

My Portrait Tributes to some of the Teachers I admired

by ND Amerasekera

These Portraits were drawn from old photos obtained from the internet. Some of them were not of the best quality, were in black and white and others when our teachers were much younger or older than when we had them as our tutors. My sincere apologies if any of the portraits are not a true likeness of these great men.

Our teachers in the faculty bubble were our icons. We feared and respected them in equal measure. To make portraits of them now, even after all those years is a daunting task. The photos I have of them are ancient, grainy and in black and white. To draw portraits in colour from them makes the task much harder. They were faces so well known to us and still are. I have made every attempt to make it as close as possible to the real thing. As I am a novice I'm sure you will have the good grace to forgive those glaring omissions and inaccuracies. My enormous respect for them remains unchanged. As I worked on portraits I have often wondered what my subjects would have thought of my efforts. I sincerely hope this wouldn't disturb their well-earned repose and rest.

Prof G.H Cooray



In the Faculty of Medicine in Colombo and in Ceylon he was the *Voice of Pathology*. His educational contribution was immense. As a lecturer, his laid back but precise delivery was matchless. He spoke perfect English, taught us diligently and to the best of his ability. I can still recall in great detail the first time I sat in the lecture theatre to listen to Prof Cooray. His masterly introduction to the pathology of inflammation has remained with me ever since. Those classical signs of inflammation, Rubor, Calor, Tumor, Dolor and Functio laesa have now been permanently imprinted in my brain. The Prof, with his formidable intellect, had this remarkable ability to deliver facts in a logical sequence and transport his audience to the complex world of pathology. After a career in medicine spanning 40 years I can say, unequivocally, he is the finest teacher I have ever had. His success as a teacher earned him a huge following of many generations of grateful students. Prof. Gerald Henry Cooray passed away in 1970 at the age of 62.

Dr P.R Anthonis



When I think of the surgeons that taught me the name that comes across in flashing lights, above everyone else, is Dr PR Anthonis. He was not only a fine surgeon, excellent tutor, a fine raconteur, he was a phenomenon. PRA was a mentor to many. His ward classes were pure theatre. He knew the art of getting a message across to the students. Although calm and placid he never tolerated nonsense. He was firm when it was necessary. PRA was always courteous to his patients, his students and the nursing staff. His natural curiosity led him to make fine observations. He tried his best to pass on this superb skill to his students. After an illustrious career in the Health Service Dr Anthonis retired in 1971. He worked in the private sector well into his 80's. He was a devout Buddhist and passed away at the age of 99.

Prof K Rajasuriya



Prof Rajasuriya dressed immaculately. His gait was measured as was his speech. He was fearless and forthright and had controversial views about nationalism and religion. But in his capacity as the Professor of Medicine, he was fair and unbiased. In those days we accepted the idiosyncrasies of our teachers with good grace, assuming their intentions were honourable. The culture of bullying that was prevalent in the faculty was also present in British hospitals. This was also our salad days of youthful paranoia. When Professor Rajasuriya passed away in 1975 we lost a dedicated teacher and a fine clinician. I personally would like to thank him for the part he played in my medical education. I take the cue from the title of the 1996 song by that English Rock Band - Oasis – *Don't look back in anger*.

Prof. N.D.W Lionel



How on earth can anyone make Pharmacology interesting? It is a mass of information to be memorised. This unenviable but important task fell on Dr Lionel, as he was known then. He was a fine lecturer and a friendly person in that tough milieu of medical education of our time. He was well known nationally and internationally. Prof Lionel will be best remembered for his clinical research, contributions to the National Formulary Committee and the State Pharmaceutical Corporation. I came to know him more closely while working in the Central Blood Bank in Colombo and my professional career was at an impasse. He was helpful, down to earth and a fine mentor. Prof Lionel passed away age 56. Perhaps there is some truth in the old saying “only the good die young”.

Prof H.V.J Fernando



After a brilliant career at Royal College he entered the Ceylon Medical College in 1937. Subsequently, he qualified in Forensic Pathology in London gaining his MD and also becoming a Barrister at Lincoln's Inn. He became the Professor of Forensic Medicine in 1959 and retired in 1984. His lectures were comprehensive didactic and at times monotonous and soporific. Away from the faculty bubble, he was a live wire being president of the prestigious Sinhalese Sports Club, the other past presidents being D.S Senanayake and Sir John Kotelawela. Medical students of my era will remember him sing a duet of the famous song about the "Officers daughter who hanged and died" with Dr WDL Fernando at the Health Department Sports Club at Castle Street. They both received a rapturous ovation. That is a memory I will never forget although the forensic medicine I learnt never survived beyond the viva voce examination.

Dr M.O.R Medonza



I remember our 2 month appointment with Dr Medonza very well. At its completion, he called us to his house for dinner and drinks. There he treated us as equals. He taught us the basics of clinical medicine with his characteristic wit and humour. After graduating in medicine with first-class honours he trained as an Army medical specialist. At the end of his military duties, he was awarded the Defence Medal, the War Medal and the Burma Star. Being a well-known and popular medical specialist Dr Medonza enjoyed a lucrative private practice. He had many interests outside medicine. He played cricket for the Ceylon Medical College and also played billiards and bridge. He had a deep and lasting interest in Buddhist philosophy. Dr Medonza enjoyed a rewarding professional career and lived a full life. He passed away in 1991.

Prof F.L.W Jayawardene



FLWJ was a fine product of Royal College Colombo. He was the Senior Lecturer when we were in the Block and became its Professor from 1968-75. He cuts a relaxed figure and was then known as Dr Lester Jayawadene. What I recall most of all is his extraordinary polished presence. He was the quintessential Englishman, dignified and courteous who treated the students with respect. Dr FLWJ was a wonderful teacher who was more interested in teaching us the basic anatomy than the small print. His masterful lectures on the anatomy of the middle and inner ear and the difficult 3-D concepts of embryology were all-time classics. Although he expected high standards and stood no nonsense Dr FLWJ was always kind and charming and put us at ease at the signatures and revisals. He did get the best out of us. Dr FLWJ arrived every morning in his black Peugeot 403, which was like a Rolls Royce, in those days of import restrictions. He was one of the few on the teaching staff who was vehemently against the student rag which we recognise now as a curse that gave a free ride to psychopaths. I hold him in high esteem and remember Prof. F.L.W Jayawardene with great affection. May he find eternal peace.

Prof S.S Panditharatne



He had his early education at Ananda College and qualified MBBS in 1959. After obtaining his PhD from Manchester in 1967 he returned to the department of Anatomy. SSP became the Professor in 1976 and remained so for 22 years. Due to the passage of years I do not recall much about him except he loved the minutiae in anatomy. We were a petrified motley group seated around him at his signatures. When we didn't know the answers we visibly squirmed in our seats. Once SSP asked a hapless student how wide is the common bile duct and he showed with his thumb and index finger saying "this much". SSP blew a fuse. S.S.P was a chain smoker and enjoyed a fag during the tough questioning. He was a brilliant anatomist. As a lecturer during our time in the Block he was thorough and taught us well. It is my impression that he was rather strict and preferred to maintain a healthy distance from the students. I remember once he was informed that one of our batchmates had taken a person who was not a medical student into the dissecting rooms. He was livid. SSP told us, in no uncertain terms, that it was sacrilege to entertain non-medics in the dissecting rooms. He stressed we must preserve the sanctity and the intrigue of the place while respecting the dead. The advice was well taken. I thank him for his years of excellent service to several generations of medical students. His brand of detailed anatomy helped me enormously in my years in Radiology. The Anatomy Museum in the Colombo faculty is named after Prof Panditharatne for his long years of dedication to anatomy and service to the faculty. He passed away in 2005. May he find the Ultimate Bliss of Nirvana.

Prof A.C.E Koch



He was educated at Royal College Colombo. Prof. Arthur Cecil Elsley Koch was the first Ceylonese Professor of Physiology. He was appointed to the Chair in Physiology in 1952 and held this post until his retirement in 1968. There is now an annual oration in his memory to remember his contribution to the life of the faculty. He was a kind Tutor in that repressive environment of medical education of the 1960's. I still remember his regal entrance to the lecture theatre every morning. His lectures went way above my head but that is perhaps personal. There are many who consider him a great teacher. What has stuck with me over the years has been his introduction to the concept of 'milieu intérieur' and Claude Bernard. Overnight my friend Bernard Randeniya came to be called Claude Bernard forevermore until his untimely demise in 2004. Prof Koch had a wonderful sense of humour and the jokes received a stamping on the wooden floor, which he duly acknowledged. His treatment of students gave us confidence. It was inspiring and empowering and dispelled our insecurities.

What has stuck in my mind is his association with Sir Roger Bannister and his '4 minute' mile during his stint at Oxford University which he elaborated with great pride and illustrated the events with some fine photographs. He made physiology a friendly phenomenon for which he will be fondly remembered. Prof Koch sadly was unable to enjoy a long retirement which he richly deserved and passed away in 1969. May his Soul Rest in Peace.

Prof Carlo Fonseka



He had his schooling at Maris Stella College Negombo and St Joseph's College Colombo. During our time in the faculty he was a Senior Lecturer and was the Professor of physiology from 1982-89. He was an entertaining speaker, a fine teacher and had the wonderful ability to make physiology logical and interesting. Throughout our student days he remained a friendly face and helpful to all. The Prof remained a mentor and a confidante to many. I consider him one of the best teachers we've had. Prof Carlo was an active member of the LSSP and also in the Rationalist Movement. He gained an even bigger profile with his stance on firewalking that received critical acclaim. This demonstrated his obsession with rationalism and the truth, disproving the accepted wisdom. Artfully argumentative, he was a regular combative writer to the national newspapers. His excursions into the news media received a mixed reception. Sometimes his views were inconsistent with his political leanings and long-held beliefs. Prof Carlo and I have disagreed openly in the newspapers about the way private practice is carried out in Sri Lanka, way back in the 1980's. He found no fault in the way private practice was conducted and supervised quite in contrast to the public perception and opinion. This was a fateful moment for socialism. It is true only a small minority of medical specialists reneged on their responsibilities. Professional loyalties can get in the way of the rights of patients. As for me, the hurt was closer to home as the patient in question was my father. Although the exchanges were frosty this in no way diminishes the high esteem and regard I have for him. Disagreement is healthy as long as it doesn't lead to blows!! In Sri Lanka, he remained a celebrity feted and feasted by many. Prof Carlo Fonseka had a long and honourable life of wonderful service to humanity. May he find eternal peace.

Prof A.A Hoover



In 1941 Dr A A Hoover was elected the first Secretary of the Chemical Society of Ceylon and the President of the Institute of Chemistry in 1949. He was appointed Professor of Biochemistry at the Faculty of Medicine in Colombo in 1958. Prof Hoover was the most unassuming Professor of our time. Short and gently spoken, he could be mistaken for a softie, but he had considerable steel. He had no airs, only graces. His lectures were delivered with meticulous precision but with great gentleness. Biochemistry was not a subject that generated enormous passion but we had to get through. Much of it has now gone down the pan except the headlines – Krebs Cycle and the essential amino acids!! Our text, Bell, Davidson and Scarborough was a great door stopper. His son was in my class at school. He was an isotope of the father, gentle, generous and soft-spoken. He proceeded to an honours degree in chemistry. In 1978 Prof Hoover became the first Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Jaffna and also the Head of its Department of Biochemistry. Many remember the amiable Prof Hoover with great passion and esteem. May his Soul Rest in Peace.

Prof M.J Waas



After schooling at St Joseph's College Colombo he qualified LMS in 1940 and joined the Dept of Anatomy in 1946. He obtained his PhD from the University of Manchester in 1951 and was the Prof of Anatomy at the Faculty of Medicine in Colombo 1960-67. Although anatomy is a broad subject with an extensive syllabus he had a light-hearted attitude to teaching the subject. My abiding memory of the Prof is being in the amphitheatre of the old anatomy lecture theatre listening to his superb delivery lavished with hilarious anecdotes. He was such a colourful character. Many remember him for his own brand of humour and mischievous fun. He is often rightly described as a lovable person. Prof Waas was indeed a breath of fresh air in that rather toxic environment. Like many medics of my era I associate him with that famous joke – He asked at an examination "what goes through the foramen magnum" and Jegasothy replied –"food, Sir". Prof Waas then quipped "in your case it must be gallons and gallons of booze". Fact or fiction this has entered the folklore of our great institution.