

30th November 2010, 9.00 p.m.

Distinguished guests, I am particularly glad to see all the invitees this evening and I would like to offer a wholehearted, loyal and respectful welcome to everyone. Personally for me it is a great pleasure and an honour to be at Royal Mall with all of you. In fact after inviting you for this memorable occasion, I waited with an eager anticipation to see you before I leave the MEU. At the present moment, I feel the liveliest satisfaction as my mind goes back to never-to-be forgotten days of the MEU.

I hope you will agree with me if I say my recollections and reminiscences are sufficiently vivid and dynamic for me to talk for 3 or 4 hours. But I do not propose to dwell on many things and detain you for a long time. I feel my reminiscences should be actually in a form of a book. I consider it has been a great privilege to associate all my guests who graced this occasion this evening intimately and uninterruptedly for a long period of time.

Before I proceed, I feel it is our incumbent duty to remember the late lamented friend of the MEU, Prof. Pep Jayasena who was instrumental in pushing the establishment of the MEU from Colombo as the Registrar of all universities. He laid the foundation stone sent from Peradeniya very strong and deep wishing its existence till the sun and moon last. The MEU certainly owes a mighty debt to him. I wish to express my grief on his death again and to reminisce his beneficent administration of the Unit as one of the past Directors and let us burn to his memory the incense of remembrance and deep appreciation. I cannot forget affable Prof. Pep Jayasena so I invited Dr. Lali Jayasena as one of my guests this evening.

Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya

At the very outset I must thank Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya our Dean for coming and gracing this occasion. Dr. Buthpitiya successfully secured the 2nd contractual term for me. Dr. Buthpitiya managed to convince the university authorities regarding this extension and as per the university regulations Kosa as the Director and SAM as one of the Clinical Co-ordinators were impelled to play the role as my fiduciaries during the past eleven months.

I know Dr. Buthpitiya from his student days and he is a personality with great ability and a breadth of vision. We appreciate the untiring zeal and unflagging energy that you had displayed in promoting certain things and putting the faculty back on track and back in the university map. You had made certain sacrifices to this cause. Your creed (*a set of principles*) is well known and it has borne ample fruit and your vigour has increased from month to month. A personality who is ahead of the times was never shaken and faced anything with equanimity. He is a true Peradeniya product at heart, warm and ever loyal personality, an individual of impeccable integrity, brilliant mind, has an unabated attachment to educational principles and a person who loves his Faculty. Thank you again Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya for accepting my invitation and coming to Royal Mall this evening.

Dr. Lakshman Karals

I would have left the MEU much earlier and this gathering would not have been a reality if not for warm hearted Dr. Lakshman Karals. He came to my rescue when I officially retired after reaching 60 years. This was after Professor Nimal Senanayake's rescue act in 1983. Dr. Karals provided me his own house to stay comfortably in Kandy after November 2009. I owe a debt of gratitude to him and I e.mailed him expressing that this was a magnificent gesture of magnanimity. The right royal reply came by return e.mail from Dr. Karals saying that there is nothing called magnanimity and this was only humanity. Yes, Dr. Karals I very well understand, this was "*nobless oblige*". I know that he is blessed with a generous heart. After coming back home this time, Dr. Karals has assumed the fiduciary role and extended my stay in Kandy expressing that I should engage in something worthwhile.

I had a very long cordial association with him. Always helpful giving valuable advice. I can still remember how he took me to Peradeniya hospital when I had a fracture in the foot and placed my foot in plaster. He attended from A to Z in the hospital and sent me out with USK.

Although he was heading the 1st ever academic department created in Anaesthesiology in the Sri Lankan university system, he had a penchant for

medical Education and published articles in two leading Medical Education journals. I gathered from reliable sources that he would stay back for a teaching and research spell at Peradeniya in spite of his King's College assignment being extended by three more years. This gesture and your loyalty to the Faculty is highly appreciated Dr. Karals. The credit should go to Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya our Dean for his efforts.

We used to talk about his ready deadpan humour and enjoy. There were many instances but there is hardly any time to relate them now.

I always appreciate his ripe culture, fair judgement, high character and the spirit. I salute you Dr. Karals with utmost respect for everything you had done for me over the years.

Prof. Varagunam, my dear Sir, may I be permitted to recall to your recollection that I joined the MEU owing to fortuitous circumstance. That was purely by chance. I was in Physiology and Mr. Nicholas who had previously agreed to come had repudiated and finally Prof. Varagunam came to Physiology to see what was happening. Prof. Basnayake informed Prof. Varagunam that Mr. Nicholas was not coming but indicated to him that he can release me in place of Mr. Nicholas. Prof. Varagunam at once agreed and asked me whether I would like to join the MEU. I said YES over the counter. I had not seen Prof. Varagunam before, but the picture painted in my mind about him by the Physiology staff was a very pleasant one. This was the watershed moment in my life and now I feel that this was an open sesame for my long journey in the MEU. I was an insignificant and wholly inexperienced creature at that time and gradually began to get the hang of things and it took time for me to adjust to the prevailing demands. After some time the sailing was very smooth engaging in multifarious duties with a spirited team of medical educationists. After a couple of months, in addition to our own staff members and staff associates I made acquaintance with Prof. Nimal Senanayake, the priceless asset of the Faculty of Medicine, which was subsequently developed into a brotherly love.

Since I first joined the Unit, it has been a long journey, with its share of ups and downs, pleasures and pains, happiness and sorrow, laughter and tears. My wife says that the MEU is my first home. I always say no. On certain occasions I had to argue with her to disprove her statement. Prof. Varagunam, Sir, now you have to adduce proof and protect me. Looking back, I consider it has been a great pleasure and privilege of my life to work under academics with meticulous and scrupulous scholarship. I came across remarkable personalities and great intellectuals.

I had a bad habit of coming early to work and going home late after work. In Sri Lankan standards this is not acceptable and it is considered as a sin. Now Sir, I urge you to absolve me from this cardinal sin committed by me on the date of my retirement and please request the King Yama to transfer the file maintained in the Hell to the kingdom of Heaven.

I have worked according to my lights and according to my conscience and the conscience was never pricked. I was fully aware and alive to the duties and responsibilities appertaining to the position. I do not remember ever having intentionally neglected my duties to the institution or individuals. At the same time I was quite sure of the goodwill and sympathy of my superiors and colleagues in the performance of the tasks before me. I firmly believe, one must be loyal to one's own soul and more imperatively loyal to the place of work. I may not be ambitious, but my weakness is the habit of reconciling anything to my fate or karma.

I have never ever evinced my desire to possess and exercise some privileges that I have enjoyed during my attachment to the MEU. Everything was spontaneous and I consider myself lucky that way.

I was by nature blind to the faults of others and at the same time I did not for a moment objected to the wishes of my colleagues. I believe each individual is entitled to hold his or her views just as much as any other. I just listened to other people's views and did not like to get into arguments. Some would have thought that Udurawana is running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

I continued throughout my stay to enjoy the confidence of my superiors in the MEU and the faculty at large. For the much loyal help throughout, I thankfully and with sincere pleasure acknowledge it now. I am very happy that I had untrammelled freedom to work and I was never cold shouldered. MEU gave me the golden opportunity to develop great virtues such as patience, loyalty, trust and to a certain extent altruism also.

For the past 38 years I have never heard our staff members expressing disparaging remarks hurting anyone. They never traduced others. Throughout my stay in the MEU *esprit de corp* was prevailed.

I was fortunate to see with delight the perfect concord prevailed among the MEU staff and other staff members and I trust it has been a good omen for all the successful MEU activities.

One name that swims into my consciousness now is Dr. E. P. Fernando who was our staff associate, used to tell us very often that we must be free of hatred, anger and jealousy and should be radiating loving kindness to all at the point of our death. I did not agree with him. We must be free of all these evils at all times. In passing, I would like to say that I remember Vajira used to talk to me at length about the noble quality “Muditha”. I learnt about muditha from my late mother-in-law sometime back and more recently from Dr. Lakshman Karals.

I can vividly remember how Prof. Varagunam, Prof. Raja Bandaranayake, Dr. Palitha Abeykoon, Dr. Jayawicks, Dr. Gamini Premadasa, Prof. Pep Jayasena and Dr. Susil Gunasekera coalesced to form a majestic team to carry out activities of the Medical Education Unit during the good old days.

I had to serve under 10 directors including Kosa during my attachment to the MEU and they all were cultured, enterprising and progressive in character and they were all great personalities, for all the fine qualities of them, but I feel endearing is the most fitting adjective for it. I was lucky to see immense strides of progress the MEU has made in every direction.

Administration of the affairs of the Unit was well and wisely conducted by the aid of all staff members. Due regard has always been given to the requirements of the Unit and its staff. All have been unfailingly courteous to me and there were no insuperable barriers and insuperable objections to carry out day-to-day activities. I am very lucky and richly blessed to have met them in my life and I thank them for providing a fertile environment to work. I can expressly say that the unity and harmony were our strength. I used to work on trust and I have always honoured the trust reposed in me. At this juncture I wish to state that they never wished to see us facing difficult pecuniary circumstances also.

I wish to place on record that all the past directors even after leaving the MEU preserved the most steadfast loyalty. Now I cannot refrain from talking about each of the nine past directors, present director and my special guests which is my most agreeable and bounden duty too.

I wish to touch very briefly upon them like an attractive mini skirt of a young girl but long enough to cover the important areas. I am sure you must have heard about this mini skirt story. I will proceed with your permission.

Prof. Varagunam

When you consider the long line of Directors, first or foremost is our pioneer and the first director who blazed the trail in Medical Education in this country. I consider it has been a great privilege to start work under the avuncular eye of Prof. Varagunam who is one of the all time greats in the Faculty of Medicine. Sir, you have illuminated and fertilized the academic programmes in the Faculty and training activities in the MEU after returning from your sojourn in the States and you occupy a very conspicuous place in the annals of the development of medical education in this country. Prof. Varagunam moulded the soul of the MEU and gave it the muscle during the formative years. Sir, you rallied round the progressive and democratic academics and marshaled them under MEU banner and kept the MEU portals open for any staff member to join the battalion of staff associates. Sir, you brought about many changes to the faculty academic programme and especially improved the educational process.

Two of the major favourable things you had done to the faculty are the establishment of the MEU and bringing under your wings the golden boy and most illustrious son of the Faculty Prof. Nimal Senanayake.

It comes to my mind that when I was in Sydney on a private visit, Prof. Raja Bandaranayake telephoned me to say that he was planning to take us to number of places in Sydney. During that time Prof. Varagunam happened to be in Sydney. I told him my first priority is to go and see Prof. Varagunam and have a meal with him. This is mainly because of my unshaken loyalty to Prof. Varagunam. Even after retirement, he used to visit me very regularly for nearly 20 years and that increased my affection to him beyond measure. His legend will last as long as the MEU exists. Prof. Varagunam should be happy to see the emergence of a dedicated new breed of medical educationists in the country and also should be happy to see the recrudescence of interest for medical education among medical school teachers in the last decade.

Sir, I hope my standing order which activates in the English summer for a lip balm and a chocolate will be there forever.

Dr. Palitha Abeykoon

After Prof. Varagunam left the Faculty, Dr. Palitha Abeykoon took over the reigns. My dear Dr. Abeykoon, you saw the world first and showed that world to me also. I really enjoyed working with Dr. Abeykoon. Dr. Abeykoon was appointed Chief of Staff after his postgraduate studies and one year later Brigadier Jayawicks joined him. Then MEU programmes were in full swing. Workshop after workshop. AMP programme too ran in parallel.

I was fascinated with Dr. Abeykoon's style of English writing. Writing with straight forward felicity and I had the opportunity of seeing cautiously polite letters in innumerable occasions. I used to appreciate his lucid writings and saw letters and reports couched in impeccable English language. You do not have to read Edward Gibbon to learn English if you go through Dr. Abeykoon's writings. He helped me to improve my rudimentary English. I learnt some grammar from him. I can to-date remember that he was telling that there was a thing called split infinitive. Dr. Abeykoon is a dispassionate and humble observer of things. Very early in my life, I personally lost two stalwarts in the MEU i.e. Dr. Abeykoon and Dr. Jayawicks. To me, they were bright lights I can say Dr. Abeykoon was aurora borealis and Dr. Jayawicks was aurora australis. I know that they are purely visionary but they gave light to my life.

I learnt from Dr. Abeykoon about flexibility, focus and diplomacy that is required when dealing with staff members and when building strong relationships with all the Departments of Study. This duo, Dr. Abeykoon and Dr. Jayawicks took a major share in lifting the MEU to a new level of respect among other centres in the region and world at large. I can very well remember in the period adverted above, the MEU became a hive of activities and its fame had spread far and wide, paving the way for entering into a very healthy competition with the other medical education centres in the region and attracted more and more international trainees bringing a lot of money to the Faculty. The other significant thing I can remember is that we were emerging from Bandaranaike austerity too.

Dr. Abeykoon was a Medical Educator with easy humour and essential patience left MEU handing over the reigns to Dr. Jayawicks. After leaving the MEU Dr. Abeykoon continued to show the unfettered loyalty to the MEU and from which the MEU had derived inestimable benefits.

It is impossible to essay the worth of this early star of Medical Education in a brief reference like this but I venture to say that you have a very warm place in my heart and I now quietly move on to Dr. Jayawicks.

Dr. P. T. Jayawickramarajah

Then Dr. Jayawicks took over from Dr. Abeykoon. My relationship with him was extremely cordial. He is a personality gifted with a large heart, and he has an indomitable resolution to help others as far as he could. Very often, he used to say that his heart is in the MEU. He took a deep interest about our general welfare. Dr. Jayawicks watched my progress very closely and guided me always.

I got VIP treatments whenever I visited Dr. Abeykoon or Dr. Jayawicks. I am sorry I missed the opportunity of visiting Dr. Jayawicks in Bangkok and travel in the WHO big boss's vehicle with a flag. Instead I went in a rickshaw with Dr. Jayawicks round New Delhi Red Fort.

I remember once Dean asked me to undertake a certain job on Saturdays without emoluments. It was not my practice to cavil for money. I just attended to the tasks. He came to know that I was working without overtime. He carried the matter to the Dean and registered his strong protest. The protest met with immediate success. This was Dr. Jayawicks.

Dr. Jayawicks left the MEU to kindle the light of medical education in a West Asian medical school and gained a reputation for hard and productive work. He is an academic who has a profound faith in what he is doing and easygoing personality with modesty running through his veins.

Dr. Abeykoon and Dr. Jayawicks were keen attending Octogenarian Prof. Varagunam's birthday celebrations at Rajapihilla Terrace this year. Prof. Varagunam could not come and I informed Dr. Jayawicks that he would not be in the paradise to celebrate his eightieth birth day as planned. Dr. Jayawicks was a bit upset and told me in a sad tone "then it is paradise lost". Dr. Jayawicks, please do not worry, Prof. Varagunam says the octogenarian period is from 80 – 89 years and there is plenty of time to celebrate.

Dr. Gamini Premadasa

Dr. Gamini Premadasa was a valued Matale school acquaintance of mine. Dr. Premadasa was a very resourceful personality. For number of years he held the stage with seniors and he had a very good spell before leaving the country. Dr. Premadasa was drafted to MEU on time and he had to carry out MEU activities and AMP Programme work almost single handed but he loved his work engaging in the activities splendidly. At that time the new broom swept well.

Prof. Pep Jayasena - At the very beginning I remembered him.

Prof. Sarath Edirisinghe

There was an interregnum period. Professor Sarath Edirisinghe, then one of the most meticulous, methodical and organized academics, was assigned to look after the interests of the MEU. He made a great effort to salvage the position of the MEU. He was the link between the first generation of Directors and the second generation of Directors. He always supported the MEU activities and even after retirement he continues to undertake activities of the MEU mainly because of his burning enthusiasm for medical education. Special thing with him is whenever we requested him to help MEU or the new Curriculum he accepts it with an appreciative, engaging and a significant smile. My recollection is very faint. I cannot call to mind how long this disciplined academic with a lissome figure served in this capacity taking the MEU through a pivotal phase. If you visit the MEU, you can witness Prof. Ediri's photograph gracing in the lobby, looking at the past directors and still keeping guard. On behalf of the past Directors, the present Director, Staff Associates and the non academic staff members, I salute you Prof. Ediri in gratitude for the high endeavour and deep and abiding loyalty to the MEU.

Dr. Ranil Abeyasinghe

Now I am coming to the second generation of directors. I wish to bring to Your remembrance that some staff members demanded the closure of the MEU giving various reasons which did not gain currency. The cry was laid to rest by Dr. Ranil Abeyasinghe and Dr. Nimal Kasturiaratchi. Idea current was to abolish the MEU as there may have been problems that were just crying for solutions. I remember we had to gird our loins and fight.

At a time when foundations of the MEU were shaking, Dr. Abey was offered the directorship and he realizing the importance of salvation of the MEU came forward and took over the reigns. He gave a new impulse to the MEU activities and consolidated all the forces with the help of Dr. Kasturi. He gave the MEU an extensive and fresh lease of life and vigour by re-activating and revitalizing all the activities. It was a pleasure working with Dr. Abey. He handled the activities of the MEU with Dr. Kasturi and the AMP Programme with Prof. Ana.

He has been a vital cog in the MEU wheel and also one of the staunchest pillars.

I used to talk with Dr. Abey on innumerable occasions on various matters. He advised me on different occasions in unambiguous and unmistakable terms that “never attempt to accomplish impossible”, “obey the spirit not the letter of the law” and “you must always be precise, specific and objective” when carrying out different different tasks. Yes Dr. Abey, with due deference I followed your hallowed advice and I did not deviate from a hair’s breadth until today.

I thank you for the words of advice and I took them in true earnestness and in the hope that it would benefit me

He always talked to me about work ethics, spirit and value added vision to a place of work. Dr. Abey continues to-date as one of the staunchest pillars and the lynch pin of the MEU.

Dr. Nimal Kasturiaratchi

Dr. Abey completed his term and handed over the reigns to his close colleague Dr. Kasturi and Dr. Abey’s baton change with Dr. Kasturi was magnificent. Dr. Kasturi went ahead enlarging the activities of the MEU initiating so many projects. Dr. Kasturi is a great and real Sociologist who was always concerned about our welfare. He was a great source of strength to us. He brought not inconsiderable sum of money to the faculty on numerous occasions after undertaking various types of projects.

MEU rose with renewed splendour during his tenure successfully celebrating the Silver Jubilee in 1998 and doing spade work to send a team of academics to Adelaide University. Of course, Dr. Palitha Abeykoon was behind the scene taking painstaking efforts to make these events success.

At this moment, I must remember with gratitude Dr. Neil Halpe also for his splendid work during the silver jubilee celebrations.

I enjoyed in the fullest measure, Dr. Kasturi’s keen sense of humour and wisecracks. He several times told me that it is simple to make acquaintances but much more difficult to arrive at a deeper knowledge of another individual. Dr. Karals went further and wrote to me from London saying that you may not be able to understand or trust some people but do not fail to love them.

Dr. Kasturi had a good habit of keeping us informed in advance about all the things he plans to undertake. He comes in the morning with so many progressive ideas. One morning he came and put his bag on the table and directed a leading question to me. “ . This was a very easy question. I supported the suggestion with all my heart and soul and I told him, “yes, why not”, only thing is that you have to convince her to join.

I felt more than usual respect for your choice and selection as I knew Kosa very well and we have admired and watched her progress from close quarters.

I fully concurred with Dr. Kasturi at that moment, and Kosa later joined and conquered the Medical Education Unit. Dr. Kasturi you should be happy that your judgement is perfectly justified.

She started her onward march towards a position of academic self respect as soon as Dr. Nimmi Athuraliya completed her tenure. She presently enjoys a commanding position.

Dr. Kasturi is a sincere upholder of principles. He had a deeper understanding of us. His mind was always full of affection and concern about our welfare. Personally, Dr. Kasturi, to me your resignation was one of infinite loss and loneliness and it happened to bear heavily on me and I was determined not to repine against the nature of things. I know Dr. Kasturi, your devotion to us knew no bounds.

Prof. Ananda Wijekoon

Next is Prof. Ana. He is a colourful personality in the Faculty. I remember, during those unregenerate days the faculty lost unexampled opportunities to bring innovation to the academic programme. The faculty was biding time in patience and the progress of change was comparatively and painfully slow and intermittent in 1980s and 1990s. We saw no quickening of its snail-like progress to secure a major change. Prof. Ana as the Dean and Director/MEU reconfigured the faculty history by introducing innovations to the curriculum.

When Prof. Ana proposed the changes, the Faculty resisted as usually and hardened its heart against any change. Some thought a changing process will open a “Pandora’s Box” and some preferred to go on the beaten track.

Certain academics seemed to think that curricular reforms would vitiate the quality of doctors produced from Peradeniya in some way or other and resisted.

Prof. Ana fired from all cylinders and opened a glorious chapter of the Faculty of Medicine. In the run up to the curriculum change he had to work with a radical and revolutionary mindset. There were differences among faculty staff members but he had to reconcile them in a *modus vivendi* which respected those differences. Prof. Ana knew how to trim his sails to any wind. The change may have been a decided success. The MEU is the bedrock of reforms and any change that may have taken place redound to the glory of the MEU.

Dr. Palitha Abeykoon initiated a primary health care project and assigned it to his old faculty and our redoubtable Prof. Ana undertook to carry it out from Peradeniya. In passing I must say that Dr. Jayawicks too interested in this and asked me to get involved since Dr. Abeykoon is supporting this project. Dr. Abeykoon termed this activity as Town and Gown project. Our first official function was to attend a meeting in Belfast.

Prof. Ana went as the captain of the team and in every occasion he was very much in command earned tribute after talking in the most graceful terms to the funders in Northern Ireland. It was my good fortune to make the trip with the team to Belfast. I was seated next to Prof. Ana in the plane and he took me to London from Qatar in no time. We engaged in a seven hour talk. He related to me in an endless fascination his childhood, teenage, varsity and health department memories and experiences. We stopped talking only to eat and to drink bloody mary. He told me a lot of sweet stories in the course of the conversation. I am sorry, I am not disposed to divulge anything now. If he allows me to write his autobiography I will write those memorable things. He brought a tremendous amount of fun and happiness to the tour party.

Prof. Ana, I appreciate your sense of humour, warmth and fibre. You are the most convivial academic I have ever seen.

Prof. Ana and I were in total agreement that the quality or taste of coffee is important than the cup you drink. Prof. Ana I will not be there to pack your parachute this January. According to our sixth precept, Master, I will send you e-mails but no attachments.

Ana gracefully completed the term and was not re-elected. I felt this was the most unkindest cut of all.

Dr. Nimmi Athuraliya

I had spoken about Dr. Nimmi Athuraliya at length when she completed the term as the Director. I do not want to go over the same ground. She is one of the finest ladies I have ever met. She was a very committed leader. I realized that her personality is centred around humility, simplicity, commitment, discipline and courage. Nimmi left the MEU gracefully, but she will be remembered as charismatic and affable director who is always gloriously elegant in her ways. My sincere hope is that she will remain one of the strongest pillars of the MEU provided she comes back from her sabbatical. Even after she left the MEU she continued to show the same unfaltering devotion towards the activities of the MEU.

Dr. Kosala Marambe

I am now moving to the God's most precious gift to the Medical Education Unit and worthy successor to Dr. Nimmi A. Kosa, amiable and affable academic took over the reigns from Dr. Nimmi Athuraliya and she is eminently fitted to the post.

She joined AMP Programme and at once she made her mark as a personality with genuine charm, showing enchantingly easy going temperament and to-date she remains an essentially modest character handling affairs with supreme confidence.

The destinies of the MEU rest in her worthy hands. I always describe her as the angel of medical education. She is the rising star of the medical education firmament. Kosa has a prepossessing and winsome smile and as an individual the mildest of ladies who would not hurt a fly. She sincerely shared her ideas and views constantly with me. I had long long hours of chatting with this graceful lady. Thanks Kosa for being so resourceful and tireless in attending to day-to-day activities. She has now grown into a fully fledged Medical Educationist always trying to bring a personal touch into her dealings with faculty staff and serves with great acceptance. She has already touched the hearts of most academics of all the other faculties.

I am perfectly certain and I know in my heart of hearts that she will take the MEU very safely to its 50th year of existence.

She has an able lieutenant Sisira who is fast developing into a promising medical educator after his baptism in medical education and going ahead with his youthful raptures.

Kosa is the brightest jewel in the MEU diadem.

I have finished referring to my past directors and I shall now slowly move on to my other two special guests this evening.

Prof. Nimal Senanayake

I am now moving on to the personality to whom I have the greatest admiration. To-date I have an unbroken partnership of 38 years with him. I have already referred to him as *the priceless asset, the golden boy, the most illustrious son of the Faculty*. He is my saviour.

Prof. Carlo once referred to him as the “Mudun Mal Kada” in a preface to a book. He objected to it but to no avail. So I am going to say that Prof. NS is “*incomparable*”. I know only the enlightened one is incomparable. My active association with Prof. NS was destined to be.

Previous existences in the samsara must have determined this. From the very first day we became so close and I felt that he was my elder brother that I never had. I can vividly remember that memorable day. I was coming out from the MEU to go to railway station to catch the train to Matale.

Suddenly he appeared in the Faculty lobby and talked to me one or two words and offered me a lift to Kandy city. I joined him to go to Kandy and laid the foundation for the eternal relationship.

Providentially, I feel Prof. Nimal Senanayake’s appointment to the position of Clinical Co-ordinator allowed our partnership to develop and prosper to greater heights and my long association with him has been one of my life’s success stories.

I am unqualified to talk about his unparalleled accomplishments in the field of Medicine and to talk about his intellectual attainments and academic distinctions. He is honourably distinguished in medical sciences, literature and art. I had the opportunity to witness how he glided towards greatness in an effortless-looking manner.

I noticed by reading his galley proofs forwarded for publications, his achievements were on the highest plateau during the early period, mainly because of his insatiable appetite for clinical research resulting in unprecedented and a veritable number of publications began to flow from his pen. Prof. Nimal Senanayake’s beautifully crafted orations delivered to academic gatherings still reverberate in my ears.

I can certainly talk about his achievements in the field of literature and art. He is a literary giant, literary storehouse with a formidable literary mind.

I have throughout my uninterrupted association admired profoundly his great intellectual gifts, his high literary attainments, and his unbounded energy and capacity for work. I learnt literary criticism from him. I had chats for long hours on arts. My association with him built in me a taste for good literature.

I shall give you one example of my chats with Professor Senanayake where my wife challenged me about my knowledge on literature. One beautiful Saturday morning,

I was waiting for SAM's call to go for the morning constitutional. My wife was preparing tea for me and I was getting ready. The telephone rang. Prof. Nimal Senanayake was on the other side calling me to find a book from the Main Library and continued to talk about some books and authors. I finished the call and hanged the receiver.

My wife realized the focus of communication was on some authors and books. She came to me and questioned "Your are talking to Prof. Senanayake on literature, about Dickens and about Bronte Sisters and their work, what do you know about classics"? In a way this was a very reasonable argument. I have completely stopped reading after getting married to her.

I started listening to her instead of reading books. She says that I am an attentive listener on domestic and family matters but never take action. Admittedly, I am a master listener with minimal action. Finally, I consoled her and silenced her by saying that I was learning literary criticism from Prof. Senanayake.

That Saturday morning Prof. Senanayake gave me a fairly heavy dose on classical work of some writers. A little later I got another dose from SAM on "Roman History" at the cinder tract of the Peradeniya university playing fields. It was one of really fruitful weekends for me.

Prof. Senanayake whom I know, is a personality with creative thinking who can always look beyond the horizon and has the ability to turn or transform an ordinary into sublime.

The outstanding characteristics I saw in him are clear vision, method, memory, culture, thoroughness and intellect.

Prof. Nimal Senanayake supported all the MEU activities right through. He will never say no to MEU requests. At the last workshop, he had to fill the role as the stock bowler and bowled a spectacular spell mixed with googlies, of course with deceptive fight. At that instance SAM was our regular bowler but he had to withdraw due to some other commitment.

Finally, I must say that Prof. Nimal Senanayake's impartiality in academic matters is unquestionable. My fervent hope is that the history will no doubt accord him his rightful place in the fields of Medicine, art and literature.

You may rest assured, that even Harold Larwood cannot break our partnership with a bodyline burst.

My close colleague and right hand in the MEU, USK... predicts about my future perks.

“Six figure salary – first time in my life, Air conditioned room – first time in my life, Secretary – first time in my life, Official car without petrol”. Second time in my life. Prof.Senanayake, please do not take these predictions seriously.

I am sure I will not be abandoned in a wild forest.

Prof. SAM Kularatne

I am moving on to my SAM who is heir apparent in the Department of Medicine. If Prof Nimal Senanayake is my elder brother SAM is my younger brother. I knew SAM as a bright student in his batch. After passing out I did not see him for a long time. I can remember one day he came to meet me as a budding and fledgling physician.

First thing he told me was that he had a girl friend in the 3rd or 4th year entry batch. The request was to get a clinical group transfer for her. I cannot remember whether it was a direct or a mutual. This was a momentous task for me. I told this unassuming, truly great unpretentious physician that this was possible. I gave this assurance without consulting Prof. Nimal Senanayake because I knew that he could be prevailed upon. Finally Prof. Senanayake approved the transfer.

My association is so close to him. If I am ill, he comes to see me in no time. If it is a weekend he appears early morning in the compound with his blood pressure apparatus and the bag of medicine. So now when he inquires about my health or my wife's health, I say we are in perfect health even if I am not in best of my health because he takes the trouble to visit me.

When dealing with on official matters, he is very attentive and understands the urgency and supererogation of work. He does not delay any matter in hand. If I request any thing from him he will not say this job is not within his province and keep quiet. He takes prompt action.

I watched very closely, SAM's stature as an academic, increased each year. He has been exceptionally sincere to me and one day I told SAM casually that in 5 years he had to clear an important hurdle. Working towards it was no easy task, but I like to see him get there. After about 5 years, one day he telephoned me and said, “Udu, as you had indicated to me now I have completed five years in the department and I feel that I can meet your deadline”. That was one happy moment for me and he shot at the target.

SAM is a master of Western History, especially the Roman history. Edward Gibbon talked about the “decline and fall of the Roman Empire”. But SAM talks about rise and fall of the Roman Empire”. My knowledge about Roman history is very little. I only know that there was a Roman dictator called Julius Caesar. I am now talking about Julius Caesar, if I had been there during that period (circa 100 BC to 45 BC), I would have asked Caesar to see Prof. NS as he was thought to have suffered from epilepsy and Dr. Abey as he could not understand the changed and uncertain behaviour of some Senators and especially the predictor’s Ides of March.

Anyway I will come back to SAM. Caesar was collectively murdered by the Brutus & Company. Mark Antony came to give the funeral oration and rhetorically said that Brutus was an honourable man. He was emotionally charged. That much I know about Roman history. Now Udurawana is going to say directly, without any hesitation, that SAM is an honourable man.

I feel sure, on a certain day in the future you will come to praise me and not to bury me. This will be complete opposite of Marcus Antonius.

“ SAM Kularatnayaneni, oba mata RATHNAYAK. Mage ekantha wishwasaya wanne, mathu yam dawasaka oba peminenne mawa pasasannata misak wala damannata nowe ”.

But SAM, only thing that we have to keep in mind is that the “Good is oft interred with our bones”.

“SAM newatha Peradeniyata kednawagena aa Nimal Senanayakeyanantath, mata obage sameepa esura laba dun deviyanhansetath mama sthuthiwantha wemi ”.

SAM, your heart is so big and so open to me and the good deeds you have done for me will surely come back to you dearly in this life or next soul.

Prof. Vajira Weerasinghe

I am moving on to baby of the special invitees and Professor Basnayake’s trusted pupil Vaji. If Prof. Nimal Senanayake is my elder brother and if my younger brother is SAM, Vaji is my step brother. My close brotherly association with him runs into 20 or more years. I always admire his unflinching courage and academic sagacity. He is blessed with an excellent logical mind and an easy going person with a broad smile always trusting his will.

He has a deeper understanding of many people. This briskly moving (*me hitiyaa me ne*) academic's heart has always been open to me.

His crowning moment was when he wisely steered the KSM vessel and brought it safely to the port of Annual Sessions without throwing overboard any of the splendid traditions took on board by Varagunams, Senanayakes, Arsecularatnes etc.etc.

If I am ill and Prof. Nimal Senanayake and Prof. SAM Kularatne are not in the scene, he immediately takes action. He is very much concerned about me. He does not favour the academic Rip Van Winkles. He does not like academic heresy. I have noticed that to go through any activity under incredible pressure, Vajira is the best. He is unmatched in skill and temperament.

He is a staunch pillar of the MEU. As a Staff Associate, he extends his fullest co-operation to MEU programmes. Now he is a vital cog in the MEU wheel and also he has become the lynch pin of the MEU. I would very much like to place before you that vajira's contributions on examinations during the curricular reforms were invaluable in keeping the faculty on the "*qui vive*" throughout the process.

He is a strong believer that the steering wheel cannot be shared by more than one at a time as the machinery might run erratically or very often get out of order. I am, to a certain extent in agreement with his policy.

Sometimes endless, aimless and inconsequential conversations with him developed into a welcome routine, most of the time bringing me up to date with latest information and gossip. We shared and exchanged thoughts which helped us to maintain each other's enthusiasm.

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The distinguished guests, I have now touched all my past directors and the special guests.

At this juncture, I venture to say that the establishment of the MEU is mentioned in Dr. Philip Veerasingam's recent book "The Cry of the Devil Bird". There were two editors for this book. Active editor and the silent editor. Dr. Lakshman Karals who was the silent editor and he should get the credit for this. Dr. Karals was an individual who revered loyalty to MEU but never courted popularity.

I do not want to inordinately lengthen my talk.

I have taken my retirement as part of my life and I hope my retirement, I feel assured, conduce to the better and the MEU should not suffer in efficiency as the young team comprising USK, Anoma, Himali and Vasana who devote their best to the assigned duties and MEU will continue to profit by their experience. Recently, when I asked Anoma to take over some files and indicated to her that I want to leave the MEU a bit earlier, she intoned that a dark cloud appears over her office. I was taken aback. Ladies and Gentlemen, the silver lining was there, which Anoma did not notice.

Lastly, I would like to remember with a deep sense of gratitude, Prof Raja Bandaranayake and Dr. Susil Gunasekera and all the past and present staff associates who were intangible assets of the MEU. The Staff Associates have contributed to the development of the MEU in no small measure and their contributions assumed gigantic proportions. The commitment of the permanent staff members and voluntary combinations of staff associates resulted in the MEU standing pre-eminent among all the other medical education centres nationally, regionally and internationally.

While I was engaging in writing this script, it came to my mind how Prof. Ana concluded an OSCE session in the recent past. We conducted a workshop for Kandy hospital clinicians on student assessment. Last session was on OSCE. Kosa and Sisira will bear witness to this episode. One lady consultant while walking out indicated to Prof. Ana that she was stimulated after the workshop.

Prof. Ana who is very particular about specificity, without batting an eyelid, in his inimitable and innate style retorted “Which part is stimulated?” I fervently hope MEU will continue in a similar vein.

I firmly believe that the Faculty should burn the incense of adoration and praise to the MEU for its services over the years.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without telling you how much I have enjoyed my work at the MEU. I have played my evanescent part in the MEU and I am going to take shelter under Prof. Nimal Senanayake’s golden wings. In my leisure I fall into a reverie about the good old days and I recall the memories of my association with you all with great pleasure. I will continue to send e-mails or forward the jokes in order to let you know that you are still remembered, you are still important or still loved. The MEU has done more for me than I have done for the MEU and I can never return what was given to me by the MEU over 38 year span and I wish to express my perpetual indebtedness to the Medical Education Unit and the staff.

MY ETERNAL STAND IS “NO WORK IS GREATER OR NOBLER THAN SERVING YOUR INSTITUTION”.

Due to personal reasons, I have decided to call it quits. So I am bidding you an unwilling and a reluctant farewell as a poor man but very rich in so many other things. I will not saunter again the Faculty lobby and the MEU corridors. SAM and Professor Ana I will not saunter the corridors of the Clinical Block. I will not hear Professor Ana’s stentorian voice.

Yes, it is with deep sense of personal sadness that I part from those with whom I have worked for so many years, especially Kosa, Sisira, USK, Anoma, Himali, Vasana and Jayaratne. USK, my table is waiting to receive you on Monday. Please open the door early in the morning and start your spell.

I am solaced on this occasion by thinking that I have done to the fullest of my ability and to the best of my ability for the past 38 years.

I am sorry I have taxed your patience too long. You all are enshrined in the grateful heart of Udurawana. I am contented and I am thankful for all that I had in this transitory lifetime.

Lastly, I am grateful to Nadira my dearest companion for tolerating me and her unstinted support during my stay in the MEU for a record number of years. She says that her full retirement is effective from tomorrow and at the present moment, I am sure, her heart may begin to flutter with joy at the prospect of being my retirement. I honour the woman in her and her soul.

Prof. Varagunam, my dear Sir, I remember you had quoted the Persian poet Omar Kayam when the PeMSAA was born in 1992 and I have to say the same thing now that I spoke about the dead yesterday. But as I said I feel the liveliest satisfaction at the present moment and Sir, I am not in a position to talk about the unborn tomorrow.

Finally, if Professor Varagunam appoints a “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee”, I will be certainly there to give evidence.

The distinguished guests, you all are like stars. I do not always see you, but I know you are always there (Courtesy a recent e.mail from Dr. Nimmi Aturaliya).

Please allow me to quote from the Roots, Recollections and Reminiscences by the late versatile writer Tissa Abeysekera “Everything is an act of faith, faith in yourself, faith in others and others’ faith in you”.

Thank you very much and “may the blessings of the noble Triple Gem” always be with you.