

Volume 12

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# Maya Puwath

Bimonthly Newsletter from MGCAANA



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*“-Like a beautiful flower,  
brightly colored but  
without scent, even so  
useless is the well-uttered  
speech of one who does  
not act accordingly.-“*

- Dhammapada- Translated by  
Sangharakshita



# Editorial

It is with a great pleasure that I pen down this editorial for the Mayapuwath October issue. The summer heat waves are slowly fading away, replaced with cooler breezes and the amazing change into fall colors. Those colors remind us that wintery weather is just around the corner and that once again our Mahamaya Girls' College Association of Alumnae in North America (MGCAANA) is launching a new beginning.

As a long time MGCAANA member I cannot emphasize enough the importance of renewing your membership while encouraging new members who grew up with the blessings of Mother Maya back in days in Kandy, Sri Lanka to join our alumni community. Your membership extends a long way by brightening and paving ways towards a better world in an economically disadvantaged child's life. Many of us remember the actions of people who paved the road for us to become who we are today. As Mayans we have reaped benefits while growing up in the historical city of Kandy under the guidance and education provided by Mahamaya, a strong foundation we all have in common together. As graduates we have continued the Mahamaya values by helping economically disadvantaged children through MGCAANA. We all have busy lives here in the USA and Canada and often do not have the time we would want to donate towards charities. MGCAANA provides already established commitments with children who needs our help and by becoming a member your payments and donations are the most effective way to continue our educational aid.

Bi monthly, we create this newsletter to keep our members informed on what we have been doing and what our future plans will be. Our very active editorial board takes their responsibilities seriously and community submissions are always welcome. We invite you all to share your great articles, poems, recipes, and other creative work. One of our strengths as an alumni society comes from new blood bringing their individual creativity into our literature. This is also an opportunity for volunteer experience with MGCAANA by joining any of our various committees. I am both excited and humbled to extend this invitation to participate to all of you, regardless; if you are brand new to this organization or have been with us for some time. It is a great way to create connections between our community while we are so far away from our beautiful island.

I would like to conclude this editorial by saying how much I enjoy being a MGCAANA member, staying involved with the executive committee for the last two years, and being a part of the editorial committee. It has provided me with irreplaceable memories and encouraged me to reach goals on behalf of both my school and myself. Getting members together once a year was a challenge that I met with pride and I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with other members in making annual get-togethers a reality. Connecting with the old and new Mayans gave me the tremendous pleasure and solidified lifelong friendships. It is my honor to let you know that the little that I did for MGCAANA has given me happiness and fulfillment for a lifetime.

Sriyani Dissanayake  
Editor of the October Issue, 2016

### **MGCAANA UNDERGRADUATE & GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM 2016-2017**

The Selection Committee of the MGCAANA Undergraduate & Graduate Scholarship Program is looking for Mahamaya alumnae who demonstrate outstanding academic achievements, leadership and active participation in extracurricular activities and also a significant level of financial need. Intended to cover the cost of textbooks for a semester, scholarships of **\$500.00** each will be awarded to two (2) candidates.

**APPLICATION PERIOD & DEADLINE:** September 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016

**Award Notification:** By January 31, 2017

Please visit our website at [www.mahamayaalumna.org](http://www.mahamayaalumna.org) to view and download the scholarship application. If you have any questions about the MGCAANA Undergraduate & Graduate Scholarship Program, please e-mail us at [mahamaya\\_alumnae@yahoo.com](mailto:mahamaya_alumnae@yahoo.com).

**We look forward to receiving your applications!**



## **Mahamaya '86 Batch Get-together on August 27, 2017**

**'86 batch mates who live in Sri Lanka and overseas, Please save the date.**

**For further information, please contact Priyanthi Senarath Dias on Facebook.**

**-- Arushie Nugapitiya --**



## Past Teacher, Mrs. Sumithra Gunapala – Taught at Mahamaya from 1960 to 1982



My mother's full name was Mrs Sumithra Gunapala (known to friends as Sumi). She taught at Mahamaya for 22 years. She was a class teacher to grade 1 for many years, she taught English, and English Literature to upper classes, she worked as the first Principal of the Mahamaya Primary school when it was re-established. She was a devoted teacher to her students and to the school, Mahamaya. She loved all those students of hers, and even long after retirement she used to talk about so many memorable moments she had with her classes. After retirement she looked after her bed ridden daughter Maithrinee for 18 years, until the daughter passed away in 2003. For this reason, she was not able to attend Mahamaya past students' and teachers' events in Kandy. But she continued to keep Mahamaya and the well-being of her students close to her heart. She was so happy and honored to be invited to the ගුරු උපන්තිය organized by the Class of '82. She talked gratefully about all her students who visited her at home during her last few years, those who sent cards and messages. She was overwhelmed with happiness to see past student groups who came with dear Mrs Chunchi, with Jayanthi Wijesekara, with Sriyani Dissanayaka and also those who visited individually. She was so thankful for the opportunity to see them all again, and share some enjoyable memories from Mahamaya days. During her last five years she was suffering from cancer. But she took everything with courage and helped her children to cope with the difficult time. She passed away peacefully on the 24th of September this year. It is a loss beyond words. May she attain Nibbana.

Sent by Nirmala Gunapala



## Diabetes Among South Asians:

As a nurse, I have witnessed the significant impact of Type II diabetes on the South Asian population living in North America. South Asian immigrants are 4-6 times more likely to develop diabetes compared to their Caucasians counterparts. The higher risk may be because South Asians are more likely to have less muscle and more abdominal fat, which increases insulin resistance.

Once consumed, all carbohydrates are broken down into simple sugars (ex: glucose). To utilize this sugar, the pancreas makes a hormone called insulin. Insulin moves sugar from the blood into the cells of the body where it can be stored or used for energy. Diabetes occurs when your pancreas cannot make enough insulin (insulin deficiency) and/or insulin is not able to move into the body's cells (insulin resistance). This causes the sugar to build up in your blood often leading to various long-term complications.

Risk factors:

- Ethnic background: South Asians are at a greater risk for diabetes due to many factors including genetics, family history and stress related to migration from another country. Lifestyle is also affected by migration: eating habits are modified to accommodate the “western” diet which often contains increased calories, fat, carbohydrates, and alcohol. Along with decreased physical activity and a more sedentary lifestyle.
- Obesity: These negative lifestyle changes can increase one's weight – especially abdominal obesity. Abdominal obesity, defined as too much fat around the waist, can increase one's risk for insulin resistance. Insulin resistance is a key factor in type 2 diabetes.
- Age: those over 40 years of age are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes (though this threshold is decreasing in many countries around the world – more and more adolescents and young adults are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes).
- Gestational diabetes – if you were diagnosed with diabetes during pregnancy, you are at a greater risk of developing diabetes later on in life.

Why is Diabetes Relevant to me?

High blood sugars alone may not seem worrisome. However, long-term complication of diabetes can be debilitating. Some of these complications include:

- Chronic kidney disease
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Blindness/decreased vision
- Nerve damage (especially in hands and feet)
- Foot problems

Luckily, diabetes can be prevented and/or delayed. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for South Asians to delay health-related concerns until it is too late. Here are some ways to ensure you take charge of your health:

-Regular physical activity – It is recommended that adults exercise for at least 150 minutes/week. This can be broken down into 30minutes, 5 days/week. Exercise will help with weight reduction, and improved heart health.

-Healthy eating – Follow the healthy plate model: ½ of your plate should include vegetables, ¼ should include a form of protein (meat, fish, soy, lentils), and ¼ should include a carbohydrate (rice, pasta, bread).

-Annual check-up with your doctor – It is important for everyone to see their family doctor at least yearly (or more often as necessary) to conduct a full check-up, which can include blood pressure, weight checkup, and blood work.

### **Healthy Recipe:**

Okra and Tomato Curry

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Makes 7 servings

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 tbsp. (15 mL) canola oil
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced (lengthwise)
- 2 medium tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1 tsp (5 mL) red chili flakes
- 1 tsp (5 mL) salt
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) turmeric
- 2 lb. (1 kg) fresh or frozen okra, sliced and trimmed
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 cup (250 mL) water (approx.)
- 1 cup (250 mL) chopped cilantro (approx.)

### **METHOD**

1. In a large sauté pan, heat oil over Medium heat. Add onions and cook for about 2 minutes.
2. Add tomatoes and cook until onions are translucent and tomatoes are soft; about 2 minutes.
3. Add chili flakes, salt and turmeric and stir for 2 minutes.
4. Add okra and mix well, adding 2 tbsp. (25 mL) of water if ingredients stick to pan.
5. Add lemon juice and cook for 2 minutes, adding another 2 tbsp. of water if sticking.
6. Reserve 2 tbsp. (25 mL) cilantro, and add remaining to pan.
7. If using fresh okra, add remaining water and cover and cook up to 15 minutes. Omit adding the rest of the water here if using frozen okra.
8. Garnish with reserved cilantro when okra is tender and remove from heat.

### **Nutritional Analysis per Serving (1 cup)**

Calories .....74  
Fat, total .....2 g  
Fat, saturated .....0 g  
Cholesterol .....0 mg  
Carbohydrate .....15 g

Sent by Geethanjali Wickramanayake

## Unity train

We were traveling on a trip to Ella Sri Lanka, a beautiful place in the Hills and mountains surrounded by tea estates and tea bushes Carpeting the landscape. We were going to stay in a resort called 98 acres Hidden in a mountain and a tea estate

We decided to take the Podi Menika Train from Colombo to Ella Reserved on the third class seats we were a little apprehensive as 3 adults 6 children in a third class fully booked train seemed a little daunting But the reserved word sort of gave some comfort and hope that we would actually Have some seats.

All of the traveling family members met in the fort railway station On a hot and humid poya day morning. The train started its adventurous journey A little late in the morning but the crowded platform vibrated with a holiday spirit When we entered the compartment it was empty. The compartment before is was full To the brim. There was no room to even put in a foot to check for our seat number.

Some kind person who saw our confusion shouted above the noise of people To go forward and find our coach. We were all pretty relieved to see the empty Place. Our seats had been booked all over the place and if we went to rule We could not sit together. Since the coach was empty we targeted ten seats together And decided that we would try to negotiate. A family of 22 got in after us. The confusion was Great as they also had seats amidst ours but at least theirs were in one carriage So we spoke kindly To one of the party and he was so obliging as he could see the predicament We were in. He gave the orders and we moved around soon his group was happy and we were delighted. This started our journey with kindness and compromise from total strangers.

On the right side block was a Tamil family also on holiday. They were silent and like us decided to take what seats they could to be comfortable and together.

A little while later each group brought out there food packets made from various houses in the early hours of the morning as this was a long journey that required breakfast and lunch. There was a cafeteria but we could not reach it through the salmon packed third class not reserved compartment. So we were stuck here between the engine and the locked other door. The elderly mother from the large group brought is a pan bage and asked us to share. We had eaten almost as we got in so we politely refused.

In a little while we saw that the kids in that group were not eating. The seeni sambol was too hot for them. We had plenty of food to go around so we offered it to the kids who accosted with all smiles. After a little while the Auntie from the group came again with fried kadala. It seems they were thanking us for feeding their kids. We reciprocated by opening a biscuit packet and sharing. In a little while came a box of cutlets. We had also made but they would not let us refuse. It seemed the food was endless and the passing from one group to the other genuine and free.

Then started the music. It was like being part of a live musical concert. The girls and the boys of the group had such beautiful voices blending in perfect harmony it was amazing. It was like each voice had a place in the song. The drum that accompanied them was effortlessly setting the tune and the songs old and new that came out from the group was spirit lifting. We were truly lucky to be in that place in that time. We were part of a beautiful opera group that brought out the true meaning of a melody and harmony in song. The food was amazing and the entertainment was beyond expectations. What more could we wish for.

We were climbing uphill. From about Nawalapitiya a Muslim family got in. Their seats displaced the father in the Tamil group. Who stood silently by his family. We had an extra ticket as one in the group was running late but I didn't want to get involved. After all they were Muslims. I felt an initial dislike seeping in. The first negative feeling in the journey. A family of four. There was a young boy of about 15, glaring eyes and set mouth. Seemed angry and trying to take on the world.

We moved around asked the Tamil displaced father to sit where we made room for him. He was more than happy to accept. Grateful he sat down in a corner not really wanting to disturb group. The Muslim boy was glaring in disbelief at the music filling the train as if he had never experienced anything like this in his life. We noticed that this family had not eaten anything from the time they got in. Not a drop of water and not a bite of anything.

I felt bad. What sort of Buddhist was I. If I could not see or feel beyond clothes or looks. I had fish cutlets and chicken sandwiches but they were not halal. But I did have some packs of biscuits. We hesitantly offered and was not sure if the reply was a yes or no. So we left the box on their table. The little girl in the group from time to time peeked over the seat at all the excitement going around.

I saw the boy slowly look around and open the box and put a few in his mouth. We were relieved as we hoped we had not offended them.

The Tamil family left a little before this. Thanking again with smiles and goodbyes.



The bigger group was singing away and a gent from another compartment who could not resist the music was dancing and singing away. But it was our musicians to get down. We bid our farewells and wished each other a wonderful holiday. It was a sad good bye from our side as our orchestra left.

We had much food left. We took a box of cutlets to the next compartment group who the dancing gent had come from. They were so happy to receive our cutlets. I think they had run out do food. We also had some sandwiches left which we shared again with deep gratitude they accepted. They had a surprise birthday in their group with a birthday cake which was shared with all of us.

We asked the Muslim mother if they would like some cutlets. She woke her son who with a sleepy smile refused. Again they had not drunk or Wayne anything except for the biscuits. The little girl started to play with our kids and she accepted a milk and biscuits with a big smile.

The kids were having wonderful time as the whole compartment was now ours as the other group also left with one of them a little heavy with drinks hugging and kissing us bidding farewell. The kids were climbing over seats and on the bars and I knew Darwins theory was absolutely true watching with the ease and fun the kids had having on the bars of the train.

We took the left over cutlets and showed it to the mother who looked at it hungrily. I put one in her hand one in her daughter and one the father accepted gratefully. The son still decided not to.

They got off in Ella and again like all the groups before bid farewell to us, each group getting off the train and going off into the distance with smiles and waves with hopes and dreams. Some simply to enjoy their holiday, some wondering how to make ends meet. But all of us in those few hours together came together as a family. As a family of human beings looking for things that unite us and not what divides. Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim. No different to each other expect for a belief. A thought that has been forced or accepted freely or born to which divides all of us. Only a thought that we have kept thinking over and over again which we have formed into a religion or a race totally forgetting who we are and where we have come from.

All of us are born live and die, no matter what or who we believe in. No matter how we chose to live or fight. It is division that is man made and easily man removable.

We chose each of us in that train. In that compartment to find things to unite us. To make us whole like pieces in a puzzle. Each one needed to make the other a better person.

So we rode 10 hours in the unity train. Without barriers, bring out the best in each of us. Showing Each of us to find the light that we carry and to look for that in others not the outer cover. To understand that we are all one. And that this one is what we all are.

Unity train...taking us to heights breathtaking, and leaving us with a vibrations that leave us breathless with their power.

The 10 hours were so well spent in our beautiful blue unity train

Sent by Nilmini Dorabawila



**“- Health is the greatest gift,  
Contentment the greatest wealth,  
faithfulness is the best relationship -“**

**- Lord Buddha-**

## About mental health

Everyone's mental health is important. It needs to be taken care of to make sure you stay healthy overall. Learn about your mental health, how to improve it and the resulting benefits.

## What is mental health?

Mental health is the state of your psychological and emotional well-being. It is a necessary resource for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health. It does not mean the same thing as [mental illness](#). However, poor mental health can lead to mental and physical illness.

Good mental health allows you to feel, think and act in ways that help you enjoy life and cope with its challenges. This can be positively or negatively influenced by:

- life experiences, such as:
  - o family situation
  - o the death of a loved one
  - o financial and employment status
- relationships with others, such as your:
  - o friends
  - o family members
  - o co-workers
  - o schoolmates
- work or school environment
- physical health, such as problems caused by:
  - o long-term illness
  - o alcohol or drug abuse
- the type of community you live in
  - o is it a supportive and trusting community or one where everyone keeps to themselves?

## How can you take care of your mental health?

Take care of your mental health in the same way you would take care of your physical health. It takes practise, patience and support.

You can maintain or improve your mental health by following the advice below.

- Know and accept that life can be challenging.
- Know and accept your strengths and weaknesses.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Accept yourself and others. This is the basis of self-esteem.
- Learn to recognize and understand that you and others have both positive and negative feelings.
- Create a sense of meaning in your life by learning and trying new activities, like starting a hobby.
- Create healthy, trusting relationships with people who accept and support you.

Building a supportive community is an important way to improve mental health. Making meaningful connections with your family, friends, peers, colleagues and other members of your community can help you feel:

- like you belong
- safe and secure
- free to express your thoughts and feelings on issues that are important to you

You can help create a healthy and safe environment where you live, learn, work and play by:

- knowing and accepting that everyone has difficulties in their lives
- taking part in local events and getting to know your neighbours
- finding ways to get involved and giving back to your community
- supporting and including people of different ages and backgrounds in your community

### **How does being mentally healthy benefit you?**

Being mentally healthy can:

- increase coping skills
- o how we handle difficult experiences and stresses
- improve self-esteem
- o feeling confident in your worth and abilities
- improve resiliency
- o your ability to successfully move on after a negative event and regain control of your life

Increasing coping skills, self-esteem and resiliency encourages people to:

- create healthy relationships
- positively interact with their community
- talk openly about their mental health, including their needs and wants

Feeling confident and competent in these areas can improve emotional strength. In turn, this can help improve and maintain your level of mental health.

**Source: Government of Canada** (<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/mental-health-sante-mentale/improving-mental-health-ameliorer-sante-mentale/what-quoi-eng.php>)

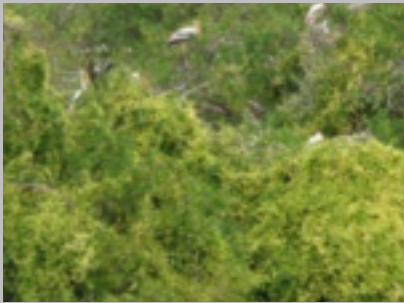
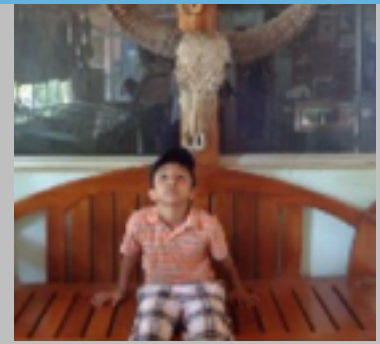
Sent by Vihara Dharmaratne



## My adventurous trip to Kumana – Wildlife sanctuary

By Ravindu Karunaratne

Grade 3 – Bear Path elementary school in CT

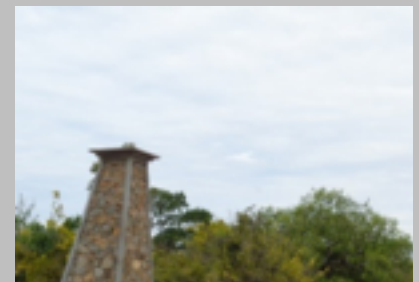


Have you ever been on a wildlife safari? If yes, have you seen animals in their natural habitats? Well I have! My family and I have been to a wildlife sanctuary called Kumana in Sri Lanka. There was an information center and there we saw stuffed animals and several skeletons of wild animals including elephants. Those animals were dead by natural causes.

My father got us the tickets to enter the sanctuary. He also requested park information from the officers at the information center.

A little before we went to the information center, we went to a nearby store and got a huge packet of Hawaiian cookies and cream cracker biscuits. Who knew how long it'll take so we needed more than enough food to be sure we won't be hungry on our journey. After we bought our snacks we got inside our car and started our journey! When we were driving towards the entrance I saw that the entrance gate looked just like the Jurassic park [the Jurassic park gate shown below]. After we passed the gate we started seeing different kinds of birds like woodpeckers, kingfishers, parrots, mina birds, cranes, sparrows, lovebirds, and of course peacocks.

Slowly we reached a huge lake, it was almost entirely full of lotus flowers, we also saw other lakes with cool creatures living in them such as crocodiles, alligators, and water buffaloes. I was very frightened but it was also awesome seeing creatures I wanted to see for a long time so we slowed to a stop and got out of the car so we could take pictures of the wild animals that live there. We also saw signs of elephant poop and my mom asked me for a joke hey Ravindu, can you touch the elephant's poop? So if its hot is new poop an elephant is nearby, cold is old poop an elephant should be long gone. Ha ha ha ha! "Yes ammi" .... Very funny I said. "It's not funny" my Mom said.



After we got down from the bird center my mom and I got back inside the car. While we were driving we saw that the road in front of us was a little flooded my dad was not ready to drive with us in the car, I was also very frightened I thought there were crocodiles in there.



Photo of the wild elephant. Plus, it is looking directly at us!



So Ammi and I got off the car and we waited until Appachchi drove his car across the flooded path. After he crossed the pathway it was our turn to cross the path, I was afraid but my mom and I was determined to cross the flooded pathway. All of a sudden we heard a man from a safari truck shouting “Elephant! Elephant! Get in the car!” so my mom and I held our hands tightly and quickly crossed the flooded pathway and reached the car forgetting about the crocodiles and we got in the car as quick as we can. Then while we were driving a wild elephant came into view! My mom was clearly frightened and started whispering to my dad to leave this place instantly but my dad didn’t listen but he started taking photos of the elephant. Then my mom started whining and blaming my dad for going closer to the elephant. But he kept taking pictures until he felt like turning around and leaving, which takes a long time. [actually, my mom is the one who took the photos, my dad took the videos, glad my dad drove the car because if my mom was driving she will turn the car around and leave ] After we left the elephant alone, my mom told me a fact, “One wild elephant is more dangerous than a herd of elephants.





It was the afternoon we started seeing more and more animals they usually prowl when it's close to night, I bet that there are nocturnal animals living there too! While we were driving back we saw 2 foxes running along the road, many herds of deer drinking water from scattered lakes, many peacocks ready to dance and a large rabbit which my mom got many photos of. Usually the sanctuary closes at 6:00 pm so we barely came out of the sanctuary before it closed. We saw more elephants as we came out of Kumana. It was getting dark, we were very tired. It was the most amazing experience I had. It is better than any zoo in America or even in Sri Lanka because in zoos animals are kept in cages. How would you like if you're kept in a



Sent by Ravindu Karunaratne



Badullla Train  
and  
Demodara Arc  
Bridge

Taken by  
Sriyani  
Dissanayake



**A PUBLICATION OF THE MAHAMAYA GIRLS' COLLEGE ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA**

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