

by Amarnath Paul

In a world that has gone through incredible changes not only in climate, but in attitudes, behavioural patterns and human voracity, it could be concluded that we have today as a whole, accumulated an avalanche of mundane chaos and grief. That is why the pristine memories of yesteryears have become even more precious to many of us who lived through a wholly different era.

I drift back fifty five years, to recall the days when my mother had a boarding house down Mahiyangana road in Badulla. A few families who still live in that area, would remember the name 'Brooklyn', the majestic 'wallauwa' house of little girls and a handful of boys.

I was just a kid of six along with my twin sister and elder sister when it all began, but remember most of the names of those who shared and relished those halcyon days of

'Brooklyn', the boarding house in a different era

yore. 'Brooklyn' was surrounded, not by the current trend of high walls, but by trees and thick bushes. They formed the natural green periphery. There were no peak-capped security guards either to safeguard 30 hyperactive girls and six boys! The only visible sentinel was "Bonzo" our well groomed Alsatian! He was on guard duty twenty four hours and would sit

regally on his special long wooden chair in the front veranda! He was a special pet to the many girls who adored him. I do not recall any instances during those long years where a prowler or thief ever set foot into our premises, such were the times. The few occasions Bonzo would exhibit his fine set of teeth and bring out his deep growl was when the daily postman arrived on his bicycle. He hated the din of the man's cycle bell! One morning Bonzo was asleep near my mother's feet. The postman arrived and stretched his hand to deliver a package. The alert animal, presumed he was going to harm his mistress and pounced on the delivery man bringing him down with his bicycle! Mum attended to his bruises and made sure he saw a doctor the next day as Bonzo had left a tooth mark on his arm. The loyal canine had to be reluctantly shackled whenever the postman arrived from that day onwards.

I remember on full-moon nights, the uproar we used to make. Before dinner, we used to catch the fire flies flickering in their hundreds in the open. We would place as many as we could on our clothing. We clung to each other in a row as we rushed through the twinkling night making the noise of a steam engine! A second group rushed onward from

the opposite direction and the din we made when we crossed each other was awesome. Occasionally, someone would trip and fall and the whole train of children would derail! Whatever joy modern technology may render today, I feel the current generation have completely missed out on a brand of gaiety we generated in that era.

I recall vividly the hide and seek games we played. Many of us loved running into the neighbouring paddy fields to hide. We would frolic in the mud and ruin most of what the farmers had toiled for in the hot sun. Very often, the humble farmer used to come complaining to my mother, who would in turn admonish us. I remember kneeling for hours on end with my twin sister and the other adventurers who had ventured out into the forbidden fields..!

The food department was powered by firewood. The chief chef, as we call them today, was none other than "Maggie", a stocky dark woman with a gold tooth that glittered every time she smiled, and she reserved that trade-mark smile only for my Mum! She hailed from a nondescript village in Badulla and remained with my mother until the cessation of Brooklyn. She, along with her younger apprentice provided excellent meals for the hungry young mouths, in a kitchen that swirled with smoke and fine aroma all the time! Maggie's hot "Kothamalli" drink every Saturday evening was

an absolute culinary delight! What ever happened to that brew of yesteryears, I wonder.

My mother was a stickler for cleanliness. The girls and boys used to line up for inspection each morning before they went to school. Saturdays were dedicated to cleaning of dormitories. Even Bonzo was bathed and groomed!

Weekend evenings were special when my father joined the family from the estate. The whole caboodle of boarders played "rounders", a baseball type game that we enjoyed. We made more noise than all of the town folk put together during those unforgettable evenings.

Before bedtime, everyone gathered for prayers. My mother being a devout Christian, would sing lustily and pray. The non-Christian members were supposed to say their own prayers at this time. But, everyone would voluntarily join. There were non Christian girls who sang and memorised the hymns better than the others! Those were early days when religion and race had yet to become a weapon against people....

I used to spearhead the much hyped "film shows" in a small room next to the kitchen. We used to have some artistic posters pinned on the wall and a brass bell to start proceedings. Everyone packed excitedly into the tiny screening room! The projector was a long single torchlight! The room plunged into complete darkness

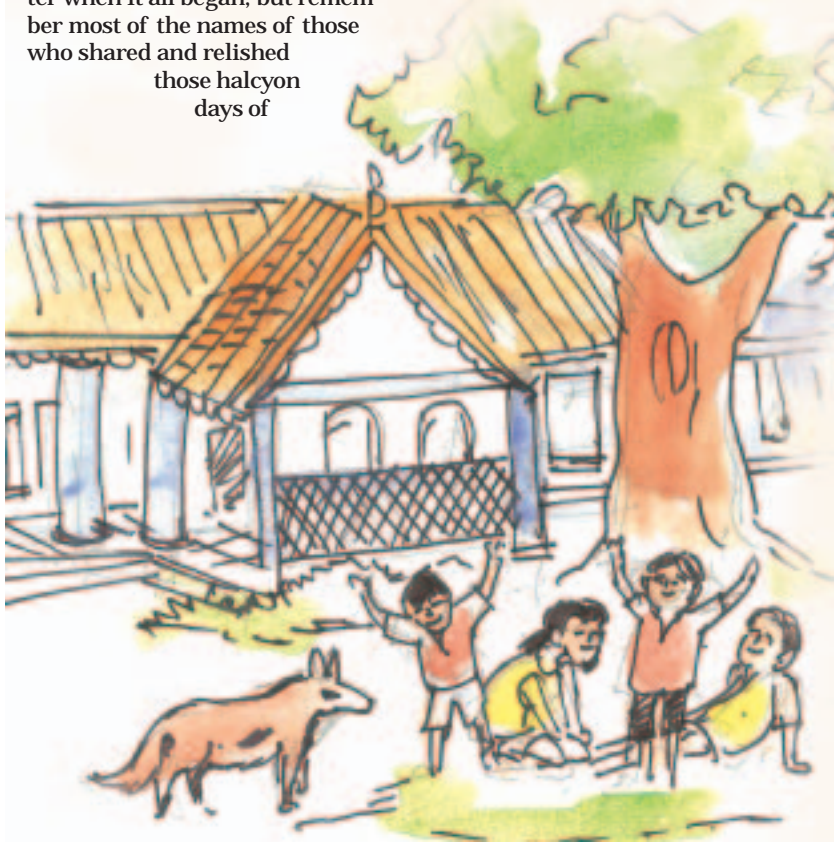
accompanied by catcalls and whistles. With the bright beam of the torch, we used to make all sorts of grotesque shapes and figures with our fingers on the blank wall. The boys were sent under the camp-bed with a basin and John's famous mouth organ. They were in charge of "background music"! Everyone sang, clapped and made frenzied noises. Bonzo was ever anxious to join, but he would certainly have turned the film show into a circus if he was admitted!

The show would go on until Maggie arrived to announce sternly that dinner was ready. Everyone made their exit rather reluctantly. Whenever I switch on my DVD today, I muse over the uproarious audience that gathered in my little screening room so long, long ago.

As the years passed I went to College boarding in Kandy. During mid-term holidays I would arrive at Brooklyn, as a young, more mature lad, no longer affiliated to the age of innocence. Thus my attention was more on the girls my mother cared for and nurtured. As the Boss's son, I had privileged romantic interludes, but was yanked out of many sugar coated episodes by a disciplined and austere Mother!

More years passed and the girls and little boys I grew up with, parted ways. Today via the internet, I still have contacts with a good number of them. They are all scattered around the world, leading productive lives. In time, the demise of 'Brooklyn' became a reality and Maggie departed, shattered and in tears.

Brooklyn still stands today, with a few changes to its exterior. I had the privilege of visiting the old haunt recently with my twin sister. We stood gaping inside the same old rooms with a lump in our throats, as a myriad memories flooded our minds.



Diane Kruger

A mini is great bet if you have gams like Diane Kruger. The actress paired her bright Balenciaga mini with neutral sandals.



Heidi Klum

A short, strapless bright purple dress was the perfect choice for Heidi Klum. The model and presenter wore the dress, designed by Project Runway finalist Rami Kashou, to accept Us Magazine's "Style Icon of the Year" award.



Kristin Cavallari

For summer eveningwear, this red strapless dress is pitch perfect. Kristin Cavallari, star of Laguna Beach, paired it with gold Louboutin sandals and a simple gold cuff for a movie premiere.



Stars in Summer Dresses

Paris Hilton

This pink-and-tan halter dress screams summer sophistication on Paris Hilton. The floral print, braided straps and bow-tied belt make it perfect for a garden party or wedding.



Kerry Washington

Kerry Washington's strapless cocktail dress is bright and breezy and perfectly matched with her pink pumps.



Kate Walsh

Simple, summery white is a good choice when the temperature rises. Kate Walsh's sleeveless dress is enhanced with bright orange accents.



Thandie Newton

Thandie Newton likes to make fashion forward choices for her red carpet garb. This Matthew Williamson party frock is a case in point—with its ruffles and bows and lots of layers, it still manages to be modern and flattering on the British actress.



Penelope Cruz

Every summer wardrobe needs a little black dress. Penelope Cruz's dress is the epitome of chic—tailored, fitting, and sexy.



Lauren Conrad

Orange and turquoise are two great colors for summer—and The Hills star Lauren Conrad combined them both in a beaded mini dress. The designer's silver sandals took a back seat to her show-stopping dress



Fergie

This BCBG Max Azria dress is the perfect shape for Fergie's curvy figure. The halter neck maxi features a bejeweled empire waist and a botanical print.



Ashanti

Ashanti's formfitting black and white sheath managed to be modern—and classic. The songstress found the perfect accessories too—matching peep-toe heels.

