

Father and sons who revolutionized education by embarking on a unique adventure

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For quite some time, opinions have circulated that education in Sri Lanka needs an update to align with modern times. Yet, a proper system has continuously failed to materialize. Finland currently leads the world in education, ranking first among countries where children genuinely enjoy learning. This success stems from their dedication to fostering creative children equipped for the modern world. Such creativity requires a free mind, which in turn demands a free environment. Lasantha de Silva is actively working to introduce an educational framework mirroring this approach. Today, he operates as a social science researcher.

Silumina traveled to his home in Nagoda, Kandana, to uncover the details of this story. Upon our arrival, Lasantha and his two sons—dressed in matching outfits—greeted us with exceptional warmth.

The front entrance featured a small decorative pond alongside a model of the sunken Titanic crafted by Lasantha's eldest son, Nikolai. Meanwhile, Deran Nolasko, the younger son, welcomed us with a trumpet-like sound. He produced the noise not from a traditional brass instrument, but from a galvanized pipe—a clever discovery entirely of his own making. Stepping inside this remarkable welcome felt less like entering a traditional home and more like walking straight into a research laboratory.

Airplanes, rockets, and satellites dominated one side of the room, while models of space travel devices filled the other. Elsewhere, rock fragments collected from across Sri Lanka sat on display, including crusts left over from iron melting and cooled lava formations. Bookshelves lined every wall, decorated with portraits of various scientists. Interspersed among them were poems and handwritten notes penned by Lasantha, who was the first to sit down for the *Silumina* interview.

"In 1994, I earned my university admission. However, after sitting on the waiting list for over three years, I was finally admitted to the Faculty of Arts at the University of Colombo in mid-1996 to pursue my first degree. By October 2001, I officially received my Bachelor of Arts degree. Following that, I worked as a teacher while simultaneously running private English classes..."

"It was during this period that my partner, Ruwani Subhashini, came into my life. We married in 2004. Three years later, on May 1st, 2007, our eldest son, Theekshana Nikolai, joined our family. Exactly four years after that, our younger son, Deran Nolasko, completed our nest. When Deran Nolasko was in first grade, Ruwani chose to leave our home. I hold no resentment toward her; the world is very different today, and people's perspectives change. She left me with two wonderful children, which is why I didn't collapse like others might have. She did not destroy my life or the lives of our two boys, and I sincerely thank her from the bottom of my heart for giving me these incredible resources."

Facing a challenging path as a single father with two children, Lasantha enrolled his eldest at Wattala St. Anthony's College once he reached school age. As he navigated the daily routine of dropping off and picking up his son, Lasantha grew increasingly

critical of the tedious process other parents and children endured simply for the sake of traditional education.

He often pondered the fate awaiting children who spend years studying only to face failure at the ordinary or advanced level examinations. Should a child who devotes years to schooling be left to live as a loser at the end of it? Furthermore, is it truly necessary to wait so long for standard national exams? During this time, Lasantha—leveraging his background as a social researcher—began exploring what actions he could take to alter the trajectory of these young lives, who otherwise trade away their childhoods like a mortgage.

He ultimately turned his focus toward his own sons. At that time, a few months had passed since Theekshana Nikolai transitioned from the 7th to the 8th grade. Lasantha made the bold choice to withdraw his eldest son from school. The year was 2020, and with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government had shuttered schools in favor of online learning. Seeing an opportunity, Lasantha guided his sons to bypass the conventional timeline and sit directly for general examinations. Nikolai, who had been studying in the eighth grade, took the 2020 General Certificate of Education and passed. He then applied for the A-Level examination through the commerce stream. In the 2021 (2022) A-Level examinations, he passed by securing a B in Business Studies, a C in Economics, a C in Accountancy, a B in English Language, and a score of 70 in General English. Nikolai was just 14 years old at the time.

Now 16, Nikolai shared his perspective: "I never took tuition for any subject, not even for the London O-Levels. My father taught me everything. I actually had plenty of free time and sat for the London A-Level Examination last year. I achieved my results through intensive studying, entirely thanks to my father's guidance. Right now, my focus is directed toward space travel, the automotive industry, and mineral resources. Whenever I visit the International Book Fair, I primarily hunt for books on those topics. So far, I've authored two books—*Space in Brief* and *Story of the Motor Car*—using the knowledge I've gained through independent study."

"I also love studying minerals, a field that ties all these interests together. Every rock piece you see here was collected during my travels across different areas. A piece of lava found on the beach was actually picked up by my brother and brought to me. A glass-like rocky byproduct left over from iron smelting is called slag; I found that one in a lagoon. I didn't know what these objects were when I first picked them up, but after

bringing them home and researching details online, I figured it out. I would love to become an astronomer. That is my ultimate goal and dream."

Following his brother, 12-year-old Deran Nolasko spoke with *Silumina*. "When I was 10 years and nine months old, I sat for the London O-Levels, completing them in just one year. I felt no pressure while preparing; I still watched cartoons and played games all day once a week. I love Teddy Bears, and every single one of mine has a name. This one is Nosy. My goal is to launch him under my own brand name, similar to Walt Disney and Warner Brothers (W.B.). To kickstart that, I want to establish an animation studio called Nosy. I've already written a book about him titled *Adventures of Nosy* to build awareness, alongside designing custom badges and symbols. I want to become a globally recognized character among children everywhere, just like Mickey Mouse."

Their world is undoubtedly larger than ours. They are looking far beyond the borders of this island.

Operating as the formidable driving force behind this journey is Lasantha himself. To build a valid educational policy for the country, he enrolled in a postgraduate sociology degree program at the University of Kelaniya in 2017, successfully completing it in December 2021 as part of his work as a social researcher.

Drawing from his own experiences in school and university life, he dedicated special attention to the systemic flaws of an outdated educational model and the excessive time it demands from a youth's life. Grieving the time wasted in a child's development, he conducted comprehensive research to identify systemic shortcomings. This academic endeavor ultimately transformed into a published book. Released last July, his research book is titled *Sri Lankan Education Needs Oxygen*.

The core turning point of his research involved transforming the education of his own two sons. By pulling them out of traditional schooling and implementing his own bespoke educational methods, he is reaping the highest possible rewards today. Looking ahead, the vision is to introduce a practical educational program tailored for schools nationwide—reaching children in urban centers, suburban areas, and remote villages alike—so that the next generation is genuinely prepared to face global changes.

Photos - Chinthaka Kumarasinghe