

## **PARADISE LOST**

**By Darryl Isaaks.**

Like many others before me, I was forced to leave the Island paradise of Sri Lanka and make my home in Australia because of the policies introduced by the Bandaranaike government. I could adapt to those policies but my children faced a dreary future because they belonged to a minority community. So, in 1983, we settled in Melbourne and have thrived here because of our hard and honest labour. However, in my heart, I have always been a Sri Lankan and proud of it. I felt that, in leaving Sri Lanka, I had left Paradise.

So, it was with a great deal of pleasure that I re-visited Sri Lanka in 2001. I was then the Assistant Treasurer of the EIGHTY CLUB and introduced myself to the President of the DBU, the charming Ms Deloraine Brohier and the Chairman of the DBU's Welfare Committee, Mr. Neville Overlunde. The latter then took me to visit some of the Welfare Beneficiaries helped by the EIGHTY CLUB and what an eye-opening experience that was. I came away from their little homes in tears. These were the flotsam and jetsam of a one-proud community reduced to penury and destitution by circumstances beyond their control. Many had children who had migrated and forgotten about the parents they left behind. Others had children whose incomes were insufficient for them to even support their own wives and children - so they had nothing to spare for their aged parents. I realized then that these less-privileged members of the Burgher community had lost their Paradise even while they lived in it!

Space does not permit me to describe the plight of the many people I met there and who kept echoing the sentiment, "God bless the Eighty Club." However, one problem they have is something that we, in Australia, take for granted. In Sri Lanka, there is no social service scheme that provides cheap or free medication to the aged. Indeed, there are no pensions paid to the Burgher aged. Imagine the plight of a person who suffers from one or more of the common ailments that we all experience such as High blood pressure, Diabetes, Elevated cholesterol levels, Glaucoma etc and cannot afford the daily medication needed. One tablet to treat these ailments costs in the region of RS.25 each. So, these patients are faced with a dilemma. When they get a few rupees as a hand-out, do they buy some tablets or do they buy some food. Invariably, they buy food and suffer all the symptoms that come with their ailments with patience forced on them by poverty.

I met three out of four families who had a child living in their homes suffering from acute schizophrenia. These were young adults who were subject to frequent and violent seizures unless kept sedated by daily doses of tranquilizing medication. This medication cost about RS.800 per month and was quite out of the reach of aged couples with hardly any income at all. On my return, I described the position of these children to my peers in the Eighty Club's Committee of Management and am delighted to report that the EIGHTY CLUB now meets the cost of the monthly medication needed by these four mentally sick children.

One has got to see for oneself, the extent of poverty within the ranks of the less-privileged members of our Community in Sri Lanka. Only then will the work done for them by the EIGHTY CLUB be fully appreciated. How proud I am to be a member of this fine group of men and women! Good friends doing God's work.

\*\*\*\*\*

*(Excerpt from 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Souvenir , Eighty Club Melbourne, Sept 2003.)*