



Bobby Fernandes

A Remembrance and a Celebration of a Special “Old Boy” of St. Stanislaus

By Dr. Thomas B. Singh

Soon after I returned to Guyana in late 1994, I received a telephone call from Camille De Groot, urging me to become involved in the St. Stanislaus College “Old Boys’ Association.” And soon after that, I found myself serving as a Councilor on the Executive Committee in 1995. That was my induction into the “Saints’ Association. I couldn’t have been more fortunate, for the President of the Association then was none other than Bobby Fernandes, who had entered the College some 35 years earlier (in 1959) in Form 1B, with Stanley Anselmo Marques as his Form Master. Bobby in fact served as President of the Association from 1993-1995. Other members of the Committee of Management of the Association in those years included Terry Solomon, Albert Smith, Joan Rodrigues, Chris Fernandes, Lolita Jeffery, Cecil Das, Tony Xavier, Pat Thompson, John Lewis, Joan Collins, Kester Alves, and others.

In 1993 Guyana, still an economy in utter shambles, the liberalization having begun only a few years earlier in 1989, was rapidly shedding all of its past - the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful. Taking its cue from an economy in which markets would operate without any rule other than the survival of the fittest, the society was a sort of Wild West, as pioneers of the reconstruction thought only of their self-interest. Education and St. Stanislaus College in particular, for us the big losers in the country’s economic and social collapse,¹ somehow had to be taken care of in the many mad rushes of those days.

That historical context is precisely why Bobby Fernandes, and perhaps only Bobby Fernandes, could seize the opportunities, confront the challenges and especially, envision a future for the College during his 1993-1995 tenure. Indeed, even before that, in 1992 Bobby, with the instinct, the insightfulness and the creativity that only an artist would have, made contact with his childhood friend Errol Campbell, requesting him to “[arrange] for Toronto-based alumni to support the College in a time of need.”² But while his colleagues saw that immediate need as “saving the College building from an infestation of termites,” Bobby’s vision was for that group to be exactly what it is today, a strong and well established institution that would provide sustained support to his *alma mater*, as it now does in a more organic way, still working tirelessly with another new institution, the St. Stanislaus College Board, led heroically by Bobby’s brother, Chris. And immediately upon receiving an award from that very Toronto-based alumni group, Chris referred to Bobby’s role in starting the relationship we now enjoy.

¹ I’m sure that I got this characterization from Chris, Bobby’s brother.

² “History of SSCAAT,” <http://www.torontosaints.com/docs/History-of-SSCAAT.pdf>



St Stanislaus College – Distinguished Alumni

My colleagues and I saw firsthand Bobby Fernandes' leadership during those days. Not only was it about his initiating role with the Toronto "Old Boys" and the local Association, but it was his pragmatic diplomacy as we didn't have a specialist communications officer, though one was much needed in those early days; it was about keeping his ear to the ground about our alumni in the wider Guyanese society, and especially the younger ones, to get them involved in the Association; it was about connecting the past with the future, in a Guyana in which "the more things changed – and change they did – the more they remained the same."

Of particular note during this very 1993-1995 period was Bobby's decision to compile and edit the 1993 St. Stanislaus College Magazine, its 50th or Golden Anniversary edition. In 1993, that would have been a major undertaking and accomplishment. As Editor of the 1995 edition, the next to be published, he noted that it was a lot easier because of the work done to restart it in 1993. Then he was also involved in the production of the 2006 Magazine, which coincided with the College's 140th Anniversary. Bobby had a sense of proportions when it came to significant moments in the College, and clearly saw things through the lens of the wider society. As he put it in the 1995 Magazine, "the "SAINTS" magazine will never lose the significance of its contribution to a St. Stanislaus Education. In these days when important traditions are so easily and irresponsibly cast aside for economic or political reasons, a special effort should be made to preserve the tradition of the St. Stanislaus Magazine."

Then there was Bobby's deadpan humour. It was 1995 and the College Dinner was being held in the Marion Forum. A prominent lawyer, and alumnus of the college, made a speech in rather lofty English, chiding the MC (Bobby) for not recognizing him when he had come in. Not long before, he had survived a serious gunshot injury on Sherriff Street, and we were all surprised when he walked in, all trussed up in a suit, waistcoat and all. Brilliantly connecting the dots of the gunshot, the shadiness of Sherriff Street, and the waistcoat, Bobby turned to him at end of his closing speech and assured him that we had *all* recognized him, from the moment **of** he entered, with his "bullet proof vest." It was an oratorical triumph that only a Forbes Burnham might have achieved!

And talking about that, one must note the obvious about Bobby. He was a man who loved the beauty of his country, who was seized by that beauty. In the words of Oscar Wilde,

**The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.
Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.
Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.**



St Stanislaus College – Distinguished Alumni

So Bobby would prefer his celebration of Guyana's beauty to be his autobiography, a higher form of criticism, as he remained the charming, cultivated and hopeful Bobby Fernandes whose life was a rich embodiment of the motto of St. Stanislaus College:

AETERNA, NON CADUCA - NOT FOR THIS LIFE ALONE, BUT FOR ETERNITY!

May he Rest in Peace, and may the Perpetual Light shine upon him.

Thomas B. Singh
Former President of the Association (1998-2000)
March 1, 2021