

Remembering PK

Reflections on My Friend Dr Wong Poi Kwong

By Dr N K Yong, SMA President (21st, 23rd - 25th, 28th - 29th Council)



Dr Wong Poi Kwong

PK, I find it difficult to imagine that you are no longer with us. You always seemed to me to be indestructible. I will always remember how boyish you always looked, even when I saw you before your illness you looked almost unchanged from the time when we were students, and then colleagues together in GH - thick black hair, carefully groomed, always cut in the old "short back and sides" traditional conservative style. Not for you the trendy unruly long hair. Not in keeping with your character.

When I first joined our class of 1946 in October 1946, I was a late entry, and knew no one, not having been together with all of you when you first started classes. I very quickly learnt that there was a guy from St Andrew's who had come into College with an awesome reputation - 8 A1's in the Senior Cambridge examinations. He was pointed out to me - it was you. I was most impressed.

Somehow, I never knew why or how, I found myself included in a small study group (it was very popular in those days) which included you. You were the pre-eminent scholar in our little group. We studied together, we played together, we partied together at birthday and Christmas celebrations, we went on picnics together, we sat exams together, we passed the exams and commenced our professional lives as housemen together - the seven of us, you, Joo Liang, Kim Boon, Pat, Bill Fung, Heck Sing, and myself. Sadly there are only four of us left now - tempus fugit.

Throughout our six-year course, the one quality of yours that sticks most in my memory is your quiet imperturbability even in the face of all those horrible examinations they threw at us. You never seemed fazed, always calm, composed, confident. Everything seemed OK to you. If there was one of our class, absolutely certain to graduate, it was you.

Life as housemen and medical officers was tough, we worked almost interminable hours. There was not much time to see each other socially, but we worked in the same hospital so we often met as

colleagues and of course there were still the birthday and Christmas parties of our group. You went into internal medicine, I into surgery. You were fascinated by Gordon Ransome and his neurological magic. I was but to a lesser extent. You preferred more intellectual challenges, I preferred working with my hands.

After completion of our training and our specialist qualifications we both joined the University of Malaya, as it was in those days. You were of course with Medical Unit I, Ransome's Unit, I was in Surgical 'A', the Professorial Unit. We both moved up the academic ladder almost at the same pace, and then you moved into the more elevated position of Dean of Medicine. In the meantime I had gone to Kuala Lumpur to the new Faculty of Medicine at the University of Malaysia.

You were a good and valued friend, a good man, a devout Christian, a decent, honest professional, a dedicated teacher and leader, and a wholly dependable colleague. Your life revolved around your

work, your family and your faith, in which you never wavered. We were always

aware of your deeply-held faith, but you never imposed nor even attempted to impose your religion or morality on us. You were just one of us, a band of young men and women, who started off together in medicine with just one objective - to graduate and become decent honest doctors.

I like to think that what we shared together during our time together as students was rather like the kind of friendship that good childhood friends share - with the innocence and absence of guile of children. The innocence may have long gone, but the shared memories of that treasured friendship and comradeship remain and remind us of a long gone age of innocence whose passing was inevitable but diminishes us. The sadness was that we did not recognize it at the time.

God bless, PK, and thank you for being yourself, and for your friendship and your example. ■

DR WONG POI KWONG, 17 MARCH 1925 - 27 APRIL 2001

His citation for the Public Service Star 2000 and a full list of milestones can be found with this article at http://www.sma.org.sg/sma_news/newscurrent.html

EDUCATION: St. Andrew's School 1931-1940; King Edward VII College of Medicine, University of Malaya 1946-1952. Post-graduate training in Neurology, London, Scandinavia & USA 1959-1961; Member (1960) & Fellow (1970), Royal College of Physicians, Lond & Edin.

AWARDS: Queen's Fellowship 1959-1961; Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques, France 1975; Public Service Star 2000, Singapore.

EMPLOYMENT: Ministry of Health 1952-1957; Consultant Physician SGH 1963-1992; Director, Manpower & Training MOH 1985-1989; University of Singapore 1957-2001 (from 1977-85 as Professor of Medicine); Health Answers, Medical Director, 1999-2001

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS HELD: Head, Dept of Medicine 1971-1985; Sub-Dean, Faculty of Medicine 1966-1967; Dean, Faculty of Medicine 1971-1980; Member of Senate (NUS) 1971-1985.

MEMBERSHIP OF VARIOUS BODIES (Academic, Professional & Others) INCLUDING: Singapore Medical Council (Chairman, PPC [disciplinary]); Board of Postgraduate Medical Studies, NUS; Personnel Comm., St. Luke's Hospital for the Elderly National Ethics Comm.; Founder Member, Varsity Christian Fellowship; Trustee, Mistri Fund for Neurological Research; Trustee & Elder, Christian Assembly; Solemnizer & Deputy Registrar of Marriages; Chairman, Management Comm., Brain Research Fund; Chairman, Chapter of Physicians, Academy of Medicine; Chairman, Board of Consultants, National Kidney Foundation; Chairman, Computer Comm., SMA; President, Association of Informatics for Medicine, Singapore.

The President and the SMA Council send their condolences to Dr Wong's wife, Siew Geok, and his three daughters, Celina, Angelina and Helena, of whom the eldest and youngest are medical doctors.