

Number 347/2008

GOLD STAR OF CIVILIAN BRAVERY– 2008

M. L. Wasana Sanjeewa(*Student*)

Date of incident: 6th June 2007

Place of incident: St. Anthony's College – Galle / Sri Lanka

As is quick action and acute observation, he was able to save 200 schoolmates by landslide

INCIDENT:

Reader's digest

Volume: December 2010

"Heroes – Gall / Sri Lanka"

It was a cold, wet day on June 6, 2007, when 14-year-old M. L. Wasana Sanjeewa arrived at St. Anthony's College in the seaside district of Galle, Sri Lanka. Waiting outside his classroom for his classmates to arrive, Wasana stared idly at the torrential rain. Then his gaze fell upon the 18-meter-high hill that rose at the back of the classroom.

He noticed enormous amounts of rainwater glowing down the hill, and water was also bubbling at the base of a boulder on the hill. For a few minutes, Wasana stared at the water, wondering why it looked so familiar.

Then it hit him – the scene was alarmingly similar to the slides he was shown during Disaster Management classes, the course was conducted at schools located near the sea following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, which killed more than 30,000 Sri Lankans,

Fearing an impending disaster, Wasana swung into action. "Run, run don't stay here! The rocks on the hill are going to fall on us!" he shouted as he gesticulated wildly at students waiting outside their classrooms. Chaos broke out as the students ran to the open area that had been designated as an emergency gathering point. When some teachers approached Wasana, he showed them the water gushing from the hill and they started leading the students to safer ground.

Just then Principal Nihal Gurusinghe drove into the school compound. Wasana ran over to tell him what was happening.

After inspection the site where the water was bubbling up from the ground, Gurusinghe knew the school was in serious trouble. A famer himself, he understood how easily soil can be washed away in these conditions. The enormous boulder at the top of the hill could come crashing down at any minute.

Leading a group of school employees and older student, Gurusinghe climbed the hill and tried to divert the water flow away from the boulder. They were too late: ten minutes after they started their frantic work, they heard screams as the massive rock hurtled down the hill on an avalanche of sand, rock and mud. There was little Gurusinghe and his group could do as they watched the earth engulf an entire school block.

When Wasana returned home later that day, his white uniform covered in mud, he received an earful from his mother. He tried to explain that he had saved 200 schoolmates, but she didn't believe him.

His mother finally realized he was telling the truth when she saw a TV report about the disaster. Filled with pride, she hugged Wasana, kissed his forehead and murmured that he was indeed a hero.

Thanks to Wasana's quick action and acute observation, no-one was hurt in the incident. The landslide destroyed two classrooms and caused extensive damage to six others. The repairs, costing \$27,000, included a new retaining wall on the hill to prevent future landslide.

"The financial damage is nothing compared to what would have happened had there been children in the classrooms," Gurusinghe says "Wasana's action taught us that sometimes we cannot wait until something happens before we do something. It might be too late by then."

Wasana later received a Gold Star for Civilian Bravery from the Foundation for Civilian Bravery, Sri Lanka. The incident also inspired a teacher, Hsyama Amarasiri from Vidyaloka Vidyalaya Maharagama, to write *Gold Star 1*, a Sinhala booklet about Wasana to inspire other youngsters to adopt the same spirit of bravery. Looking back, Wasana says he didn't think twice about the ridicule that would have ensued if he had been wrong about the landslide. "It would be worse if already knew it was going to happen," he says.

The event has turned Wasana, now 17, into a confident youngster, "I feel disaster management lessons are important for everyone," he declares. "We'll never know when the knowledge will come in handy."

Number 366/2009

GOLD STAR OF CIVILIAN BRAVERY – 2009

Selvi Sinraza Dananshika

Date of incident: 2nd March 2009 / 6th March 2009/ 20th March 2009

Place of incident: Pudumathalan

Saving lives of three people who were severely injured by the war

The war was being intensely fought a mere kilometer away from the residence of Sinraza. On 2nd March 2009, at around 9 AM She heard the cries of her neighbour, Gunalakshmi Sivasundaram. Running to her, Sinraza noticed that Gunalakshmi was injured as a result of shell explosion; she was hit on the head with shrapnel. Sinraza covered her head with a piece of cloth to prevent bleeding and informed her father and husband. Also, Sinraza took her to the make shift hospital at the school. However, Gunalakshmi died on the day she was admitted.

Four days later i.e. 06th March 2009 around 12 noon another student Raj Kumar was injured in the head due to shrapnel. Acting immediately Sinraza covered his head with a piece of saree cloth to prevent bleeding. He was taken to the hospital and his life was saved.

On 20th March 2009 a 65-year-old lady was lying under a tree, bleeding heavily from one of her legs. Sinraza attended to her and took her to the hospital on time to save her life.

Number 388/2012

GOLD STAR OF CIVILIAN BRAVERY– 2012

W. D. A. Sadunil Sankalpa

Care of K. A. Chandralatha, No.02,
Pallama Road, Bangadeniya.

Date of incident: 8th March 2012
Place of incident: Bangadeniya, Anamaduwa

Prevention of accident at the railway crossing at anamaduwa, bangadeniya

Student Sandun Sankalpa left his house to buy groceries at a nearby shop on 8th March 2012 around 7.30 p.m.

He observed that the gate at the railway crossing was not closed and the train was speeding fast towards the crossing, but the gate keeper was not to be seen. There were vehicles approaching along the highway. Quick thinking Student Sankalpa immediately ran to the gate and closed it with his might preventing a major accident.

Number 414/2013

GOLD STAR OF CIVILIAN BRAVERY– 2013

N. Damitha Dhananjaya

Grade 10; Age 15 years
Habaraluwewa Maha Vidyalaya, Sevanagala

Date of incident: 2nd September 2012

Saved 03 school girls who were drowning in Habaralu Lake.

Some students from Maharagama were returning after a sports meet held on 2nd September 2012 at Buttala when they decided to stop and bathe in the Habaralu lake. Being strangers to the area, they did not know of the lake's depths and, to their horror, some of them started to drown. Damitha, who had also been bathing in the lake, heard their cries of distress and sprang into action to save them. He saved three of them. Damitha is a true hero.