

SS SyriaTime

EXTRACTS FROM SOME OF THE ESSAYS PRESENTED IN THE SS SYRIA ESSAY COMPETITION, REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE FIJI ASSOCIATION IN AUCKLAND INC, UNDER COPYRIGHT RULES- NO PART MAY BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM THE SECRETARY, FIJI ASSOCIATION, BOX 19333, AVONDALE, AUCKLAND 1746.

From Sekaia Niumataivalu, Yat Sen Secondary School "The Bhai, The Bench and The Indian Boy" ".....You alright Bhai?" Raji asked. "I am..now" Jone replied amid coughs. "What's become of the ship?" "The Syria will not last that long", Raji replied. "After the impact we found five or six lifeboats destroyed and a few crew set out in the last one in search of help from Nasilai...those able to swim jumped overboard to try making it to the shore...the Captain opted to stay with the women and children." "Why did you save me?" Jone asked "I'd expect you to do the same for me despite my race, my origin and my religion," Raji answered. "That is what I believe the Fijians are going to do, when they save us indentured labourers from the sea. I believe they are on their way right now!" Jone awoke suddenly... he was still sitting on the bench in Auckland. He sat up to read the Plaque... to discover what might have become of his friend Raji and everyone else involved in that historic tale. He was never the same again.

From Ashwini Neelima Prakash, Dayanand Anglo Vedic College "....A loud boom caught my attention, we tried finding out what happened..people started acting wild, running around bewildered. It was 8.15pm and the ship was only half a mile from the reef. The Captain took desperate measures. I realized the ship was taking in water. I held onto Raju. In the crowd we got separated. I did not blame him for saving his life and ran up to the deck. The ship tilted..I was in the water..struggling for breath, how to keep afloat. It is true before dying life flashes by one's eyes. The years of hardship and abuse rolled in my mind like a rapid river. I thought of my family..mataji was sick. At last there was silence. All I could see was mataji, her eyes as kind as ever, calling me to rest, to let down my burden and to sleep peacefully.

From Shivneel Kumar, Nausori High School "The S S Syria leaves a message in our lives by showing us the act of kind heartedness and compassion by the villagers for the indentured laborers. We need to learn from their hu-

manity..as responsible citizens of this beloved nation, everyone, regardless of race and political opinion, must come together to start making Fiji a prosperous nation. This was the dream that our Indian and Fijian ancestors were aspiring towards, a peaceful co-existence for all of us.

From Jason Wesley Ravai Titifanue, Yat Sen Secondary School ".....125 years ago, supposedly uneducated and uncultured Fijians had in an instant learnt the lesson that up till now, I and the whole Fiji nation cannot seem to learn. Without thought, our ancestors had displayed a high level of humanity by rescuing strangers from foreign lands who were in need of assistance. They set a standard that to this day, their descendants still struggle to attain.

A Comment from Adjudicator, Lady June Hillary, QSM "It was an enjoyable task to read many lovely essays, presented by so many students. Congratulations to all who participated... our grateful thanks to each school."



Essay Adjudicators-Lady June Hillary and Dr Satendra Singh



Happy Mum Mrs Titifanue with winning son Jason from Yat Sen together with Ashwini (DAV) and her teachers.



Mr Clever enjoys a moment with a winning student Shannon from St Joseph's Secondary School (second from left) with her mother and grand mother, at the reception



From left, Principal of Nausori High School Mrs P Kumar, Dr Satendra Singh, an essay winner Shivneel and his proud mother, with the school's HOD Languages Mr M Kumar at the High Commission Prize Giving. Mrs Kumar said she was proud one of her students had achieved an award, as this was an important encouragement for other students.

The Syria was a 1,010 ton, iron sailing ship with a length of 207.7 feet, breadth of 34.1 feet and depth of 20.8 feet. She was built by William Pile of Sunderland for the Nourse Line, named after the Syria River in Karnataka, India and launched in 1868. She was primarily used for the transportation of Indian indentured labourers to the colonies.

The voyage to Fiji was the last for Syria as she ran aground on the Nasilai Reef, only four miles from shore, at 8.30 p.m. on Sunday 11 May 1884 with the loss of 59 lives. This was the worst maritime disaster

in the history of Fiji. On this fateful voyage, the Syria left Calcutta on 13 March 1884 carrying 497 passengers. Fifty-six passengers and three crew members died in the wreck but a further eleven died in the next fortnight due to complications resulting from their experience.

On 29 June 2006, the Fiji Indian Association in Auckland donated a 100 year old tree root, recovered from the sea, to be placed in the crematorium foyer of the Memorial Gardens Crematorium in the city of Manukau. The artifact commemorates the ship Syria.

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