

**SLCAO UP-
COMING
EVENTS**

- Sinhala-Tamil New Year, April 2014

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The story of Santa Claus a.k.a. St. Nicholas

The story of Santa Claus began with Nicholas, who was born in the 3rd Century in a Greek village Patara, which is now part of Turkey. His wealthy parents died



while he was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell your own and give money to the poor" young Nicholas used his whole inheritance to help the sick, the suffering and those in need. He devoted his life to the service of others and became the Bishop of Myra. He was renowned for his for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships. In particular, for presenting gold to a

poor man to use for the dowries of his three impoverished daughters. In those days, women without a dowry had few options for survival. Often, slavery or prostitution was the only viable option.

Nicholas lived most of his life in Lycia, in Asia Minor, a Hellenic Greek province within the Roman Empire (now part of Turkey). As a young man he went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he lived for a time. Returning by sea, he came to Myra (now Demre), 50 Km east of Patara, where he was elected Bishop. While serving as Bishop, Nicholas traveled to Constantinople (now Istanbul) to plead with the emperor on behalf of the people for lower taxes. The Christian Church recognizes him as Saint

Nicholas with a feast day on 6th of December.

History tells the tale on how this wonderful, generous and loving dark-skinned person from Turkey became the red-



suited American symbol for merry holiday festivity and commercial activity. Please go to the following link for more details.

<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/origin-of-santa/>

OUTSIDE THE GATE

By Kumudini Nicholas

From the house on *Vihaara Lane* in *Matara*, I could hear the rolling waves of the Indian Ocean. Surprisingly, the *Laaulu* tree by the house-gate withstood the salty breeze, to produce a modest annual harvest. However, no one particularly liked the taste of the yellow ripe fruit, causing it to free-fall, seemingly aiming the gate. Only the birds enjoyed the fruit-splatters until its periodic cleaning.

It was the year Sri Lanka established the *Children & Women Bureau (CWB)*, with a vision to protect their rights. On one

smoldering afternoon of that year, I saw a woman outside the gate. She portrayed a sense of futility. Her hair had gun-metal grey and



her eyes appeared milky indicating sombre exhaustion. Her image reminded me that a deliberately closed mental-door could become a self imposed life sentence served in solitude, even without a confined prison. The little girl she carried in her arms reflected a childhood that would make *Little Nell*'s¹ seem rosy. Their clothes were shabby and in tatters with ingrained dirt. A state of utter hopelessness and despondency was apparent.

A rattling noise at the gate made me take a closer look. The little girl was hanging on to the gate, propped up by the woman. I decided to speak to the pair. Suddenly, I was transfixed. The girl, using her small fingers, was scratching the gate to extract the partially dried *Laaulu* splatters! My thoughts returned to the *CWB*, and irony washed over me. Perhaps her unbearable hunger had drawn her to the fruit rejected by all.

The woman had an angelic smile for me. My heart sank and tears swelled. I offered her lunch, and requested her to return. Her eyes sparkled, flashing a glimmer of hope. That night, I prayed for her closed mental-door to burst and free her from the debilitating clutches of despair.

¹Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (serial form: 1840-1841)

The World's First Hospital

By Kasuni De Silva Grade 9

Do you know what the first hospital built in Sri Lanka/world was? Evidences indicates that *Minhatale* was the first hospital to be ever been built in the world.

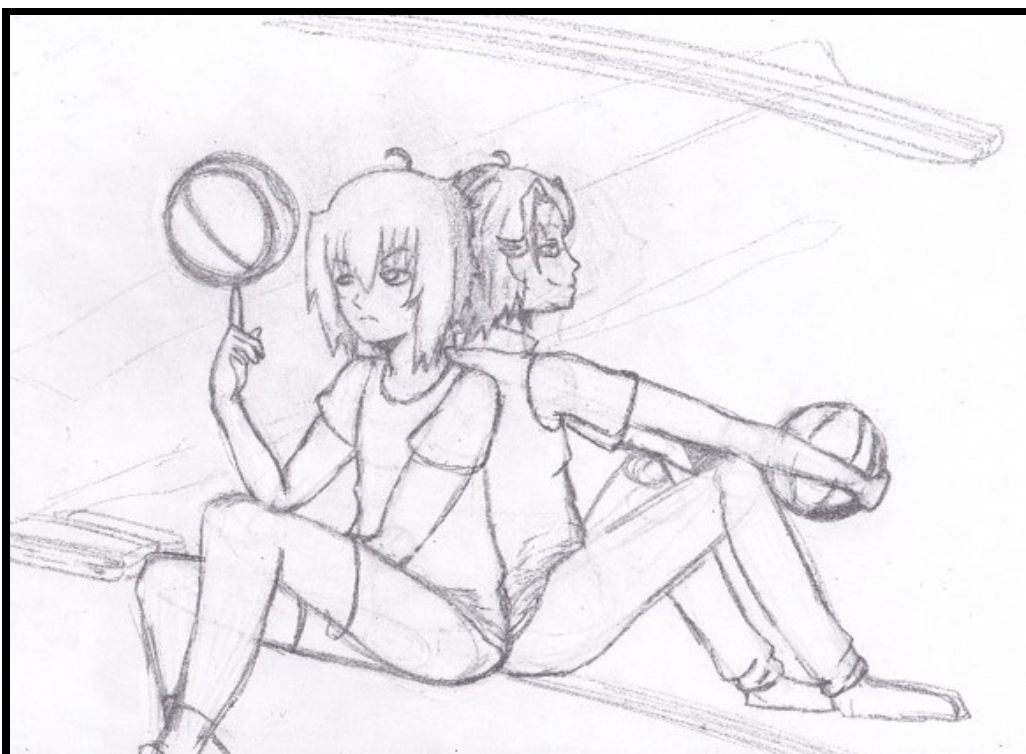
According to the Mahawamsa, King Pandukabhaya was the one who built the first hospital, at *Minhatale*. This hospital was for sick patients, in need of medication. Now this hospital is a pilgrimage site located in Anuradhapura. Decades ago King Asoka held a council at his capital *Pataliputra*. Some of the dishonest



monks were expelled from the sangha and a decision was made to

send monks to the different regions. Mahinda, who was King Asoka's son, was selected to travel to the southern regions. The grand monk and his companions left *Pataliputra* and stayed at the great monastery named *the Sanchi*.

When a monk named, Fahien visited *Mihintale* there were 2,000 monks living on the mountain. Currently this hospital is covered by many lovely mango trees. The entrance is on the southern side where a gatehouse leads to an outer courtyard. On the right side of *Mihinthale* are the remains of what was probably a hot water bath or perhaps a steam bath. Beyond this a flight of stairs leads to the accommodation area. There are rooms for 27 patients and four larger rooms for other purposes all built around a courtyard with a small shrine in its middle. In the large room on the north east is a stone medical bath. The bottom of this bath slopes footwards and there is a depression for the buttocks. Archeologists certainly still do not know what the purpose of such baths was, however they amuse that immersing patients in medicinal oils. For a small country like Sri Lanka I'm proud to say how fortunate we were to have such talented people in our heritage.



A pencil sketch by artist Shannon Silva - **Brother Rivalry**



Thoughts about Mandela, Christmas, Reconciliation and Sri Lanka

by *Martin Nicholas*

This month, the world mourned the death of one of the greatest leaders in history. Our PM said that Mandela's forbearance or his patient endurance and tolerance was legendary. During Mandela's 27 year imprisonment, he had no e-mail or *Facebook*, he could only send and receive one letter every six months. Still, it was during this time that he formulated in his mind what South Africa had to do to bring freedom to all and end the cruel apartheid regime. When released in 1990, he began transforming his ideas strategically into political action. He did it with a deep sense of compassion for those hitherto oppressed and with forgiveness to the oppressors. All within a formal framework of reconciliation he helped create.

Christmas is an apt time to remember the life of this hero. While not forgetting all he did as a freedom fighter, his message of embracing one another in the spirit of reconciliation has universal application for us in Ottawa as we approach another new year -2014. Reconciliation could be the gold mine Sri Lanka and all its citizens need, to progress with unity. The following are excerpts from President Mandela's 1995 Christmas Day Message:

- ...Each one of us should draw pride from our efforts to bring sunshine into the hearts of others.
- ...Let this Christmas period be the time for us to renew our commitment to work together.
- ...I send a message of love and peace to all fellow citizens and our friends across the globe. Let us embrace one another and build on the spirit of reconciliation.
- ...Let peace reside in all our hearts!

I Wish you the very best for 2014. It would be a tribute to Mandela's legacy if we find ways for productive and sustainable co-existence with each and everyone.

Highlights from the Christmas Party 2013 - December 07 - Photographs by Vishan Seneviratne

