

Our sabbatical holiday in the North American continent enables us to make contact with many Graduate Chemists of the Institute of Chemistry Ceylon

My grateful thanks are extended to the Editor for inviting me to make a contribution regarding our sabbatical holiday in the North American Continent from mid March to the end of August 2006.

Having postponed taking my third sabbatical when it was due in the mid nineties, I was compelled to take my accumulated two years' (double) sabbatical before my 64th birthday in February 2008; I therefore commenced my leave with a six month visit to Goleta in Santa Barbara County (120 miles north of Los Angeles) where my son (and his wife) are reading for their PhDs in Social Anthropology at the University of California in Santa Barbara.

It was my first visit to a University Campus in the USA although I had earlier been to North America and visited many university campuses in Canada. The facilities available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students were beyond my imagination! I was also surprised though happy to note that the University library was freely available to any member of the public for reading and reference purposes. I made maximum use of these facilities although I also spent a large amount of time in reading all sorts of interesting material, both scientific and otherwise, in a large Bookstore, which permitted any member of public to come in and read in comfort any book, periodical or newspaper or listen to CD's unlimitedly. – quite a contrast to a Sri Lankan Bookshop!

We spent almost three months of our holiday touring by Greyhound Bus (which we found to be extremely comfortable and cheap) as many as 42 American cities covering in the process 29 US states, five Canadian Provinces and parts of Mexico. We went through different types of weather and vegetation ranging from the deserts of Nevada and Arizona to the plains of Central Canada and the Rocky Mountains in the West! The weather varied from the heat of Las Vegas and Mexico to bitterly cold windy weather in Salt Lake City and even a light snowfall in the middle of summer around Denver in Colorado! The historic cities of Philadelphia, Valley Forge, Washington DC, Chicago and Richmond, the unforgettable stalagmites and stalactites in the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, Saguaro National Park in Arizona, modern developments in space exploration in Houston and Cape Carnavel, recent terrorist outrages in "Ground Zero" at Manhattan, New York etc were a representative sample of the wide range of places we were able to visit during our wonderful holiday.

The very fact that I had no other formal commitments (and of course, no meetings to attend)

enabled us to have a leisurely wide ranging tour of the North American continent; at the end of it, we became so much more knowledgeable about so many things that we became firmly convinced that travelling really broadens the mind!

However, one of the most enjoyable and satisfying events encountered in our unforgettable tour was the ability to meet a number of my former students including Institute Graduate Chemists of different vintages and eras, all of whom are performing extremely well in USA and Canada. It was indeed such a pleasure and joy to meet them and be at the receiving end of their kind hospitality, warmth and friendship. All of them were extremely happy to do so and expressed in no uncertain terms to what extent the Graduateship Programme of our Institute had given them an opening to professional life, if not for which they would not have been able to read for post-graduate qualifications and/or secure the positions they were in today. The confidence, maturity, strength and open mindedness exhibited by all of them in foreign countries was beyond belief. Many of the younger Graduate Chemists of the last decade or so were still reading for their PhD's in the latest developments of chemistry, chemical biology, molecular biology, medicinal chemistry, nano chemistry, computational chemistry and allied areas and were so proud and confident of what they were doing and were trying to achieve. I also had the pleasant privilege of meeting some of their academic supervisors and admission co-ordinators and was so glad to learn from them how good, hard working and enterprising our Graduate Chemists were! Many American universities now have no hesitation in admitting more of our products and some were in fact awaiting more of such applications. The names of the Graduate Chemists whose hospitality was extended to us included Dr. Dhehine Seneviratne (Toronto), Dr. Chandani Udawatte (Naperville, Chicago), Dr. Gomika Udagamsooriya (Detroit, Michigan), Ms. Lourdes Thevanayagam (San Francisco), Mr. Indrajith Gunasekere (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Mr. Piyal Ariyananda (Newark, Delaware), Mr. Shanaka Wijesinghe (Richmond, Virginia), Mr. Dinuka Abeydeera (Detroit, Michigan), Ms. Prabodhika Mallawarachchi (Gainesville, Florida), Mr. Sanka Atapattu (Detroit, Michigan), Ms. Dilusha Dalpathado (Lawrence, Kansas) and Ms. Samantha de Zoysa (Arlington, Texas). I must in particular thank Piyal and Dinuka for having kindly co-ordinated this visit programme.

During these discussions and as I contemplated

on their outcome over the past few months, my mind went back to the commencement of our programme in 1979/80 when I remember having to answer a number of queries from anxious (potential) parents who wished to know from me whether having followed the (then new unconventional and unknown) Graduateship Programme in Chemistry, their children would be able to obtain scholarships and/or post-graduate opportunities abroad. My simple honest answer at that time was that I am unable to answer that question in advance since the acceptance of our products, even locally, leave alone abroad, would depend on the quality exhibited by the products, after they pass out! Naturally, many potential parents were unable to commit their children to be "guinea-pigs" for such an apparently uncertain future! We from the Institute however had to be honest particularly since we did not have the benefit of a UGC guaranteed paper qualification such as UGC Circular of 1992 which dishonestly assumes and assures that a degree conferred by any University (new or old) is equivalent in all respects to any other!

A long history of 27 years into the production of Graduate Chemists in Sri Lanka through such an unconventional mode has however proved beyond any doubt how our qualification has slowly and gradually proved in actual practice and in the field of work to become a fully recognized, acceptable and worthy quality qualification equivalent to that of a Special Honours Degree in Chemistry. Our Graduate Chemists have been able to be enrolled, read for post-graduate degrees and obtain high level employment in numerous countries throughout the world including USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, France etc. For example, one of our recent Graduate Chemists has just obtained the very prestigious, coveted and competitive Dorothy Hodgkin PG Scholarship and proceeded to the University of Southampton. Another Graduate Chemist has become the first to be recruited as a probationary lecturer to the Sri Lankan University system. In terms of numbers, we are, since 1996, the largest producer of Graduate Chemists in Sri Lanka with an annual production of over 35.

My only sorrow is that many of our products will very unfortunately continue to be economically better off abroad and support national development efforts in the developed world but not in Sri Lanka! I did appeal to them to come back "sooner or later" but..... In this world in which people worship money, non financial attractions are unfortunately rejected in place of financial gains!

My tour through the North American Continent also enabled me and my wife to meet and reap the kind hospitality of a number of other more senior Chemists who have left Sri Lanka for good for various reasons. These included Prof. Chandre Dharmawardena in Ottawa (who taught me the elements of Thermodynamics in my University second year in 1963/64), Dr. M Mahendran in Toronto (who was very closely and intimately involved with me in the commencement and sustenance of the Graduateship Programme from 1978 to 1983), Dr. Samson Hettiarachchi in San Francisco (who was initially my student, later fellow colleague in the University of Colombo and helped in the conduct of lectures & practical classes in the Graduateship Programme from 1979 to 1983), Prof. Leslie Gunathilake in Tucson, Arizona (who was initially my student at Peradeniya & later fellow postgraduate student at Imperial College London in 1970/71) and Mr. Wijeratne, formerly of the MRI in Tucson, Arizona. I was also hosted for dinner in Tucson, Arizona by Prof. Priyani Paranagama, (who was Institute Secretary before she proceeded to USA on sabbatical leave in 2004. and was actively involved in our Graduateship Programme)

I also had the opportunity to meet and enjoy the hospitality of former Colombo University students such as Dr. Ranjith Muhandiram (Toronto) and Dr. Ransirimal Fernando (Edmonton). I was also able to enjoy the hospitality of former OUSL colleagues/students such as Ms. Mahika Weerasekera & Ms. Anokha Higgs (at Salt Lake City, Utah) and Ms. Neluni Perera (Manhattan, Kansas)

Professor J N O Fernando
Dean/College of Chemical Sciences
Chairman/Acadamic Board

Ceremonial Opening of the H D Gunawardhana Instrument Centre

The Instrument Centre in the third level of the new headquarters building is named **H D Gunawardhana Instrument Centre** in recognition of his immense contribution to Chemistry especially in the field of Analytical Chemistry, Chemical Education and Chemical Research and to his dedicated service to the educational and other activities of the Institution.

The H D Gunawardhana Instrument Centre will be ceremonially opened by Chief Guest, Dr. A T Ariyaratne, Leader of the Sarvodaya Movement on 10th November 2006 at 5.00 p.m. Mr. B S P Mendis, Director/CEO, Sri Lanka Accreditation Board for Conformity Assessment will deliver the oration.