



St. Thomas' Collegiate School Magazine 1981

My A.F.S. Experience So Far

On the 13th of August 1980 I went to the Katunayake International Airport to board a plane. I was in a good mood because two of my cousins were also going on A.F.S. (We were called the three musketeers). I kissed my family goodbye and went into the terminal. I knew that I was not going to see them for one year. I boarded the plane with mixed feelings. I was not nervous but I knew that I was going to live in a totally different environment and that I was bound to face problems. So far I haven't had any big problems. There were 13 girls and 12 boys who came to the States on A.F.S. this year.

We stayed in Pakistan (Karachi) for two days. It was very hot down there. Full of flies and mosquito's. There was a band in the hotel which was playing most of the time. They sang a Sinhalese song which was totally off the track. We met the American students who were on their way to Sri Lanka. We taught them how to eat with the fingers. Oh! Boy they made a real mess.

We flew from Pakistan to Dubai, Cairo, and Paris and over the Atlantic to New York. We flew P.I.A. We were in New York from the 16th to the 20th. We stayed in a very large university. We were told what to expect and what we could do, during our stay in the US. I met a lot of people, of different nationalities. All of us did a lot of things as one big group. Singing, dancing, acting and eating (of course). Then on the last day we had an International Talent Show in which 23 countries took part. The Sri Lankans were the first to go to and we got a very good applause and also a very good introduction. We proudly presented Kandyan dancing (not me), two songs and our national anthem. When we started to sing it all the students (about 5000) stood up. We were all very happy. In New York, I am sure, all of the students made friends with somebody. I can say that A.F.S. stands for friendship. On the 20th I left New York by bus for Wisconsin. I said goodbye to all my friends except for one who was traveling with me. It was a very sad moment because all of us had become very good friends. We were very well taken care of while we were in New York.

I traveled by bus with about 20 students and reached Madison (capital of Wisconsin), where I met my family. There was a big crowd there to meet us. They were carrying placards saying "Welcome to the US." and etc. My family came up to me and hugged me and shook my hand about 10 times. Everybody was happy.

I am now living in Madison. This city is built around 3 lakes. I live by one of the smaller lakes. I joined a high school which has about 6,000 students. It is one of the best schools in the state of Wisconsin (mind you Wisconsin is bigger than the Sri Lanka). I consider myself lucky because I was attending one of the best schools. I met a lot of people since I've been here. But I miss my friends back there. This school is in one building (including swimming pool and 2 gyms). So one can imagine how big it is. The school system is quite different. One difference is you get wider selection of subjects. We are given a time table and it is quite different to the one I was used to have. I have the same subjects every day of the week in the same order. I have two free hours a day. At the end of every hour we have 5 minutes to walk to the other class. If a person gets late or absent, it might take some points of your grade unless an excuse is given. And there is a way to do that. A letter should be taken to the grade office (each grade has an Office) and a card will be given to the bearer. So that card has to be produced to the teacher.

I get along very well with my family and they treat me as one of the family. They take me to a lot of places. Now it's winter in Wisconsin. It is very cold and I mean it. Some days it is about 30 below zero. And the wind chill (temperature with the wind) is about -70 (minus seventy degrees) there is an A.F.S. talent show in April and they selected me to be the announcer (M.C. - master of ceremonies) and I am really looking forward to it.

The food here is totally different. I had hard time getting used to it. But that is what A.F.S. is. We have to learn to live in a different culture and getting used to them. I think this is a wonderful experience for anybody who could have it. As a matter of fact it's a challenge which one should be able to take up. And this organization is mainly of volunteers, they are very well organized and they do a great job. I am proud to be apart of the big A.F.S. "FAMILY"

Kesera Ranawake
A.F.S. (In U.S.A.)