DeMelwatte Road



This is the house in Sri Lanka where I grew up. It's at a suburb around 8 km southeast of Colombo, just outside city limits. Originally a two-bedroomed bungalow, it was extended by my parents, adding 2 more rooms and a utility area.

Built in 1958 by the Department of National Housing, it was part of a national scheme to meet growing demand for housing. My parents added their names to a list and were allocated this house as they already had my brother. Others with larger families got bigger houses, but that was not guaranteed. Sri Lanka's national housing fund provided low-interest mortgages. These houses came with no planning restrictions, so you could add multiple storeys or an outdoor swimming pool if you wanted to (or could afford to!)

Sri Lanka was ruled by Portugal, the Netherlands and Britain for nearly 500 years. While the Europeans built many fine houses and mansions for themselves, providing housing for the island's population wasn't a priority for them.

My happy memories in this house are countless. Its large garden lent itself to all forms of childhood play. My father, an enthusiastic gardener, planted many trees; coconut, jackfruit, mango, rambutan, cashew. Many a happy hour was spent up on those trees. There was even a couple of coffee bushes. The area's name, Koswatte, was derived from Jackfruit: *Kos* (jackfruit) *watte* (garden or plantation).

In those days, there was no concrete wall at the front; nor a car port. The gate was on the right and painted green. Instead of the wall, there was a hedge planted with colourful crotons and a rambutan tree. There were many vibrantly colourful plants in the front garden, including bright pink azaleas.

Unconfirmed sources say that this house will soon be modified and another built adjoining it. Whatever happens, a part of me will always be there...