



Eranga and Ruwani Gunawardena are a property client of Peplows. They have worked very closely with Debbie Franklin since the latter end of 2012 after seeing Debbie speak at a property investment event earlier on that year. The team at Peplows have sat down with the Gunawardena family to produce their "Client Story". The story will demonstrate their property journey and their aim of financial freedom that so many people are now seeking to escape the so called "hamster wheel lifestyle".

## ***THE GUNAWARDENA'S "Elephant Island & the Three Tadpoles"***



*From left to right: Eranga, Aanshali, Ashaana, Ruwani and Ishaanth Gunawardena.*

### **Tell me about your property journey and how it all started?**

I came to the UK from Sri Lanka, the Pearl of The Indian Ocean, to attend university, make a career in Civil Engineering and build up a decent pension pot. This is what my parents did and they instilled in me the importance of that professional employment journey. At university I met Ruwani, my wife, and whilst we were both focusing on our respective professional paths, being stuck in a hamster-wheel lifestyle we were looking for opportunities to find a way out of this.

In 2003, we both attended a property investment weekend training course, where, Gill Fielding, an accountant turned multi-millionaire property investor, was the main trainer. This was our real turning point and having been totally inspired by Gill, realising there is more to life and an opportunity to live with purpose outside the hamster-wheel, we went out and started to invest in buy to let properties. **Our property investment journey was born in Tooting, South London.**

## What is your favourite property that you own or rent and why?

We will never forget our first property that we bought after getting married in 1997. It was tough at the time as we had just started our J.O.B.s (being Just Over Broke) and didn't have the sufficient funds to purchase this property, so we joined up with Ruwani's sister's family and bought it together. A few years later we were able to take full ownership of this property by buying out their share.

**This property later provided us with the all-important equity to use as seed capital to start building our portfolio.** So we are very grateful to this little gem, our little 'golden-goose' that we still have and is still turning out a very decent monthly cash-flow.



*The Gunawardena's 1st property.*

## Debbie said I must ask you about an amazing story she heard from you at a previous event. Apparently it was titled "The Elephant Island and The 3 Tadpoles". Could you explain this please?

Oh yes, thank you. Our story about the 'Elephant Island and the Three Tadpoles' really connected with our fellow student investors with the Fielding Financial 'family'. Elephant Island being my beautiful paradise home country, Sri Lanka, where I was born and the three tadpoles being our children: Aanshali, Ishaanth and Ashaana. Everything we do right now is for them and also for our parents.

Because of Gill and Fielding Financial, together with our relentless commitment and perseverance we managed to build a reasonably healthy passive cash-flow to allow Ruwani and I to 'jump-out' of our hamster-wheels and really do what we love the most. Because of our decision to embrace this

beautiful and purposeful journey, we were even able to build a lovely home for my parents in Sri Lanka. We are also just completing a new build in South London for Ruwani's mum.



*Eranga's parents' home that they built for them on "Elephant Island"- Sri Lanka.*

We are truly grateful to Gill, Fielding Financial and the team around us, especially Debbie Franklin and Peplows for this amazing opportunity and advice along the way. Life has become so much more meaningful, thanks to the continued support, tools, guidance and the positive energy through the like-minded awesome people around us.

## What is the best piece of advice you have ever had in business?

**Work with experts. Always! Always! Always... work with experts.**

Anything in life, even property where one might think this is a 'bricks and mortar arena', it is most definitely not. It is a people's business. So, the key thing is to master the way one builds and maintains good and solid business relationships, to generate 'win-win' scenarios. Acquire and nurture people skills by always supporting others to resolve their challenges, this will in turn help you to raise your credibility, reliability and trust.

## What is the best part about developing a property portfolio?

The best part about developing a property portfolio is whilst generating a passive cash-flow to release both Ruwani and I from full time employment, we provide housing solutions to those in need. Although, we were both fortunate to work in professional environments, Ruwani in the Investment Banking industry and myself working in the Engineering field, as most of us experience, the control was with our employers and not with us.

**Time for our family and living a life with a purpose so we can follow our passion, that's what really motivates us on a daily basis.**

## How have you personally benefited from our services?

We are so fortunate to have Debbie in our team, a very experienced and an efficient Tax Accountant who has a wealth of knowledge in Property and Company Tax. The beauty of Debbie is that she is also a property investor herself.

When we did the property training particularly the Advance Property Tax that Debbie conducts, we were blown away with what is possible to mitigate the level of tax we pay. Previously, when we were on the DIY stage of doing everything relating to property including our Tax Returns etc, we didn't realise that we have been paying the Tax-Man over and above what we should have been paying. In the 2011/12 Tax Year, if we had continued the way had done our taxes, our tax bill would have been just over £8,000. **Since we joined Debbie at Peplows, our tax that year was £700, a saving of £7,300. Furthermore, she managed to help us recover some of the overpaid tax and we received two cheques from HMRC for over £3,700. So in effect, we managed to save over £11,000 in our first year of being clients of Peplows.** For us, this is a massive advantage of being associated with such experts and like-minded people.

## What has been the best investment for yourselves and why?

Our best investment was the investment we made towards our property investment education. In 2003, we did a similar introductory course to Fielding Financial but we did not pursue our training as we looked at the cost and not the value. Although we still managed to progress in property, our journey was relatively slow. When we were given the second opportunity via Fielding Financial in 2012, we jumped at it with total focus, determination and commitment. Today, Ruwani and I have gained our financial freedom. **For us, this journey was not just about knowledge, it is about the continuous, support, access to experts, tools, guidance, encouragement, inspiration, motivation and networking opportunities that made the positive change and continue to do so.** We are fortunate that we are given this amazing opportunity and most importantly we are embracing this purposeful journey with a relentless drive, positive and open-minded attitude whilst building our portfolio.

## Name one thing as a start up in your sector that you think a) they must do, and, b) is crucial to be wary of?

This answers both of your questions but also might come as a cliché. We want to stress the importance of education, training and working closely with a skilled, experienced team of professionals. It is important that one stays in control and this can only be done through the knowledge and experience you gain through consistently taking action and building your competence level and confidence. **Be the master of your niche!**



**Where do you hope to see your property portfolio in the next 10 years?**

We want to continue to grow and expand into new-builds, developments and Residential / Nursing Care Homes. A year ago we bought our first Residential Care Home and have been working on improving its care standards and efficiency. Our intention is to build on our experience and expand this service industry internationally.



*Above and below is the Gunawardenas' first care home.*



**Why would you recommend Peplows to individuals or businesses in your sector?**

**I would recommend Peplows whole-heartedly to anyone we meet. We are so impressed with the depth of their knowledge and experience, the efficiency in dealing with each and every query we put to them and the friendly and helpful manner we experience each time we call/email. Thank you.**

Debbie and her team are renowned experts in the property sector so if you want the opportunity to save thousands in tax like Eranga & Ruwani Gunawardena give Peplows a call on **01626 208802 or 01392 223930 or visit our website at [www.peplows.co.uk](http://www.peplows.co.uk).**

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