

This is a reprinting and expanded edition of the original book 'Isle of Eden'. It contains eight new stories, and photos by the author's son, David J Grenier, an award-winning photographer in his own right. These are stories about the lives and times of Sinhala people in kinder gentler times.

Isle of Eden Revisited

by J.A.R. Grenier

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J.A.R. GRENIER



**ISLE OF
EDEN
REVISITED**

2017 EDITION

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First Edition

IN THE BEGINNING...

My father, John Alfred Ronald Grenier, or 'Ronnie', as his family and friends called him, was born on 19 November 1912 in Kegalle, 48 miles east of Colombo, and was raised and grew up in Ceylon. He was a gentle man with an outlook on life heavily influenced by the philosophies of the East that left him with a keen sense of humour, and an unsophisticated and easy-going outlook towards life and its various complexities. He was an avid line fisherman, or 'Angler' to use his term, and loved the ocean, its fish, and the fishing folk of Ceylon.

He also had a talent for storytelling and spent a great deal of his time writing about these two loves. A number of his short stories and articles on fishing were published in the '*Ceylon Sunday Observer*', as well as '*The Illustrated Weekly of India*'. He also had two books published in Ceylon, one in the mid-fifties, and the other in the early sixties. Due to his own 'couldn't-care-less' attitude about money and, I am told, an unscrupulous publisher, my father received no compensation whatsoever for his published books, '*Tales of Fish and People of the Ceylon Estuary*' (a 'how-to catch fish' and several short stories), 1954, and '*Isle of Eden*' (21 short stories), 1960.

In the late nineteen fifties, my father realized that the future for his three children was rather dim in Ceylon, and consequently made the decision to move us to Australia in order to provide an opportunity to lead a more productive and prosperous life. He did this knowing full well that he would not be happy in the West and that he would dearly miss his true loves - the ocean, the fish and the fishing people of Ceylon.

I was born, David John Grenier, on 7 April 1945, in Colombo, Ceylon. My family goes back many generations in Ceylon. The detailed genealogy I possess shows my father's ancestry being of French descent, with the first mention of a Lord Captain James François Grenier being married in Colombo, Ceylon, circa 1770. On my mother's side, an Arie Cornelisz Modder, arrived in Ceylon in 1745 from Holland, on the ship '*Weltervreden*', via the Cape of Good Hope.

In search of a brighter future, my father made arrangements for me to leave the country of my birth, and I migrated to Australia with my Grand-

mother, Ruth Modder, her sister Doris Beven, and my Aunts Daphne, Ursula and Anthea Modder (my mother's three younger sisters). We left Colombo on 7 August 1959, aboard the Pacific & Orient Line ship, *The Orion*, bound for Brisbane, Australia.

My father eventually immigrated to Australia three years after my departure, and basically was never the same person. The transition, from his easy-going lifestyle in Ceylon to the rough and tumble, materialistically driven life in Australia was clearly a life altering mistake, and he was never able to make the philosophical or physiological changes necessary to live in his new country. To complicate matters even further, my father was stricken with a rare and incurable form of TB in his sixties, which took a pathetic toll on his body and his wellbeing.

With the advance of this deadly disease, together with the unfortunate misdiagnosis and mistreatment by his own doctors, his physical and mental condition rapidly deteriorated to a point where he chose to end his life and suffering. He accomplished this objective by walking into the very same ocean that he so dearly loved and knew so well, ending his own life by a self-induced drowning, on 29 July 1988, in Lucinda, Queensland, Australia. He was 75 years old. I certainly hope that it is true, for my father's sake, that a drowning man does experience some moments of bliss after he gives up the struggle to stay alive, just before he dies.

In 1997, in order to honor my father and give him the recognition he so richly deserves as a writer, I decided to embark upon a project to republish his book of short stories, *'Isle of Eden'*, by painstakingly scanning each of the 216 pages of the original book, from the only copy in existence that I know of. After several futile attempts to find a publisher to my liking that would do the book justice, as well as being side tracked by life's demands and limitations on my time having to hold down a full-time job, I gave up the search but not the dream or the original intent.

Fast-forward to March 2014, and I found myself on a journey back to the 'home of my birth', now named Sri Lanka, a full fifty-five long overdue years after the departure from the country that was then known as Ceylon. This journey back, accompanied by three of my closest cousins that I grew up with in Ceylon, took us to many of the places that I had visited previously with my father. He was a true adventurer at heart and loved to travel

Isle of Eden Revisited

to remote, and off the beaten path areas of Ceylon, in his dilapidated, rag-top, Austin A7 automobile, nicknamed 'Baby Austin' by its manufacturer, the British Austin Motor Company.

The journey back was one of the highlights of my life. It was surreal in many ways to be back in a country that I had not seen in more than half a century. It put me back in touch with my roots, and rekindled my love of this country's tropical climate, its gentle, easygoing people and its amazing tasty and unique foods. It also rekindled my original intent to republish my father's written works.

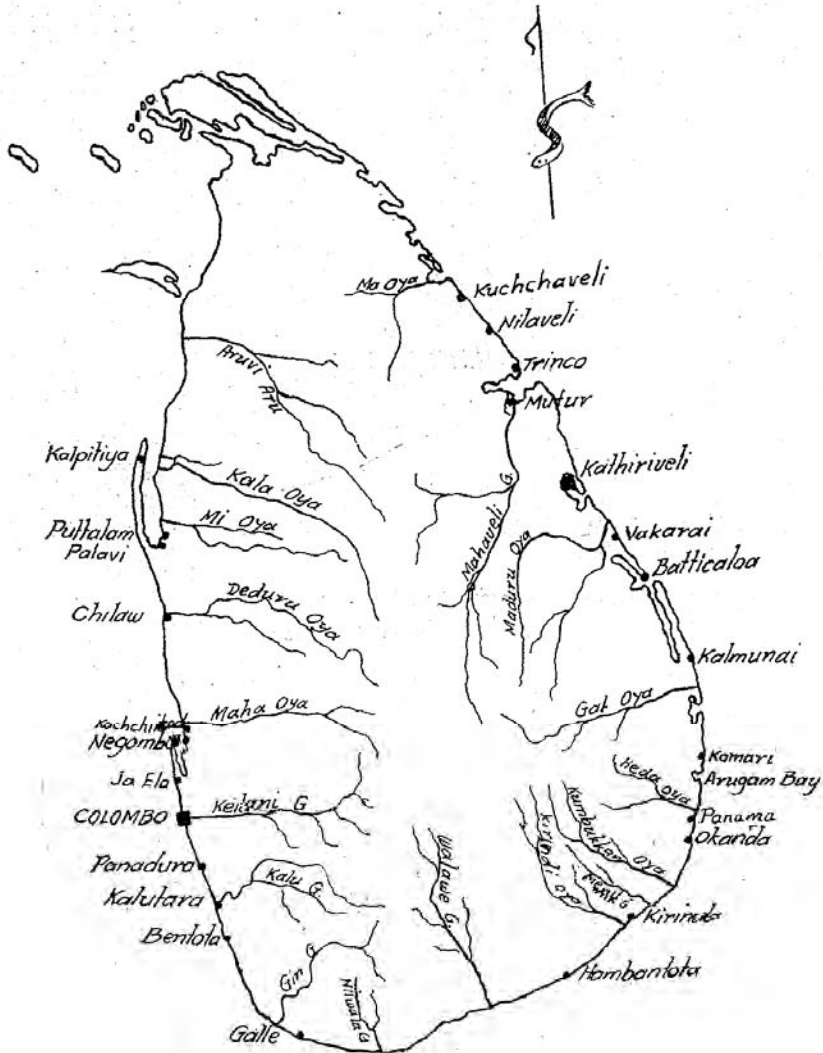
This revised and expanded edition, *'Isle of Eden Revisited'*, includes the complete original text of *'Isle of Eden'*, a short story, *'Anthony'* from his first book, *'Tales of Fish and People of the Ceylon Estuary'*, and three unpublished stories, *'The Kottang Tree'*, *'Faint Echo'*, and another novelette, *'Stranger in Paradise'*, that I discovered amongst papers carefully stored by my mother, notorious for holding onto everything!

In conclusion, I would like to thank my father for his insight and all his efforts to capture the spirit of the people of Ceylon that are the essence of the stories of this book. My father was a very special man and was a significant influence in my life, for which I am eternally grateful. My only regret is that I did not have the opportunity to get to know him more closely, unfortunately, because our time together was prematurely cut short.

Dad, wherever you are, I wish you well and hope you have found the peace of mind that you deserve — I will always love you too.

David J. Grenier,
April 7, 2017

CEYLON



J.A.R. Grenier writes with all the vigour and realism of the storytellers of old. There is salt in his veins and in his heart a strong affection for and a kindly understanding of the people of the land of his birth. He knows his heroines and heroes well. He also knows the strange, often unpredictable pattern of their lives, so deeply influenced by the manifold nuances of custom, superstition and traditions.

The people about whom he writes are just ordinary folk; fisherman, labourers, bargees, beggars and gram-vendors, washerman and peasants, any of whom one may meet anywhere in the beautiful Island.

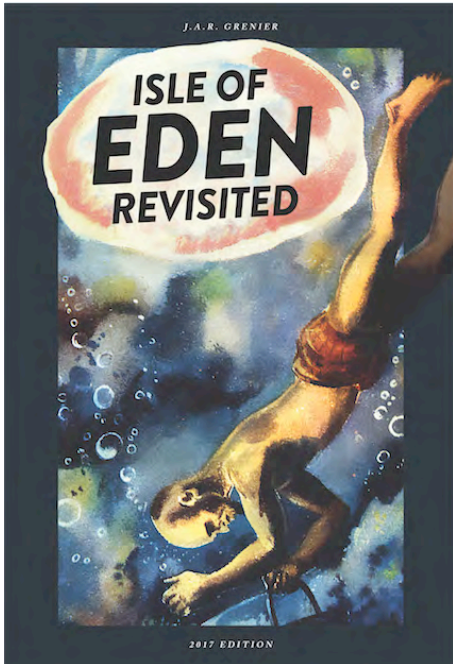
These stories are never dull or insipid. The author's characterisations are lively and full-blooded, even though, at times, they seem harsh and brutal like the lives led by those around whom he weaves his fascinating tales.

*In addition to the twenty plus short stories this book contains a novelette, *The Mani Pearl*, which recalls the colourful heyday of Ceylon's romantic and internationally famous pearl fishery in the Gulf of Mannar, to which came gay adventurers, Princes from Hindoostan, shark-binders from Malabar, divers from India, Arabia and Persia and a heterogeneous mass of humanity from all part of the Orient, to seek wealth of the sea, so dangerously garnered in a fabulous undertaking.*

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