour. One could hear a pin drop on the floor when he took his lectures. Classes would watch in awe and listen to him spellbound because his lectures were so lucid and so well delivered. In addition to the reputation that he carried with him, he often lectured outside his subject about moral ethics.

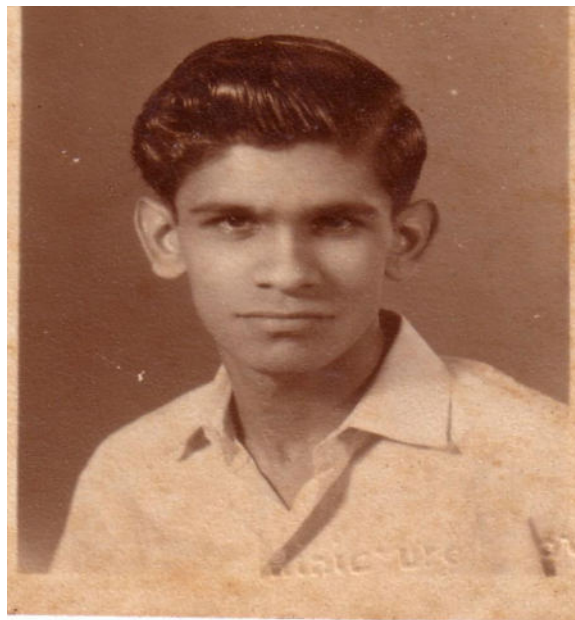
The day in question they, AGA's class of first year Science, had just completed one such lecture and were stampeding out of the lecture theatre for lunch. The time was 12 noon, and the students were voracious

after having listened to four-hour's worth of lectures. A few were already ahead of AGA and Lel and down the staircase to get to the ground floor. It was then that the hoot began.

It was no ordinary hoot. Someone started it as a small, humorous gesture, but others joined in instinctively and it rose to a crescendo in a very short length of time. Suddenly a shout was heard over the noise of the hoot. Professor Myla, it seemed then, was bearing down on his boisterous pupils. AGA and Lel took to their heels with the others. The staircase, however, couldn't handle all of them all at once, as its width rapidly produced a bottleneck for the middle of the column of fleeing students. Those at the rear couldn't move at all. That gave Myla an opportunity to catch up with some of the students at the back, unfortunately the most innocent of the whole lot. Worst still, the victim singled out was a fellow who ordinarily talked with a stammer. No amount of pleading could convince Myla that the student wouldn't and couldn't have hooted because of his congenital stammer. The poor soul was taken to Myla's office, and was suspended for a week

Although AGA, Lel, and other students had a full day's studies every weekday during the first year, they spent some evenings on leisure. One day, about five of them decided, after the day's lectures were over, to go for a movie at the New Olympia Theatre. Upon their arrival, they found the place crowded. If they were to join the queue, they would never have a chance of seeing the movie that day. They therefore decided to jump the queue. Being a long wait, what they did was enough to start a fight. As AGA joined the line, the first threat was aimed at him. His response to the impending confrontation was very simple. He pointed at Lel and told the belligerent to fight him first before challenging the rest. Even though Lel was the smallest among the five, he used the same language the stranger was using conjuring choice words in Sinhala that suited the occasion. The other three students followed suit, challenging the angry cinemagoer to fight Lel first. Seeing there were five of them, the fellow backed down, and they succeeded in buying the tickets and seeing the show as planned.

A minor digression. By this time, ZAM Bari had got a job as a schoolteacher after passing his S.S.C and was working for a small salary. Whenever AGA ran short of money, he would go to ZAM Bari's brother, ZAM Refai, who was working as a salesman in Silk Paradise and living in Bambalapitiya. Due to financial difficulties, Refai had to take up early employment working as salesman, a pitiful vocation as he was considered a very hardworking student.



**ZAM REFAI an A Class student took up employment at early days**

AGA and Lel took their studies quite seriously but didn't miss an opportunity to enjoy a variety of fun filled escapades. One of the mischievous acts that the two often indulged in was tying the sarees of girl students to the backrest of chairs. Whenever the girls got up, they ran the risk of tripping over and took some time to untie the knot, by which time AGA and Lel had already gone off safely to watch the ensuing chaos.

The first year vanished as quickly as it had come. Its going was another challenge for engineering students. Those who didn't fare well in the first-year examination ran the risk of being dropped from engineering. Second chances were not allowed. AGA and Lel were lucky to have cleared this hurdle and were placed in the Engineering Faculty proper. In the faculty, work was even more strenuous with lectures in the mornings and practical work in the evening, filling the entire day from 8AM to 4PM. Practical work was organized in groups of about six students each.

AGA also got involved in some sports like rigger and athletics. At the freshmen's meet he beat Dr C. Thurairajah in the 400-meter sprint to come first and came third in the 100-meter event, competing with then public school athletes like David Gunasekara and Kenny Stevens.

Yet extracurriculars came second to education. AGA's work group once had to perform the practical analysis of finding the expansion coefficient of a given metal. At the end of the experiment where readings were taken and plotted, and the results calculated, the value of the coefficient was wrong. All group members except AGA wrote the calculated answer, however. AGA, without calculating the result, wrote 'what it should be' even though all the group members had recorded the same readings. The lecturer, Professor Sivaprakasapillai, having seen that the recorded readings between AGA and his peers differed, made a remark in the books of the others. He said to refer to AGA's calculation for the right answer. AGA's colleagues had no choice but to acquiesce, a deferral that they later thanked him for.

### **Attending to Family Social Events during University Period**

During his stay in the Part 1, Engineering, AGA had to face his niece's wedding - the first of what was to be a series of weddings. It was a difficult event to arrange, as the family had no financial assistance at all. His mother had to borrow money from their Sheik's daughter, Fathima Thatha. In addition, AGA had to make the supreme sacrifice of parting with his treasured gold medal that the college awarded him, as part of the gold for the jewellery. That wasn't his only contribution. He remembers borrowing two hundred and fifty Rupees from Mr. M.A. Uvais, who was one of his teachers at Zahira College, to be spent on the wedding. It was Lel who took the money to AGA's mother. Surmounting all these difficulties, the wedding was held as best as it could have been.

It was also AGA's first attempt at building a throne. The grand seat took the shape of a moon with a backdrop of desert scene. The bride would be ensconced on the moon and would walk out of the stage at the appointed time. The backdrop scene was drawn by M.H.M. Zareen. Jiffriya and Fowziya sang a song for the couple which was well appreciated by the guests at the wedding. AGA had borrowed a camera from Musthakeen, a friend of his from Thihariya to take pictures at the wedding. He had to improvise artificial lighting to take pictures by opening part of the roof to let some sunlight in as there was no flash built into the camera.

When the function got underway and it was time to start taking the pictures, he started looking for the camera. It was missing. AGA went crazy, for one thing the camera was not his. Further, they were going to lose the sunlight and would without a doubt miss the pictures. At first, he felt his cousin Nouman would

have taken the camera and began to blame him for taking it. Nouman, however, denied the crime. But when AGA, in desperation, shouted out an ultimatum to be heard by everyone, the camera appeared at the place he had left it. The pictures were eventually taken. They had later come to know that it was his uncle Hathy, who was not in favour of taking pictures, who had hidden the camera.

AGA's regular routine soon became a thoroughly enjoyable University life during the week and visits to Beruwela during the weekends. One rare occasion, however, his friends Abul Hassen and Nizam brought both Nouman and Jiffriya to Colombo to see the Wesak Celebrations. Unfortunately for Nouman, but very fortunately for AGA, Nouman fell sick and was taken back to Beruwela by Abul Hassen, leaving Jiffriya with AGA. There is a famous Sinhala saying that could describe what Abul Hassen did: "Handing over a hen to a Fox." She stayed with AGA for two days and went back to Beruwela after enjoying more than mere Wesak Celebrations. Lelwela later wrote, "knowing AGA as I do, I have my gravest doubts whether Nouman's sickness was genuine or orchestrated by the beneficiary of this arrangement, to suit the occasion."

Back in university, AGA would, on occasion, pull something from his hat while a serious lecture was going on. One of the lecturers, Dr. Mahalingam, was in the habit of ordering a glass of tea and leaving it on the table to let it cool. One day, AGA decided to have a gulp of the tea when the lecturer was busy writing the work on the board. As planned, the glass came passing down the line for a sip by every student, until it reached AGA, who too had his sip. The next chance was Lel's, who decided to finish the whole glass, the drink being delectably good. The empty glass thereafter was on its way back to the table. Dr. Mahalingam, in the meantime, having finished writing on the board, turned and reached up to his tea. What he saw was something he didn't expect - an empty glass in the hand of a student who of course had nothing to do with the arrangement. The unfortunate scapegoat had to suffer the consequence of replacing the glass of tea.

AGA's mentor during his school days, Mr. A.M.A. Azeez, continued to have an influence on AGA throughout his career. He had taken a bet that AGA would fare better in the examinations than M.A.Q. Saleem, a star who had entered from Royal College. Mr. Azeez had been somewhat surprised when he heard AGA had scored an ordinary pass at the Part 1 examination in engineering, while Saleem had got a first class pass. Mr. Azeez expressed his anger in no uncertain terms, calling AGA up and admonishing him. He also showed that AGA, by his disappointing performance, had let him down badly. AGA had to make an unconditional promise to Mr. Azeez that he would beat Saleem in the final examination. If Saleem were to get a first class, he would beat him by obtaining a super first class!

AGA would do non-stop studies at a stretch for days on end. He did not leave his room, studying day and night, even skipping his weekend visits to Beruwela. He was sporting a beard as a means of cutting down on time for shaving. This made Hathy uncle comment once whether he couldn't afford a razor blade which was just a mere five cents then. That comment, some backhanded criticism, suggested that AGA should immediately go for a shave. His uncle's admonition didn't deter him from continuing with the beard, however, since there was an offer of a free balcony ticket for beard growers at the Empire Theatre. AGA, many of his friends and Lelwela, who had beards enjoyed this free gift. That was the first time they were able to see a movie from a balcony seat.





**BEARDED GROUP 1960 FACULTY OF ENGINEERING**

**TOP (Left to Right)                      BANDULA WANIGASEKERA, A.G.A. BARRIE**  
**BOTTOM (Left to Right)                ANTON MUTTUCUMARANA, D.C. LELWELA,**  
**DANIEL FERNANDO, JIM De SILVA.**

Due to closing of the hostel for holidays AGA moved back to Rajagiriya home with Pasha. He put his maximum effort to keep his word with Mr Azeez, restricted both pleasure and leisure. During this period, AGA was studying hard, continuing to cut down weekend visits to Beruwela. His cousin, ZAM Bari, having heard about it, once came to his rescue by arranging to bring Jiffriya to Colombo. She was able to spend a few days in Colombo so that AGA could regularly meet her. It was during this visit that ZAM took them to see the famous Tamil movie ‘Kalyana Parissu’.

AGA’s prayers throughout the ordeal would be answered. He eventually secured a second class (lower division), while Saleem was able to get only an ordinary pass. This was no mean task. Mr. Azeez had put so much fear into AGA that he had to give up his easy-going style and get down to the books in all seriousness.

No sooner than the final examination was over, AGA and Lel were offered appointments on the railways as technical assistants, pending publication of results. They used to call themselves ‘technical advisors’ instead. Whilst working there, AGA was summoned to the engineering faculty to be appointed as an instructor, based on his performance in the examination. This came as a surprise to AGA. He took it as a rich reward for his commitment to his studies. AGA had no hesitation in leaving the railway for the instructor position at a monthly salary of five hundred rupees as the railway job was paying him only one hundred and ten rupees. He got himself released from the railways with the hope of coming back after the one-year assignment as instructor was completed by him.

The appointment of instructor, however, was more so a surprise to Dr Sivaprakasapillai, who never expected him to pass the exam. In fact, seeing AGA back in the faculty prompted him to ask AGA whether he had come to repeat the finals!

AGA had to share this happy news with those near and dear to him. And so, the very day he received the appointment, he rushed home to tell his mother. She was overjoyed. That was the culmination of a long and hard struggle for AGA from the day he first joined the village school. His mother had played a significant role by providing him with maternal love, care, encouragement, and proper advice all the way. On this occasion too, she prompted him, as the first priority, to arrange to send Jiffriya to a good school in Colombo. AGA lost no time in making that possible by talking to Jiffry Muhsin's mother to get a place for Jiffriya at the Muslim Ladies College.

AGA was honoured by being invited by the alma mater to propose the vote of thanks at the College Prize giving. It was indeed another pleasant surprise where AGA had recalled his fantastic period at Zahira under the Principal A.M.A Azeez, describing it as the 'Golden Era of Zahira' and thanked the organizers of the great function.

AGA's desire to attend to family obligations left him with some unsettled loans. He took early action to resolve all of his outstanding debts. He looked into other household needs, compromised for the sake of providing undivided attention to his education, and arranged to provide new furniture. He was able to take over the running of the house as well, since he was by then earning a good salary. A significant change also took place at home in Beruwela during that period: ZAM Bari, who was employed as a teacher had left for Germany on a scholarship.

Within a few months, the university convocation that year was held in Peradeniya. AGA felt sad that no one from his family attended. But there were other factors that prevented any of his relatives from participating. In fact, not many in the family knew what AGA was doing. Pasha, Ibrahim, and ZAM who would have been the ones to appreciate AGA, were all still studying and were unemployed. There were also additional financial difficulties in the family. Only ZAM Refai, considered the 'Golden Boy' of the family, could lend financial assistance due to his vocation as a salesman.

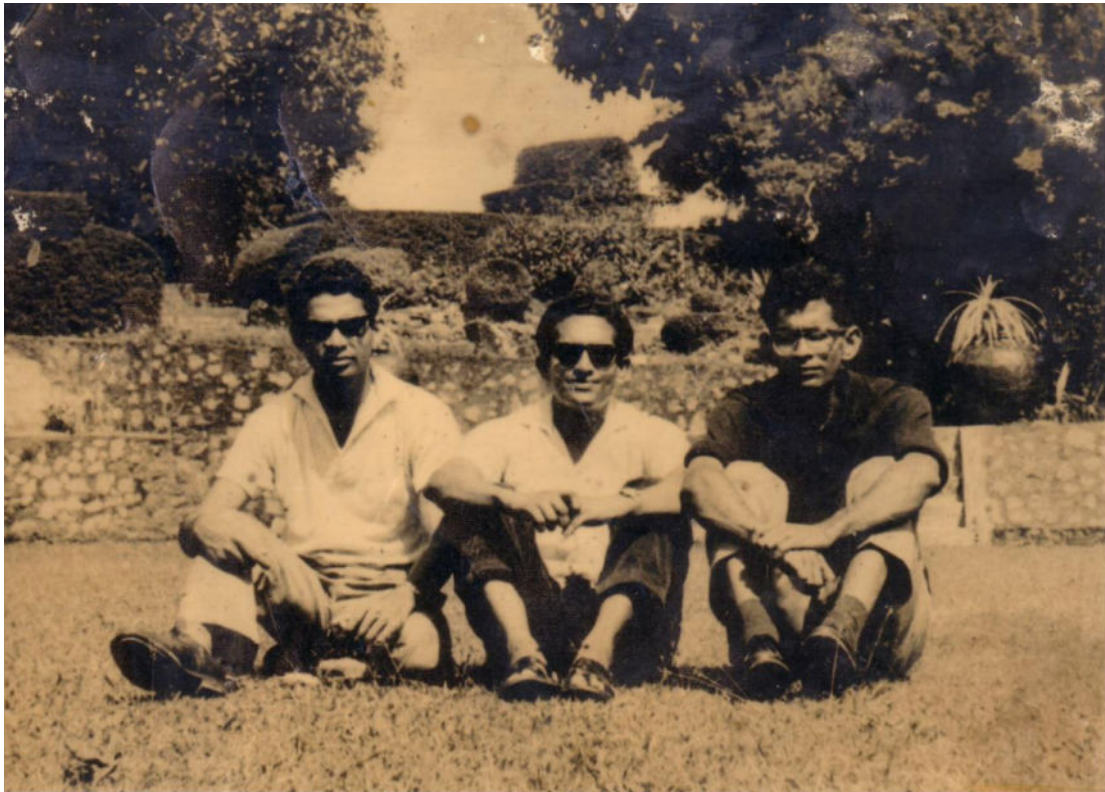


**CONVOCATION PICTURE A.G.A. BARRIE. TAKEN IN THE YEAR 1960**

## LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

### Family Responsibilities Abound

AGA was feeling a sense of relief that the family was now able to put behind them their dark and gloomy days of the past. He took a leading role in their affairs, and other family members provided whatever support they could. Prospects for the future were bright. Day by day, AGA could see the positive progress being shown collectively by all the members of the family. ZAM had returned from Germany, bringing along with him a good many electronic items and equipment. He was able to sell most of it and raise sufficient money for the expenses needed. The fact that every young member of the family joined in providing financial support in this collective effort made the family financially strong and helped raise the living standards of everyone. As if to herald a new era in the family, Sabir Pasha, who had started working, went on to purchase a car, after having sold his Scooter, and thus became the first member to own a car. It was at this time that the wedding of Sitty Kadhija, the sister of ZAM Bari, took place. With the improved financial standing of the family, this wedding was held without as many difficulties as before.



**THE "TRIO" A.G.A. BARRIE, SABIR PASHA AND Z.A.M. BARI**

**AT THE BEVIS BAWA'S GARDEN IN 1959.**

The threesome of Pasha, ZAM and AGA, having grown up together, became very close to each other, and began to get involved in several adventurous pursuits. They had tried one too many when they made a trip on bicycles from Beruwela to Matara during the Ramadhan of that year. On their return back home, Pasha was hammered by his father, and AGA was reprimanded by Hathy uncle, who asked him whether they had "gone collecting Zakat because of the festival". Only ZAM was able to avoid any punishment.

Soon AGA was to get an opportunity of showing his family members the glamour of a convocation, when

Ibrahim, who was already married at the time, went up to receive his certificate. AGA took his mother, Jiffriya and Hathy uncle to see Ibrahim's convocation. Everyone kept this journey for a very long time in their memory, as that was the first long journey by train for AGA's mother and Jiffriya. They had the company of M.Y. Mohammed's father, travelling all the way from Batticaloa for his son's convocation.

Pasha's marriage was being finalised about this time. Traditional customs in arranged marriages among Muslims would not permit the bridegroom to see the bride until the wedding day. However, it occurred to the trio of Pasha, ZAM and AGA to somehow see the bride much before that, and they hatched a plan to do so. The bride was a schoolteacher in a Girls School. The plan was to seek an appointment with the 'teacher' in connection with admitting a student - ZAM's sister Mathanya- to her school.

On the appointed day, Pasha, ZAM and AGA went to her home to inquire from her whether it was possible for ZAM's sister Mathanya to be admitted to her school. Everything worked exactly as planned. They had a good conversation. Unfortunately, because of the way they were seated, Pasha couldn't get a glimpse of his future bride. AGA and ZAM did, and they were both satisfied as she was good looking. They conveyed the brilliant news to Pasha on their way back home and started to sing the famous Tamil song "Nan Patha Pennai Nee Parkillai".



**M.I.M SABIR PASHA – THE FORCE BEHIND THE FAMILY**

As the wedding plans got under way, Pasha's family received a letter, warning that, on the day of the wedding, the bridegroom's car will be intercepted and that the signatories to the letter will not allow the bridegroom to proceed. AGA by then had become a formidable force. With the confidence he had gained with the rise of the family fortunes, he went ahead on a prior inspection of the bride's route to the wedding and signalled 'all clear'. Neither the bride nor anyone else encountered any problems on the way to and at the wedding.

The wedding took place as planned. There was, however, a family tragedy that occurred on the wedding night. AGA's cousin Muhiba Thatha passed away. This was a major blow to their family. She was a well-respected lady who had plenty of humour in her. Once she thought of teasing the front house people and used ZAM and AGA as 'actors'. She told the two cousins to dress up as an old couple and hang out opposite the house. It really worked since everyone thought a couple, about to die, had come to their place. On closer examination of the 'woman' however, they found that there was no hair on 'her' head, which led to suspicion that they were some robbers in disguise. Even Jiffriya caught the bait and was warning her mother to feel for her necklace and be careful. Others began running helter-skelter.

While being instructor at the university AGA was offered a teaching post in Nigeria. When he showed the appointment letter to his mother, she refused saying he should never leave the country as long as she was alive. AGA never ever thought of leaving the island during the lifetime of his mother. He assured her and kept his word, keeping with Islamic tradition that **‘Paradise lies under the feet of the mother’**.

Around this time his cousin’s daughter Jisthiya, Pasha’s stepsister, was getting ready to get married. This wedding was not a problem as her father sold a property and held a grand ceremony. Here again AGA made one of the best thrones, as the bride’s father was prepared to spend the money on satin cloth and other accessories for the seat. This was one wedding they all worked hard for and had a good time. AGA was even washing the plates to meet the demand of serving the visitors. Relatives from Galle, Colombo and Beruwela were present in full force. In the evening, after the wedding was over, they had a gala, singing and dancing away whole night. AGA was leading the group, assisted by his nephew Fassy, son of Shams Thatha. Even Hathy uncle gave up on trying to stop them. The old folks talk about it even today.

### **A Brief Stay in The Sri Lanka Railways**

On completing the period in the University, AGA was appointed along with Lelwela as Junior Civil Engineers in the Ceylon Government Railways. At this time, ZAM Bari had arranged another work visa to go to Germany but could not immediately afford the cost of the ticket. AGA aided his cousin by arranging some money from the Railway Chief Draftsman. In return ZAM Bari agreed to send him a German sewing machine. ZAM left for Germany and his brother, Refai, moved to Welikade to share the room with AGA.



**ZAM BARI**

**FIRST FAMILY MEMBER TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY FOR EMPLOYMENT**

AGA found working on the railways an interesting experience. He was involved from designs to construction in railway engineering. The most thrilling experience AGA remembers, as a junior engineer, is the welding of rails. This was the pet project of Mr. Vaitialingam, Chief Engineer Way and Works. AGA was put in charge to try out this new project in several locations on the track in different parts of the country. About the same time, B.D Rampala, the GM, had introduced the “novel light signalling system”, of colour lights in the Kelaniya area. After the introduction of welded rail in that area the track circuits began to fail very often. At a technical meeting, the GM told the chief engineer to undo the welded rails as it was causing problems to the colour lights. Accordingly, AGA was informed to de-weld the rails.

While mobilizing the gangs to cut the welded rails, AGA reviewed the situation and decided to weld the opposite rail as well instead of undoing work already done. This was his first bold step to over-rule directives by a senior. It worked, as the failure was due to the unequal expansion of the rails. After what AGA did, the expansion on both rails was the same, and wires did not snap like earlier causing circuit failure. At the next meeting, the GM claimed that due to cutting of the rails there were no more failures of the colour lights and gave further instructions that AGA should not try any welding in the Colombo area. The C.E.W, Mr. Vaitialingam, humbly reported that the failure was arrested by carrying out welding on the other rail too. This convinced the GM to continue with AGA’s project as well.

As assistant district engineer for central district, AGA oversaw taking over supplies of ballast materials at the coal grounds of Dematagoda. The locale sported a big racket where engineers, foremen and the contractor had teamed up to cheat the government. AGA was told by the chief engineer, N.A.Vaitilingam, either to join the gang and make your million or stand firm and clean up the place of bribery. In case AGA chose to clear the mess, N.A Vaitilingam gave him assurance that he will back him up.

The standard arrangement was that when the contractor supplied the metal (ballast stones) they make a pile in the shape of a trapezium. The pile would then be measured by the engineer and was marked with lime for the purposes of avoiding redundancy in measurements. But the involved gang in the racket took away only the marked metal on the top surface and made a new pile using almost 75% of the old piled ballast. In other words, 75% of the stone would always remain there and would be measured continuously. AGA changed the method and informed the contractor that they should alternate the supply point and take clearance from him that the old pile had been removed completely before proceeding with work. True to True to his word, Mr Vaitialingam supported AGA all the way and he exposed the culprits. The contractor, K.D Albert, who failed to buy him over, even threatened AGA by trying to get the services of Ossie Corea, the notorious thug, who was supposed to have assassinated Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake. AGA rebuked the contractor, saying that “It will not work with me as I am the grandson of Salih Thambi of Welikade” and asked Albert to check out Charlie of Welikade, a delinquent as notorious as Ossie. When Albert realized AGA’s ostensible underworld connections he left him alone, leading to cleaning up of the mess in the coal grounds. Alhamdulillah! This gave AGA a good start in railways and consequent to that, he was entrusted with more responsible tasks and positions. This episode once again confirmed the fact that *honesty is the best policy*.

AGA continued to live with Pasha and Refai in the Welikade house until he was transferred out to the Northern District as Asst. District Engineer. Once he had made a ring to Jiffriya and sent it through Refai to the Muslim Ladies College hostel. The Matron had heard that Jiffriya was engaged but did not know to whom. When she saw Refai giving the ring she had questioned both. On finding out that he was not the boy she had asked him to leave the place. Poor Refai had to come back unable to perform the task and related the story to AGA. They both had a good laugh over it.

## **Transferred to Anuradhapura**

Life in Anuradhapura, the headquarters of the Northern District, was very interesting as there were a good number of known people living in the town. H.M.Z. Farook was the A.G.A., Uncle Preena was the Inspector of Police, Doole was the A.S.P., Dr Mohamed was in the Government Hospital and C.P. Mohamed was the Chairman. They had started the building of the Mosque in town. The Railway bungalow, AGA's residence, was very large and situated in Basawakulama, very close to the famous Buddhist Dagoba. Farook too was living close by. AGA very rarely stayed alone in his bungalow unless he had some visitors, as it looked haunted. Mulaffer Khalid of the Airforce was one of the many visitors, who enjoyed bird watching in the morning hours off the lake. AGA normally lived with Farook as he himself was scared of staying alone. As it was very far, AGA used to go home only for the weekends until he was moved back to Colombo.

When he eventually returned to Colombo, AGA moved into a rented house on Polhengoda Road along with M.Y. Mohamed and Lelwela as housemates. They had a cook named Tuan Cassin Nana, who made good meals all the time and fed them well and kept the place 'clean'. Many engineers, doctors and others had gone through this lodge, especially when they didn't want to go back to their normal places after parties. This dwelling was well patronized by visitors from South and East.

AGA was placed senior to Lelwela in the Railways for the obvious reason that he was an honours graduate with proven efficiency and respect. Every time there was a vacancy he got pushed up and used to tell Lelwela how unhappy he was for Lel because of that. Lel, however, expressed no hard feelings at all about AGA's rise. In fact, when AGA voiced his dislike to the Chief Engineer about his being appointed as District Engineer with his friend as Assistant District Engineer, Lel was called up by the latter and asked whether he had any objection to working under AGA. Lel informed him that he had no problem whatsoever about it and that he would cooperate with AGA to the fullest. Yet AGA had already spoken to Mr. N.A. Vaitialingam, arranging for that district to be run by both, dividing the work between them.

## **AGA Appointed as District Engineer – Northern District**

This arrangement didn't last long as Northern District soon fell vacant and AGA was to be transferred as District Engineer. During that period AGA was accused by Mr. Dahanayake, M.P. for Galle, that he was taking in only SLFP youth into departmental vacancies but not Dahanayake's supporters. Some of these supporters were masons who had failed the trade test, though were still being recruited for the construction jobs. The accusation further held that both AGA and the building foreman were related to Minister Badiudeen Mohamed of the SLFP, a nepotistic link that meant their support. There was some truth in it, as the Foreman Marikar was indeed related to Badiudeen, and Marikar in turn was related to AGA through marriage. But they were not favouring any party. They were merely doing their job. To satisfy the hon. minister, who wanted AGA transferred, another trade test was arranged for the 'so-called' masons where they were asked to do a corner of a 14-inch wall. The test, witnessed by the Minister himself, exposed the masons' ineptitude. As usual, Dahanayake was shouting at his supporters and begging AGA to take them as at least as labourers. AGA agreed to comply with the request but told him that he was already on transfer orders to Trinco. Dahanayake tried his best to keep AGA back but failed as the transfer was on AGA's own request.

Since AGA was officially registered, Jiffriya was entitled to all the benefits of a legally married wife received from the government. Therefore, AGA decided to take Jiffriya on a plane trip to Jaffna on the last day of her school. He had managed to convince her father that he would take Jiffriya home and Hathy uncle agreed. Ironically, this was how the Sri Lankans deceived the Portuguese five centuries ago when

the Europeans asked for directions to go to Kotte from Colombo. The deception gave rise to the Sinhala saying “*Parangiya Kotte giya vage!*” AGA and Jiffriya ended up in Jaffna and came back to Beruwela after two days. Luckily, Hathy uncle did not decide to go home during that period. Alhamdulillah, they had a good time.

Work remained interesting for AGA while life was becoming much more pleasant than before. He was always busy, however, and the 1964 cyclone was a major disaster causing considerable damage to the railways. The Mannar line was completely washed away, and six miles of track was suspended off the ground like an iron fence. Mr Vaitilingam had already arranged to restore the track, employing about 300 casual labourers working two shifts, day and night. AGA was given the task of completing the damaged track in six weeks. As usual, he jumpstarted the work and reported completion of the work in one week, working only during daytime. It surprised all his superiors. The completion of work ahead of schedule again boosted his position in the Railways and won the hearts of his fellow workers. It was another blessing from Allah, Alhamdulillah.

## **AGA’S WEDDING**

### **The Wedding Reception**

AGA was officially married by registration and by Islamic Nikah. The reception then was to take place a few months later. In the period before the wedding, AGA used to spend a lot of time in Beruwela with Jiffriya to the extent that even his mother was feeling somewhat jealous. AGA therefore stopped the weekend visits to Beruwela. Three months before his wedding, AGA’s cousin Sithy Nasootha got married to Adjward matchan. This was the last of his mother’s responsibilities and she was pleased it was over before AGA’s wedding. To facilitate the wedding function expenditure, Hathy uncle was trying to sell a property in Welikade. As AGA couldn’t talk to him straight, to persuade Hathy uncle not to sell the land, AGA sent him a letter. He also informed Pasha about Hathy uncle’s plan and told him to not allow Hathy uncle to do so, as the wedding would take place somehow or the other. The property was not sold in the end, and AGA and Jiffriya were married on the 13th of February 1965. The wedding was well attended by many friends, fellow workers and relations.

AGA himself built the throne for his bride. It was the last of his thrones and it was certainly the best. ZAM had sent him the wedding suit material and five sovereigns for Jiffriya’s jewellery. It was AGA’s mother and Hathy uncle, however, who were the two happiest persons. His mother had lots of money in her cupboard and therefore she never felt any shortage of cash for the wedding expenses.





AGA'S WEDDING TOOK PLACE ON 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1965 IN BERUWELA

Lelwela recalls the wedding in his own words, speaking of AGA's mother and the reception:

*"In proposing AGA to her brother's daughter, Haseena Ummah went in pursuit of the typical Sri Lankan tradition. She could have, for instance, gone the more modern and lucrative way prevailing at the time, putting him on the marriage market. This handsome young professional, with a brilliant academic career, holding a very responsible job, and possessed of the best behaviour imaginable, would have been given away to the highest bidder and would have, without a doubt, become the most favourite son-in-law. But the graceful lady refused to entertain such ideas. She acceded to the more noble gesture of making AGA return the gratitude to his uncle for all the favours he had done when AGA was small, moulding him to be what he ultimately became. AGA too believed in that whole-heartedly. How well that wish was delivered upon! Throughout their married life, AGA and Jiffriya together fulfilled all their hopes and ambitions, spending their money and went further in providing immense help both in cash and in kind to all the kith and kin and to so many of their friends.*

*The wedding itself was a very modest one. It just suited AGA's philosophy of not going after other peoples' money. Nor did he believe in wasting money on extravagance during those early days of frugal living. But it was a complete wedding in every respect. It was well attended by relatives, friends, well-wishers and by us the batch mates coming from different parts of the country. It also had a unique feature - the two parties to the wedding were living right opposite one another in Beruwela. In fact, AGA enjoyed that aspect of it as he reminisced with us that day in the midst of all the humdrum of the wedding, how he, during those*

earlier times, could sneak a peek at his future bride darting back and forth in her house on days he was not allowed to see her in person.

The wedding had its own glamour as well. The groom was taken to the bride's home across the road in a Mercedes that belonged to Rane, a batch mate of ours. As the car stopped under the porch, someone had been detailed to 'rain' coins on the hood of the car. This made a surprising noise when the coins hit the metal hood of the car. The coins spilled all over it and onto the ground while some of them fell inside the car as well. Rane narrated the story later how he, while cleaning the car back home, was able to enrich himself by picking a good number of the coins that were found fallen inside on the wedding night. The bride was at her elegant best. As AGA went and sat, the prayers and recitals by the priests commenced. The social part of the wedding ceremony came later.

I had travelled down to AGA's home earlier in the day. As always happens, dressing up the bride was the main item of the day. Aga's brother Azeez's wife was the lady in charge of that. AGA had told me to help them in whatever errands needed. This lady asked me to go up to the Kalutara bazaar and get some make up (I forget the item exactly) to be applied on the bride. I did my best, but it was not good enough for the purpose and not to the taste of the lady. I was chased away by the lady to go back and get the correct item. I complied with the order obediently.

The wedding ended with a gala dinner after which we returned to Colombo. On the way back we talked about the experience of a Muslim wedding. We had not seen one or attended one before. We referred to the rain of coins. We then thought that it must obviously be to wish that the groom would, in the years to come, be able to 'rain' in the money he would need for his living. And how true that wish turned out to be!"



**WEDDING CEREMONY CONDUCTED BY UNCLE ABDUL JALEEL LEBBE, HIS FATHER'S BROTHER AND WITNESSED BY A.M.A. AZEEZ, PRINCIPAL, ZAHIRA COLLEGE, ON 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1965.**

After the wedding, the couple went back to Anuradhapura. AGA's mother too joined them. They were presented with a complete set of household requirements by the employees of the Northern District. They furnished the Railway bungalow completely. AGA remembers that there was a bird's nest in the garden and his mother was praying that they should live happily like those birds. Alhamdulillah, this was another major help from Allah, as AGA couldn't have furnished the District Engineer's Bungalow at all. His mother's prayers were answered again, and they lived very happily. In the meantime, AGA continued to help all the family members in every way possible within his means.

### **Back in Colombo - Death of AGA's Mother and Increased Family Responsibilities**

While in Anuradhapura they were informed of AGA's great uncle's, Pasha's father's, death. When they went down to attend the funeral, AGA's mother also fell ill and therefore continued to stay in Beruwela.

AGA then obtained a transfer to Colombo due to his personal circumstances. During this period, AGA's son Iftikhar was born on the 29th of November 1965. His mother, however, was still sick. AGA remembers handing the new-born baby to his mother. She was full of joy, and, with tears in her eyes continued to pray for the baby.

The dispersal of Zakat money was handled by his mother, as she liked to help. She continued this until she passed away, this rite being taken up by Jiffriya. As AGA required additional funds to meet all the problems, he was given permission to serve in the Army Volunteer Force. This was again a big help from Allah, as the Railway was an essential service and employees were not permitted to join other services. The Chief Engineer granted AGA permission, having known his situation.

AGA's mother passed away on the 6th February 1966. She was playing the role of mother for her children, her daughter's child, her sister, Raihana Chachi's, children and the children of Zain uncle (ZAM Bari and Refai's father).

ZAM Bari had, by then, returned to Ceylon. This was again Allah's will for ZAM to be around when AGA's mother died. ZAM was now becoming the most eligible bachelor in the circle, with proposal after proposal flooding in. The condition was that the bride should be prepared to leave the island with him. Finally, he decided to get married to Rosie, daughter of Mr. Samad, the former Zahira College rugger coach. The wedding took place on the 24th of February 1966, amidst so many objections from the family members. Many were upset at ZAM for taking the wedding immediately after AGA's mother's death, and before passing the 40<sup>th</sup> day. AGA, however, reasoned that his mother would have been the happiest person to see ZAM getting married, and would not have objected to the perceived slight.

ZAM left for Germany with Rosie, leaving most of the responsibilities in AGA's hands. At the time, AGA was still in the Army, working three days a week in Katunayake and the rest in Railways, but located in Trincomalee. Jiffriya along with her mother and sisters moved to Trinco. Incidentally, the night they were traveling to Trincomalee, Iftikhar had not been fed in time and he turned the train upside down. In the excitement, they even forgot to take a bag of rice they had brought off the train upon arrival. Ifthikhar fell ill for the first time when he had a bath in 'hot springs' and immediately afterwards slept under the fan. They enjoyed their stay in the Eastern District having lots of fun and outings. They had many visitors, including ZAM Refai and his good friend, the late M.T.M. Mahroof with his wife Aman. The Railway bungalow was large and comfortable, but AGA had scant furniture in it, as he couldn't afford to furnish it as it should be.

Even though the Chief Engineer had given him permission to join the Army, the Deputy Chief Engineer, Paul Senaratne, was not in favour. Unfortunately for AGA, he had taken over the Way and Works Dept during the absence of Mr. Vaitialingam, who was planning to retire. During this period, Paul was giving

AGA a hard time and even accused him of neglecting the district. Yet AGA proved him wrong, and, as an act of defiance, he resigned, not even having a job on hand.

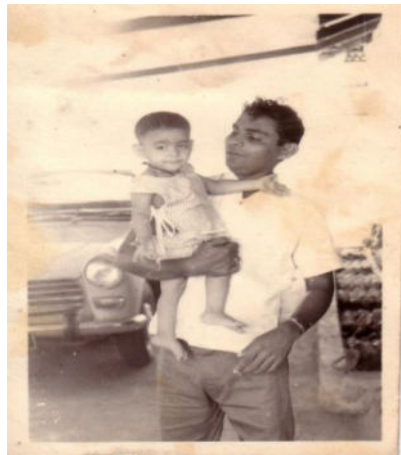
## **PROFESSIONAL LIFE - WORLD OF EXPERIENCE.**

### **Opportunity in Ceylon Development Engineering (CDE)**

Alhamdulillah, when AGA was going back to Trinco, by night train, his berth mate inquired what he was doing. He replied that, even though he was in the Railways at the time, he had submitted his resignation already. This person sharing AGA's berth requested for him to meet the General Manager of C.D.E, Mr. M.S.M. De Silva, who was looking for engineers. This again was another help from Allah, for the next day AGA was given a job with a salary three times what he was drawing in the railways, and in addition, a car and driver. He was appointed the Project Manager for the Uda Walawe Project. With three times the salary, he could now provide more for his family, something his relatives were quite proud of.

The occasion marked the first time any member of his family possessed a four-figure salary and a car with a driver. As usual, AGA continued to work very hard, almost losing his eyesight due to strain. Within two months, his salary was raised still further, and he was getting over 2000 rupees per month - a princely salary indeed at the time. Living was, resultingly, getting easier day by day. The family was in Beruwela and AGA was travelling home for the weekends. Iftikhar never failed to give AGA a smile, his voice the cause of joy even in the dead of night. Very often, AGA used to take Jiffriya and Iftikhar with him to Uda Walawe to spend some time together in the Circuit Bungalow situated at the site.

Once, when they were running short of money to pay the workers the Festival Advance, they had to raise the balance locally, the Head Office being closed. To meet the amount was impossible, and the Accountant, Jeganathan, was going crazy. AGA told him that he had a friend in Kahawatte who would be able to help. Three of them, the accountant, Ranjith Wickramasinghe and AGA went to his friend Farook's house. As they turned into his house, Farook Hajar's brother-in-law Sattar was leaving. When AGA inquired for Farook, Sattar said he was not in and wanted to know why they had come? AGA then told him that he came to collect 15,000 rupees to pay the labourers' salary. Without any question and hesitation, Sattar pulled out from his pocket the required amount and gave them the money, just on the road. Both Ranjith and Jeganathan couldn't believe their eyes as another person, not AGA's friend, gave the money without any questions. This again was from Allah, as it boosted AGA's value in C.D.E. Everyone began to respect him even more thereafter.



**AGA WITH HIS SON IFTIKHAR AT UDA WALAWE PROJECT, IN 1966**

There were many instances in the construction of the Udawalawe Dam which left permanent marks in AGA's heart. The most trivial one was the river closure. Bulldozers were pushing away the earth to close the Menik Ganga. They came to final stage, the last drops of the massive river flowing over the earth dam like a child crying for its mother – a scene unforgettable to AGA.

AGA worked around twelve to sixteen hours a day at the dam as the work was carried out in double shifts. This affected AGA's vision due to dust and strain. He was responsible for introducing a rubber pad made out of old tyres situated behind the excavator, a mechanism designed to stop bulldozers from pushing the excavator. This invention was later converted into the built-in 'pusher block' by the Caterpillar company.



**RIGHT BANK POWER PLANT AT UDAWALAWE PROJECT. PICTURE TAKEN IN JANUARY 2005**

AGA was doing extremely well in the firm until the day Gunatileka, the Deputy General Manager, wanted to get rid of some of the Asst. General Managers. The move would place the Project Managers wholly in charge of projects, a decision AGA never agreed with. To him, the ploy was pure vengeance. This resulted in AGA's resignation. The General Manager M.S.M. De Silva tried his best to keep AGA but, on principle, he left and joined C.T.B. as Deputy Chief Engineer.

### **Joining Ceylon Transport Board (CTB) and Move to Colombo**

AGA relocated to Colombo and lived in Kirillopone flats owned by advocate Dissouki Mohamed. Here he resided, along with Jiffriya, her parents and sisters, as well as his cousin Zulfiqar, son of his uncle Thahir. Around this time, Mathani, ZAM's sister, got married. A radiogram, supplied by ZAM, was disposed to AGA's friend A.J.M. Farook Hadjar of Kahawatte, and the fund was utilized for the wedding. This prompted AGA to venture outside the Island, keeping in line with his undertaking to his mother.



**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN WITH ZAM REFAI AND HIS GOOD FRIEND A.J.M.FAROOK OF KAHAWATTE, WHEN HE VISITED HIM, AT AHSAN'S HOME AT MACLEOD ROAD, AFTER AGA'S OPERATION IN JUNE 2004**

It was also around this time that ZAM Refai got married. His wedding was surrounded by threats, however, with a warning letter being delivered to the family. The message entailed that Refai was already married with children, and that those children would show up on the wedding night. AGA, ever vigilant, guarded the entrance to the ceremony with the help of some of his police friends. Nothing happened and the wedding took place as usual. Refai then went on to start his own business in Colpetty, a textile shop.



**REFAI WAS MARRIED TO FAIZA IN MARCH 1968. THIS PICTURE OF THE HAPPY COUPLE WAS TAKEN IN JUNE 2004 AT THEIR NEW HOME IN MACLEOD ROAD.**

AGA soon grew bored with his work. His assignments were dull and uninteresting, laclustre for an engineer of his talent. Furthermore, the earning capacity was not enough to overcome his family commitments. Hence, he had started to apply for jobs overseas and also for immigration to Canada. He had already informed ZAM Bari of his intention, who also decided to apply to migrate to Canada.

This period brought about the birth of AGA's second child, Raihana, on the 2nd of January 1968. She was their festival gift, born during the festivities of Ramadhan. At this time, Iftikhar was about 2 years old and naughty as ever. As they were living in an upstairs flat, whenever vendors came to sell vegetables or fish to the occupants downstairs, AGA's mischievous son would urinate on them. Knowing this, the vendors would ask for Iftikhar to make sure he was not around before they displayed their goods. Iftikhar would also never allow his 'Hathy Appa' to enter the house until he got his share of sweets. This process of extortion began by his clutching to Hathy Uncle's coat, with one hand inside the coat pocket, to retrieve the parcel of goodies.

AGA continued to work in the Army and was involved in building the Nava Rangahala Theatre at the Royal Primary School. Iftikhar enjoyed the Army Jeep, which used to come in the mornings to pick AGA up. He had learned from the army driver how to salute and was thrilled to do it.



**CAPT. AGA BARRIE IN 4<sup>TH</sup> D&C REGIMENT**

As usual, life was going on but there were less challenges. AGA was involved in the design and construction of new depots in various towns, some of which were built by E.C.C. Ltd. The company often delayed executing the projects, to which the C.T.B. issued them a warning letter. The warning was that if the company did not come out with a concrete proposal to complete the remaining works, it would be blacklisted. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the letter was signed by AGA as Deputy Chief Engineer. One day, the Chairman of the company (ECC) Raja Ratnagopal and C.D.E. General Manager M.S.M. de Silva showed up and told the C.T.B. Chief Engineer P.N.K. Dias that C.D.E. was willing to take over the project and complete it. As C.D.E. was a well-known construction company and de Silva a well-respected engineer, Dias accepted the offer.

The same day AGA had a call in the evening from de Silva asking him to join them for dinner. AGA complied and was surprised to see Raja present. Straight away the chairman told AGA that he will join them and finish the project before AGA left for Canada. AGA had no objection if Mr. Dias agreed. So,

the next day they came to the CTB and told Dias of their plan. AGA's package was the same salary without tax, a car, a free house and tickets to Canada for him and his family. It was another challenge but Allah's gift once again. So, AGA left CTB and joined E.C.C. Ltd. He moved into Raja's apartment in Colpetty and completed the project and cleared E.C.C.'s name. AGA was compensated as promised except for the tickets to Canada, a sour omission sweetened somewhat by the wedding of Jiffriya's sister, Fowziya. The ceremony proceeded without any difficulty at all, as AGA had enough money to spare, Alhamdulillah.

Even though AGA had achieved whatever he wanted in his life for himself, he felt he was missing something. He believed he was unable to give the best to his closest kith and kin. Helping them seemed a constant struggle, and thus he decided, once and for all, to migrate to Canada.

From AGA's life in Sri Lanka, he puts forth the following:

*We are Muslims, Alhamdulillah, thus the way of life is all pre-planned. It is up to us to follow the real way, as prescribed in Islam. As for me, I have tried to practice one of the basic principles in the Islamic way of life: **living for others**. It is not easy to practice. Once you have decided to, however, you must train yourself from earliest of days. May Allah help and guide everyone to acquire this important fundamental and essential quality in life so that they will accomplish, at the end of their tenure, peace of mind. This is a basic requirement to meet the Creator, of course after living as a Muslim. One cannot achieve this overnight but must prepare oneself from inception. The following is the basic preparation at various phases of life to attain this goal.*

### **CHILDHOOD**

- Learn to share your toys
- Help other children when they are in difficulties
- Be kind and cheerful when you are with others
- Be satisfied and do not be a burden to parents
- Be proud to be a Muslim kid but remain humble in life

### **STUDENT**

- Be consistent in your habits
- Learn to manage your time properly
- Be a sport and learn to take up defeat like gentlemen
- Do your schoolwork and help others with pleasure
- Live within your means
- Learn to be humble when you excel

### **AT WORK**

- Be exemplary
- Work more than you have been contracted for
- Do not live on others fault, but solve, as it is yours
- Volunteer to help others and refrain from complaining
- Be pleasant

### **AT HOME**

- Be a leader and set examples, so that others will follow
- Be kind, firm and understanding
- Treat all alike, no favourites
- Admire achievements and punish faults
- Give the best to your family



*Once you have the basics then you live as per the code of Islam. It is important to realize and accept the fact: All what you do and think are known to Allah. Understand this and you will not attempt to displease Him. You are only a passenger in this journey to meet the Creator. With this concept you act and live to please Allah. How is that possible? Well, we must have few fundamentals correct:*

**1. Earning**

*This is the most important factor to lead a peaceful life. Your earnings should be proper, Islamically halal. Your conscious is the answer to this. Anything you have doubt keep away. Feeding the family and helping others should be from properly earned income. If you are paid to work for 8 hours and you do only for 7 hours, then the salary you get is questionable. In my opinion, this is the baseline before you set your goals, Insha'Allah.*

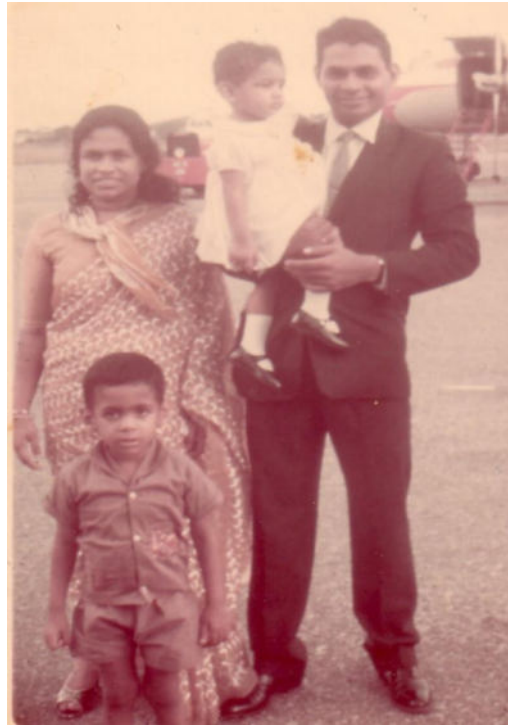
**2. Disposal**

*Having earned properly it is equally important to dispose the earnings in the proper way. This is the difficult part but if you are in the path of pleasing the creator, it is not difficult at all. Keep for your basic need and give away the balance, starting from your immediate needy kin. You must realize that you cannot have everything when your close relatives and the associates around you, do not have the basics. If you practice this phenomenon, all your needs are met by the help of the Creator, and you will achieve peace of mind. Insha'Allah.*

*Follow the path of Allah, as shown to us by our beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Fear Allah and Allah alone!*

# MIGRATION TO CANADA

## Arriving in Toronto and Facing a Hard Life



AT THE RATMALANA AIRPORT LEAVING TO CANADA IN APRIL 1969

Around April 1969, AGA migrated to Canada with Jiffriya, Iftikhar and Raihana. It was very difficult on Jiffriya's parents, as they had to part from their only grandchildren at the time. Yet it was the only way left to overcome the family commitments and to raise the standard of living. On arrival in Canada, they were met by ZAM Bari and family at the airport, ZAM having relocated from Germany a year earlier. It was very strange that, on their way to their new home, AGA saw the 'PITTS' sign displayed at a construction site and said working for them would be a welcome change. Within two weeks of their arrival, Uncle Samad came to Canada as well. They went to pick him up in ZAM's company van. Unfortunately, it was a little too big for the airport parking and it touched the overhead installations. To further add to troubles, ZAM lost his job the following day.

They were back to the same old days: "no job, no money". Now the affliction was compounded with the dire fact that they were in a foreign land. They never got any help from anyone except Allah. Alhamdulillah, within a month AGA was offered a job at \$150 per week, with PITTS construction, as he had intended. ZAM too got another job. Thus, life began to look better once again. They continued to share their two-roomed house at Roseheath Avenue for about six months before moving into an apartment on Birchmount Road. After some time there were three other Ceylonese families that moved into the apartment building, whereby they had a wonderful time. AGA remembers his friend Daya Chandraratne used to have a part time job in one of the factories across the road. As Daya was in the night shift, he used to sneak out and take a snooze at AGA's place. Nissanka Dabare and Brian Wright were also living in the same block too. Incidentally, Brian was working with AGA at Pitts as a surveyor, a vocation he was quite good at. They were involved in the construction of the Kennedy and 401 Interchange for the Department

of Highways of Ontario.

It was around this time that AGA's good friend M.S.M. Nizar and his wife Hidaya also came to Canada. AGA also sponsored his brother's son Razvi to migrate as well.



**PICTURE OF M.S.M. NIZAR AND HIDAYA TAKEN AT THE COLOMBO HILTON  
ON THE DAY OF SARA'S WEDDING IN AUGUST 2004.**

The families did their shopping together. One day they had gone to Knob Hill Farms to do their groceries. AGA had just dropped the ladies and was about to park the car, when a six-foot man came up to AGA and asked him why he was parking in the place the man was waiting to park. AGA replied that he was there first. In the meantime, the fellow had got hold of his shirt through the window and was challenging AGA to a fight. AGA was still seated in the car and told him to let go of his shirt. The man did not, but when he opened the door AGA used his boxing skills and gave him a good punch to the jaw, breaking one of his teeth. That one shot put him on the ground. The ladies saw the commotion and came running back. Each one of them had an empty milk jug, which Jiffriya used to deliver a fury of blows. The poor fellow, feeling embarrassed, got up and ran away. In the meantime, a passerby who had been watching the incident told AGA that it was the man's fault and wanted AGA to file an entry in the Police Station and that he would be a witness. The report was filed but the belligerent bully was never seen again. Hearing the story, AGA's friend Nisanka Dabare, from the Bahamas, had sent a sketch showing a 'big guy' on the ground and few ladies pecking him with milk jugs.

On the home front in Ceylon, things were getting better. The family was getting ready for Haleema's wedding, while ZAM Refai had now started the gem business. Incidentally, the money sent for Haleema's dowry was utilized for the improvement of Refai's business. Jiffriya went alone for the wedding, leaving the children with AGA, though Hidaya spent a great deal looking after them. During this time, Ramani and Neelia, AGA's family friends, got married, an event for which Raihana was their flower girl. Jiffriya could not make it for the ceremony, however, being stranded in Scotland on her return. She finally returned safely after two days, a timeframe wherein AGA was worried sick.



**RAIHANA AS THE FLOWER GIRL AT RAMANI- NEELIA'S WEDDING**

AGA's income eventually increased, and with the help of Allah, he was able to help his family back home in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, his elder uncle Zainulabdeen, ZAM's father, passed away when they were in Canada. It was the first death in the immediate family circle after he left Ceylon, and it was hard to accept. Zainulabdeen had been very helpful to the family, particularly to AGA. On the day he passed away, AGA was in the hospital, undergoing an operation to remove a growth in his throat. Both he and ZAM sadly missed the funeral, with all arrangements being carried out by Refai in Sri Lanka.

## **Engineering Achievements**

It is worth the digression to account for AGA's wonderful achievements in engineering. The following are some of many accolades that AGA proudly recalls as having contributed to the mother country Sri Lanka as well as his work overseas.

### **Achievements in Sri Lanka**

#### **1. Cyclone Damages to the Railway tracks in Mannar - 24th December 1964**

AGA was Assistant District Engineer, Northern District in Ceylon Government Railways when the cyclone washed away six miles of track in Mannar. During this period, AGA was on holiday in Beruwela preparing for his marriage. He received the message from the local Station Master at about 6.00 PM that AGA should report back to work immediately. AGA complied without question and arrived in Anuradhapura at around 1.00 AM, meeting the Chief Engineer in his saloon who then briefed him on the damages. AGA was instructed to complete the repairs on six miles of track, completely washed away and in certain areas it was standing like a fence, within six weeks. He was given full authority to collect any amount of money as petty cash for the expenses and to also recruit sufficient casual labour to meet the target. He reported to the site in the morning and walked the entire length of track to assess and evaluate the situation. He found that a crew of 300 people were working day and night in two shifts to meet the target set by the Chief Engineer. On returning to Chief Engineer's saloon, AGA called for a meeting of all the supervisors and instructed them to inform the crew that work would be a single day shift, 6AM to 6PM. As the instruction from AGA was different to that of the chief, they were reluctant. AGA explained to them that he was in charge now. He told them he had another plan to complete before they met the target fixed by the Chief Engineer. To implement his plan, AGA asked the crew how long it would take to do one mile of track with a crew of fifty people. They all answered that it would take one week as agreed with the Chief Engineer. AGA's next question was why then would the whole job take six weeks? The crew answered very simply that six miles of track damaged meant a six-week project. To this, AGA very humbly said "You are all wrong. We can finish this job in a single week if we divide the crew into six and take one mile each, working twelve hours." The crew saw reason and agreed, leading to the rescheduling and reorganization of the project. The senior foremen took six miles under the senior inspector of works. The younger foremen worked directly under AGA. Alhamdulillah, they were able to complete the work in six days and took the first train with provisions on the 1st of January 1965. The entire group appreciated the management quality of AGA, a young Muslim engineer who demonstrated both faith and works. The most wholesome praise, however, came from the Chief Engineer, who lauded AGA for such a marvellous accomplishment.

#### **2. Udawalawwe Project by CDE**

Ceylon Development Engineering was auditioning many engineers to lead the construction of Udawalawe Dam. None, however, even came close to the success and arduousness of AGA. As the project was a 24-hour operation, he had to work on average 18 hours a day ensuring all the departments were coordinated

and proceeding at an accelerated schedule. During the period of construction, certain months brought about inclement weather. The rains were often heavy, yet there was a pattern to the conditions that AGA's team was able to reorganize. They worked on concreting when rain had ceased, and when the downpour resumed, they performed other tasks under cover. By this innovative method the team was able to complete the project in time. Conversely, working 18 hours a day had caused some strain in AGA's eyes, leading to a loss of vision. Despite the hinderance, AGA was able to direct operations with over 3000 employees. Then Minister of Irrigation CP De Silva appreciated AGA's hard work and created a position in Ceylon Transport Board for him on leaving CDE.

## **AGA's Overseas Achievements**

### **Working with Pitts Engineering Canada**

Working with Pitts garnered AGA much praise from his associates. Many of the projects he supervised were finished ahead of schedule, leading to saved time and costs. In fact, for his work on the Kennedy and 401 interchange, AGA was given a gold clock for making over 1,000,000 dollars of progress per month. They completed the project well ahead of D.H.O. schedule and AGA, as the project engineer, was rewarded for submitting claims for items which were overlooked by previous engineers. At one point, AGA was offered a 15% commission (10% for the company and 5% for AGA) to purchase expansion joints for the interchange bridges. However, AGA opted to give all 15% to the company, a move that surprised many; AGA had to explained that such was his way of doing things.

It was during this project that AGA exposed his Sri Lankan wit. One day early in the spring, they were to asphalt the new road. The trucks were all piled up and the inspector was not allowing the asphalt to be placed, as it was not warm enough. When AGA arrived on the scene, he asked the Inspector, who was resting inside his warm car, why the asphalt was not being placed. To his surprise the inspector said the temperature should be rising above 40 degrees Fahrenheit and showed him a thermometer. AGA lost his temper and shouted at him saying "if you poke that bloody thermometer up your behind, the temperature will rise!". He then ordered his foreman to place the asphalt, as it was indeed warming up. The inspector did not take kindly to this and reported AGA for behaving unprofessionally. Upon hearing AGA's side of the story, however, it was amicably settled. Later they became good friends.



**AGA'S FIRST CONTACT IN PITTS CONSTRUCTION GEORGE & BETTY**

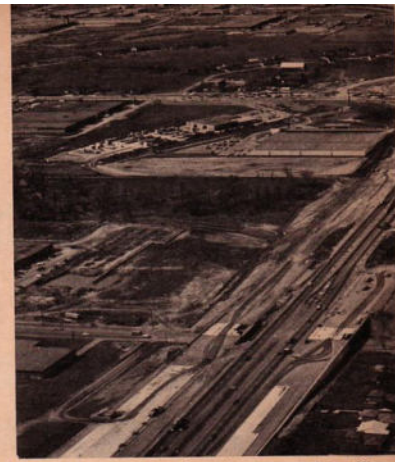
AGA was fortunate enough to purchase a nice home for \$28,000 with \$5,000 as a downpayment in Pinemore Crescent, Don Mills. This home became a popular place for all sorts of get togethers of Sri

Lankans, including New Year's parties. The basement was completely done by AGA, a feat of which he was proud. He invited Pitts carpentry superintendent John Minderlein to show off the supposed accomplishment. Minderlein was not impressed, and subsequently laughed and said the job was an insult to carpentry. The next day, John sent few carpenters and rebuilt it professionally.

The Kennedy project itself was unique, as it was the longest bridge and the only one in Canada without expansions at the abutments. Instead, it was fixed and anchored at the abutments themselves. The length of the bridge was 1973 ft, adjusted to coincide with the year of completion.



HIGHWAY widening is well under way when storm sewer trench is backfilled.



DETOUR maintains four lanes of traffic

## Contractor's cost-saving dirt proposal wins

By Art Joy  
HCN Managing Editor

An Ontario roadbuilder's proposal for dirt supply was a major factor in winning a big contract for widening a section of the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway (Highway 401) along the Toronto bypass.

Toronto-based C. A. Pitts Ltd. arranged to get 900,000 cu yd of material delivered to the job site for \$3 a load from outside the right-of-way. This was a substantial saving from obtaining it with the firm's own equipment from the owner's borrow area, seven miles away.

Taking advantage of this situation was one of the reasons Pitts got a \$10,-

800,046.50 contract as low bidder on the Ontario Department of Highways' project. The contract calls for widening of the 1.78 miles of the freeway from 4 to 12 lanes, reconstruction of the Kennedy Road interchange and other related work.

Pitts started the job May/69 on a 40-hr a week basis and now has the work approximately 70% completed.

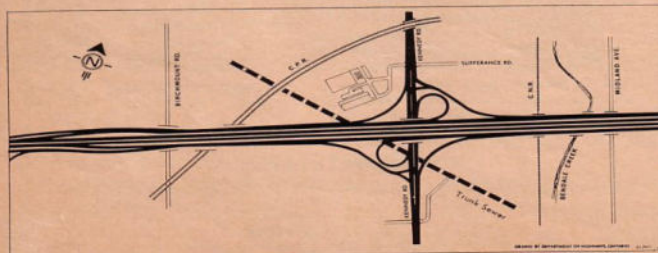
The method of obtaining dirt proposed by Pitts in its bid provided a number of benefits. The contractor was able to work non-stop through last winter and will complete the project in Dec./70, 10 months ahead of the originally scheduled completion date of Sept. 15/71.

The material brought in from outside

the right-of-way came from excavations for buildings and Toronto Transit Commission's construction of the Yonge Street subway extension in the north Metro Toronto area. The haulers of the excavated material benefited too, by disposing of the material over a shorter distance than the 20 miles or so to the Toronto waterfront.

Total dirt handled on the job was 1,300,000 cu yd. In addition to the 900,000 cu yd brought in, 200,000 cu yd had to be excavated at the site and another 55,000 cu yd of old roadbed material, placed about 10-15 years ago, was reclaimed and pulverized to become part of the granular B material used. A Bros pulverizer machine was used for this purpose.

**Pattern Changes:** As well as widening the freeway to a total width of 220 ft, including shoulders and medians, the contract called for crossing 401 over Kennedy Rd. instead of under it as in the former traffic flow. It also required the widening of two railway structures, reconstruction of bridge structures at Birchmount Ave. and Kennedy Rd., construction of a new culvert for Bendale Creek, and construction of five retaining walls ranging in height from 10 ft to 45 ft. The bridge over the CNR line was widened using prestressed box girders while the bridge over the CPR line was a prestressed post-tensioned portal type structure. Prestressing of the CPR bridge was carried out by B.B.R. Canada Ltd.,



PROJECT PLAN shows Kennedy Rd Interchange and various structures involved.

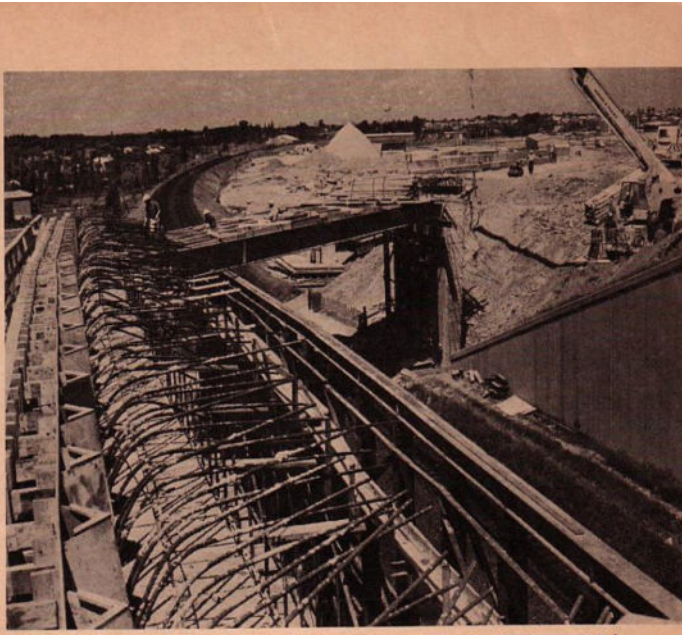
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HEAVY CONSTRUCTION NEWS, JUNE 29, 1970

Heavy Construction News June 1970 Issue is an Article on the Project accomplished by AGA.



as roads are widened and structures built.



BRIDGE over CNR line is extended to accommodate road widening to 12 lanes.

## big road job

Agincourt, Ont., using the firm's own system.

Another part of the job was widening of Kennedy Rd. from 4 lanes to 6 lanes for a distance of about a half mile.

Although speed on the freeway was reduced from 70 mph to 45 mph, Pitts has maintained four lanes of traffic at all times through the project.

Major fills were made on the collector roads and the Kennedy Rd. approaches due to the reverse grades and the freeway was raised about 25 ft by fill at Kennedy Rd.

Earth subgrade compaction was to 1/10 of 1 ft tolerance and to 95% Procter density. All granular B material was to 100% Procter density.

Above the subgrade is 6-in. of compacted granular B material of 4-in. maximum size. Over this is 6 in. of crushed granular material of 3/4 in. maximum. The 200,000 sq yd of reinforced concrete top is steel-mesh reinforced and was placed with a Blaw-Knox paving train.

All joints, both transverse and longitudinal, were sealed with a pre-formed neoprene seal. Spacing of transverse joints is 29 ft; longitudinal joints, 12 ft.

A load-transfer device, consisting of 1 1/4-in. steel dowels in a wire basket was placed in advance of the slab pour at 29-ft. intervals. At these points the slab was sawn and sealed with the neoprene seal to control cracking.

Polyfoam insulation bats were used on

the winter concrete pour of approximately 7,000 cu yd for bridges and retaining wall, and heat was generated by Terry 350 DTU heaters.

- **Special Form:** To save time, labor and materials, Pitts used a specially-designed steel form for pouring parapets and coping atop 2,400 lineal ft of retaining wall. The unit, which runs on wheels on rails placed on the backfill, is an invention of John Roma, general foreman, and has been dubbed the "Roma Flyer". It provides for the pouring of coping and parapet in one form compared to the conventional method of pouring them separately.

With the Roma Flyer, about 45 ft of parapet and coping can be completed in one shift without the need of forms built up from the ground. The old method required three carpenters, two laborers and the necessary material. The Roma Flyer is operated by one carpenter, one laborer and a finisher.

A major job in the contract was construction of a 108-120 in. concrete storm sewer line through the interchange to replace a smaller one that was part of the Scarborough Borough's sewage system. In the same trench a 24-in. sanitary sewer was installed. The storm sewer empties into a gabrion-lined open channel that required an arch-type culvert under the access road to the Shulton plant.

Jack Newell is project manager for Pitts and Aga Barrie is project engineer.

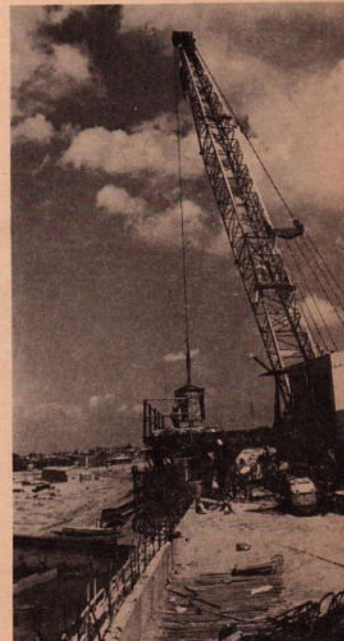
For DHO, which has an engineering and inspection staff of 40 men on the project, Carl Watson is project supervisor.

- **DHO Inspection:** On this job, the contractor is not required to give any guar-

antee of his work. Since DHO has its own inspection staff on the job, these men insure the work's quality.

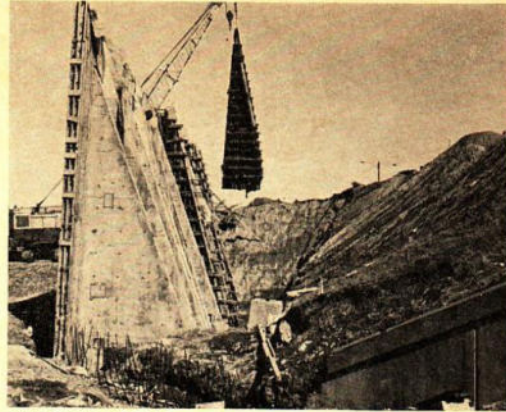
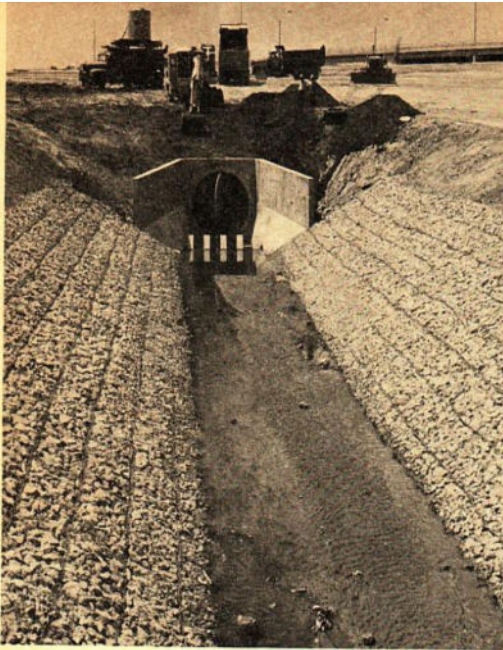
"We accept the work as it is done," Watson told HCN. However, the electrical work, which includes lighting with mercury luminaires, requires a one-year guarantee. The 347-v electrical system is controlled by a substation that was built as part of the contract.

For alignment, DHO staff used a co-



ROMA FLYER on retaining wall work.





**RETAINING WALLS** ranging from 10 ft to 40 ft are installed to contain road right-of-way bordering on private land.

**STORM SEWER** across Kennedy Rd interchange empties into gabrion-lined open channel. Equipment grades slope above.

ordinate layout procedure which avoids distance measurements where traffic is a problem on a complex job. The system is a method of surveying used for construction layout and establishes locating of any desired point (or series of points such as a curve) from intersecting lines of sight from two or more transits. This eliminates distance measurements to a greater extent but they are still taken when desirable.

In addition to the contract to Pitts, DHO supplied material to the value of \$2 million. It included 4,000 tons of steel from Steel Co. of Canada Ltd., Hamilton; 155,000 bbl of cement from St. Lawrence Cement Co., Toronto; elec-

trical material for highway lighting; 2,000 tons of hot-mix asphalt cement from Imperial Oil Ltd.; and guide-rails from Westeel-Rosco Ltd., Toronto.

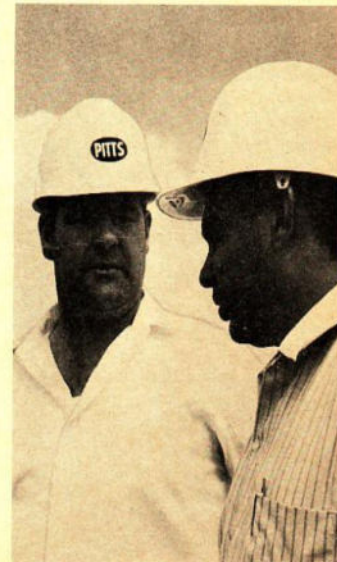
Another part of the contract was construction of a DHO patrol yard northwest of the interchange. It includes a salt shed to control pollution and salt run-off and enables storing in summer of the full supply for winter use. The patrol yard also contains snow removal and patrol vehicles and a 12-bay garage for repairs.

• **Sub-Contracts:** The sewer work was carried out by Consentino Construction Co., Malton for upwards of \$2 million. Other sub-contracts included: sewer pipe,

Concrete Pipe Ltd. and Bestpipe Ltd., Toronto; 98,000 lineal ft of curbs and gutters, and sidewalks, Sartu Contracting Co. Ltd., Maple, Ont.; 33,000 tons of asphalt paving, Sentinel Paving & Construction Co. Ltd., Toronto; placing of 3,500 tons of structural steel in structures, G. & H. Steel Service of Canada Ltd., Scarborough, Ont.; prestressed beams for structures, Wilson Concrete Products, Belleville, Ont.; gravel supply, Consolidated Sand & Gravel, Stouffville, Ont.; ready-mix concrete, McCord & Co., Toronto; electrical work, Beddard-Girard Ltd., Cooksville, Ont.; and 125,000 sq yd of sodding, Frank Watts Sod & Seed Supply Co., Scarborough, Ont.



**GRADING** for project on Macdonald-Cartier freeway involves 1,300,000 cu yd of material; 900,000 cu yd was brought in; 200,000 cu yd excavated on site.



**JACK NEWELL** (left) is project manager; Aga Barrie, project engineer.



PICTURE WITH OLD FRIEND VICTOR SONCIN IN 2003 AT IFTIKHAR'S HOME.

Of AGA's fondest memories of his time at Pitts, those of his team are perhaps strongest. The carpentry superintendent, Victor Soncin, was the driving force of their assembly. Jack Newel, Project Manager, was a man with plenty of common sense and was ideally suited for the position. AGA was, of course, the project engineer, a role in which he was deemed the 'brain' behind the operation. Whenever the project sites would sell their scrap steel, Jack gave AGA a handsome share. AGA, true to his character, never took the profits, instead giving it to others. Jack once aggressively insisted yet AGA still refused out of principle; he would not take from the company any more than he was due. Defeated, Jack and the company resorted to buying AGA some plants with that money. As part of this impressive team, AGA developed an unmatched friendship and genuine respect for his fellow worker Victor Soncin. Their relationship became so strong that Victor could not avoid calling AGA to spend the latter part of life in his company as a worthy consultant.

The same team, save for Victor, took over another major project in Niagara Falls. This again was completed well ahead of time. During the job, the team lived in an apartment in Niagara Falls and would come home on Wednesdays and on the weekends. The apartment was shared by three Sri Lankans and one Canadian; Brian, George, Bala and AGA. George was very attached to Iftikhar and would buy him all sorts of presents. Incidentally George and his wife Betty never missed any of AGA's parties, as he was AGA's first contact in Pitts.

After the project in Niagara Falls, AGA ended up in Ottawa, building the 417 highway and the piling works for the treatment plant. For this AGA moved to Ottawa with his family after renting out the house at Pinemore Crescent. When work began, Pitts employed out John Minderlien as the project manager, which meant that AGA had to be more on alert to guide and train him. They did well again and completed the projects, as usual, ahead of time. AGA too was involved in building the first Mosque in Ottawa.



### **The Mosque in Ottawa**

The next project they undertook was in Nanticoke, building the harbour for a Canadian steel company. The work sported some interesting tidbits both social and in regard to engineering. For one, AGA and his team were living in a trailer home, close to the lakefront, where they had *the* party of the season. Even today, the fete is the talk of those who attended. One whole goat was BBQed on an open fire using a special apparatus made for the occasion by Victor Soncin. The harbour itself was only of its kind constructed in Canada using the dry dock method. It was made by floating the cribs and sinking them at the right locations to form the harbour. When they were floating the first crib the whole team was on pins, expecting the crib to sink. Alhamdulillah, it came up and they continued to float all 8 cribs; in the last one they even took a ride.

# Temporary work required on \$11m dock

By Art Joy  
HCN Correspondent

Extensive temporary construction work facilitated early completion of a \$11.5 million dock project at Nanticoke on the north shore of Lake Erie for Pitts Engineering Construction Ltd. of Toronto.

The contract, awarded by the Steel Co. of Canada Ltd. (Stelco), Toronto, is part of a major \$750 million development program for a four-phase steel mill complex.

Since most data provided at the site were expressed in metric terms, most measurements are used in this article without reference to imperial units (see HCN, April 28, 1975, p. 16).

The original contract from Stelco called for construction of a temporary causeway, but Pitts proposed that a temporary harbour be constructed in order to build the cribs for the new dock at the site, rather than at some remote location. The new dock will be used to receive raw materials from iron ore and coal freighters of up to 45 300 t.

The contract provides for two phases of construction. Phase one consists of a temporary causeway and harbour facilities, a permanent causeway and an access bridge. Phase two includes the building of a wharf and connecting dredging work.

Work was started in the first week of April, 1975, and was scheduled to take two full seasons to complete. But Pitts expects to wind up most major work this year, leaving only construction of the concrete bridge deck and some minor work to be finished in the spring.

The dock facilities, which will extend 1 200 m south from the shore, consist of a 33 m bridge and a 420 m causeway, both 23.5 m wide, and a 456 m long wharf which is 30 m wide.

The temporary causeway, which was the first installation, parallels the bridge site and provides land access to the permanent causeway site.



VIEW is south from shore. Footings for pier are placed from causeway.

After 170 m of the 420 m causeway was constructed, Pitts built a temporary breakwater and causeway 370 m long to develop the temporary harbour with a materials loading platform, crib launching platform, a wet dock and a crib finishing dock.

Later a channel was dredged from the crib finishing dock to the wharf site, where the cribs were towed. A temporary mattress was laid to support them on arrival.

Pitts started the job by hauling rock from a Stelco quarry 3.2 km away, where Stelco equipment was used to load the contractor's trucks — five Euclid R50s and four Cat 35 ton (31.7 t) trucks. Pitts worked on a two shift a day basis to place 74 000 t of rock.

After the temporary causeway and harbour were completed, Pitts started work on the bridge piers by partially excavating the bottom and driving sheet steel piling to bedrock to construct 10x10 m coffer dams for the pier footings. Piling was driven using a drop ham-

mer attached to a Link Belt 80 ton (72.6 t) crane.

The remainder of the overburden in the cells was removed by a clamshell and residue was air-lifted to clean the bedrock. From 300 to 350 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete was tremied under water in each of the six cells to prevent any hydrostatic uplifting. A total of 2 100 m<sup>3</sup> of 3 000 psi (20 622 kPa) concrete was placed.

Pitts used steel forms of its own manufacture for the pier shafts and used Efco steel forms for the pier caps to place another 8 000 m<sup>3</sup> of 3 000 psi concrete.

The concrete, which was supplied from Stelco's 200 m<sup>3</sup>/h ready-mix plant at a nearby construction site, was placed by a Creter crane.

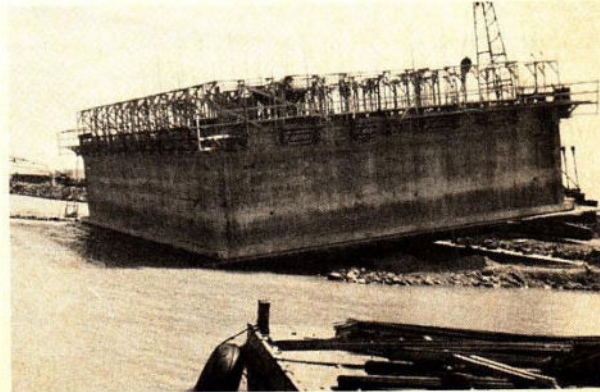
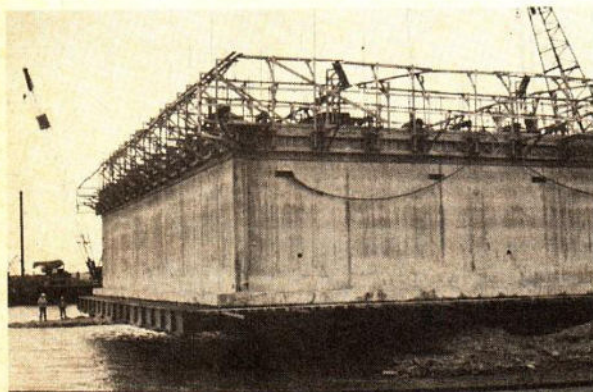
Bridge abutments were founded on 270 m of bearing H-piles which were driven by a Delmag D12 diesel hammer mounted on a 60 ton (54.4 t) Manitowoc crane.

Under a subcontract from Pitts, Dominion Bridge Co. Ltd. of Toronto erected the bridge's steel beams, which are 50 m long and weigh 25 t each. They are believed to be the longest girders ever transported by road to any jobsite.

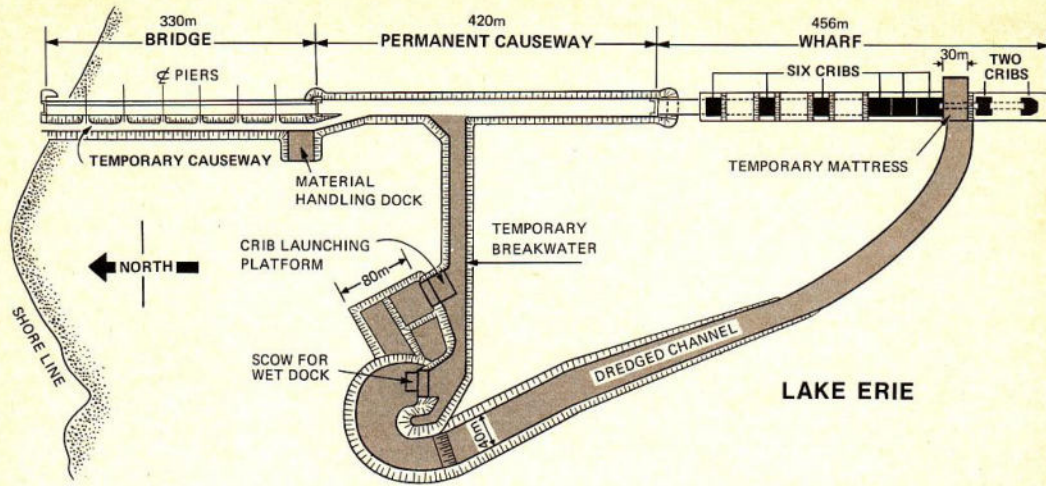
The bridge's 20.3 cm concrete deck, to be constructed in 1976, will contain 1 300 m<sup>3</sup> of 4 000 psi (27 576 kPa) concrete. Pitts plans to use a Bidwell finisher for this operation.

From the shore to the wharf, the lake bottom elevation declines from 174 m to 165 m or lower, providing a depth of at least 9 m for ships loading and unloading at the wharf.

To construct the permanent 420 m long by 23.5 m wide causeway, Pitts cleaned the overburden from the bedrock and placed 125 000 t of quarry rock on top. On the side slopes, an underlay of 21 000 t of rock of half tonne to two tonne size was placed and covered with 47 000 t of armoured stone ranging in weight from 4 to 12 t, in that order from



PARTIALLY COMPLETED crib is balanced on fulcrum, front support is removed, then crane lifts up the back end . . .



SHADED AREAS indicate temporary facilities that were developed to speed completion by Pitts of the Nanticoke dock.

top to bottom. Armour stone was placed with a grapple attached to a Link Belt 218 crane.

One of the most interesting engineering features of the project is the method of constructing cribs in the temporary harbour. Of a total of eight cribs, three measure 30x20 m and five measure 20x20 m. On completion they are all approximately 19 m deep.

Using a Heede International slipform system, pouring of the cribs is started on a launching platform measuring 21x31 m. It has a tongue and groove timber deck on 60.9 cm wide steel beams. One set of forms is used and a crib is completed through a two week cycle.

The timber deck is sanded, greased and covered with polyethylene. Reinforcing steel is placed, then the crib slab is poured. The walls of the crib are then slipformed to a height of 5 m and to a weight of 3 000 t.

The platform rests on a fulcrum, off centre, with sand jacks at the back end

and a temporary support at the front. The crib is set off centre toward the sand jacks. In front of the platform is an inclined skid beneath the water surface.

To launch a crib the sand jacks are lowered sufficiently to allow removal of the front temporary support. The back of the platform is then lifted with a 150 ton (136.1 t) Link Belt 518 crane to about a 10% grade, causing the crib to slide into the water. The crib is then towed to a wet dock and completed with the slipforms to a height of about 17 m.

To provide the channel to allow the cribs to be towed into position in the wharf, 250 m<sup>3</sup> of overburden and 30-000 m<sup>3</sup> of rock was dredged.

Rock in the channel was drilled from a barge using three Gardner - Denver DH143 drills powered by three Joy compressors, one rated at 1 200 cfm (33.6 m<sup>3</sup>/min) and the other two at 750 cfm (21.0 m<sup>3</sup>/min).

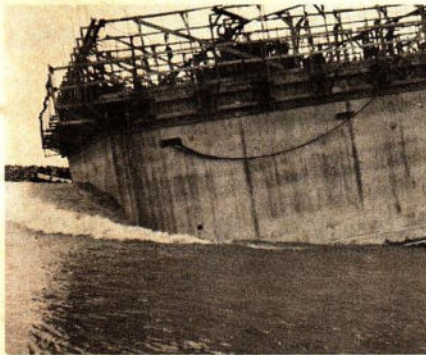
The channel averaged 7 m deep, is 30 m wide and about 600 m long.

Mattresses placed at the wharf site contained 30 000 t of rock, 20 000 t being placed under the cribs.

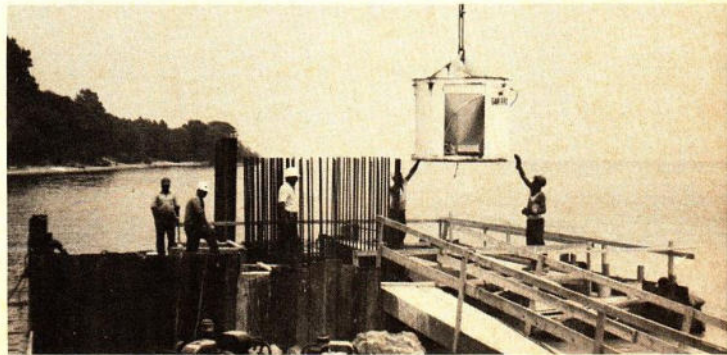
Both the structural steel and reinforcing steel for the project were supplied by Stelco, as was the concrete, all at no cost to the contractor. J. Harris & Sons Ltd. of Stoney Creek, Ont. was subcontracted to place the reinforcing steel, while Niagara Structural Steel of St. Catharines, Ont. has the subcontract for fabricating and placing the structural steel for the wharf.

The Stelco quarry supplied some of the underlay. Nelson Crushed Stone division of King Paving & Materials Ltd. of Toronto, and Indusmin Ltd. of Toronto, supplied the armour stone which was hauled to the site by Peter Bawtwinheimer Ltd. of Hamilton, Ont.

Jules Vibert is Pitts' project manager at the site, Aga Barrie is project engineer and Jack Murdoch is marine superintendent. Stelco's field manager for the dock and quarry is W. Wilson and Harry Carroll is field technologist. ♣



and crib slips down skid into water.



CONCRETE is transferred by crane to workmen placing footings for 330 m bridge.

CONSTRUCTION OF NANTICOKE DOCK APPEARED IN  
HEAVY CONSTRUCTION NEWS DECEMBER 1975.