

21st March 2023

From Udu to dear USK

I consider this as a special privilege and a window of opportunity to pay tributes to one of my most trusted friends on the eve of his retirement from the University on this day of 21st March Two Thousand and Twenty Three. It gives me immense pleasure to be with this august gathering on this significant occasion when Mr. U.S.K.Ekanayake has just begun a new journey in his life from today.

This is going to be a mix of formal and informal presentation and I wish to unfold a brief history about USK, unbeknownst to most of you.

Saying goodbye to Udaya Saman Kumara Ekanayake with whom I had served the old Medical Education Unit productively for nearly 25 years is not tough as I am also not in the service. Interestingly, I joined the Unit at its inception in 1973 and USK is leaving when the Department of Medical Education is gearing up to celebrate its 50th year of existence. Today, I am on my feet to celebrate the contribution that USK had made to old Medical Education Unit, Electronics Library, Department of Medical Education and the Faculty at large. I can go to town about my erstwhile colleague, but certainly not dwell at length.

USK, fresh from Ampara Hardy Institute and Katubedda Technical College joined the old Medical Education Unit non-academic staff in 1985 and rendered his services for 38 years. It is my most agreeable duty to state that this fledgling Technical Officer never allowed his personal life to affect his working life and vice versa and also that type of individuals are very rare to find. He is certainly a "*rara avis*"; rare bird. This energetic young person was soon adapted to the working environment. Before long, I realized that he was not ambitious, and almost evidently wanted to remain committed to MEU activities without thinking of other avenues of employment. My friendship with USK developed with great rapidity and a good quality, which I admired in USK was that he never provided unsolicited advice but was always available to facilitate and provide assistance when requested. I have had much loyal help throughout, and would like to thankfully acknowledge it now.

After working for some time, he obtained overseas no pay leave from the university and joined Kuwait University Medical School temporarily for 5 years. He has always been keen on picking new things; having acquired a varied experience, started his advanced journey in the exciting and fascinating Computer Science field, sharpening up his software and hardware knowledge during his stay there.

In passing, I wish to add that I had the good fortunes of visiting him in Kuwait. He was sharing a flat with a few Indians. At that time he was dating his future wife, Shivanthika nangi. There he had a lot of free time and used to write epistles i.e. long letters to his fiancée since he is a talented writer. There was another hidden talent in USK. He can write blank verse or "nisadas" in Sinhala. He showed me a book written by him carrying nearly 250 pages. He never published the book of poems.

After a 5 year gap, on the cutting-edge of the digital revolution, he returned to the country, resumed his duties in the Medical Education Unit; I watched his progress very closely for some more time and came to a conclusion that no one could hold the candle to him. He unequivocally acquired "primus inter pares" status, i.e. top among equals.

He married his fiancée Shivanthika, a convent educated girl from Penideniya. With my advancing age, I misremember past events so I have an indistinct remembrance of his romantic association with Shivanthi nangi.

It had been smooth sailing for him, discipline and work ethics he showed were rewarded handsomely; he was soon on board a plane heading to the Land Down Under; visiting Adelaide medical school at the insistence of Dr. Nimmi Athuraliya, the incumbent Director of the Medical Education Unit. I venture to say that Udaya and Devani nangi were in Adelaide as PGIM post MD trainees long ago. I believe Udaya's was a trail blazing visit to Adelaide University hospital for a training attachment. Later, Dr. Nimal Kasturiaratchi, our former Director, Medical Education Unit headed a revolutionary mission to Adelaide Medical School.

USK was assigned some important duties with 5 other colleagues in the newly carved out Electronics Library by the then Dean. He readily acceded to Dean's request, crossed the Rubicon, and actively ventured into E.Library duties. He was very keen on accepting future challenges allowing his friends to share his enthusiasm. He believed that coexistence with others was the

key desideratum when working in a shared working area, and also the basis of coexistence is trust among co-workers. He knew his onions and became a spearhead and also lynch pin of the E.library.

The hallmark of his character was that he never harmed anyone but he always helped others who came to him. This reminds me of famous Hippocrates' advice to doctors "primum non nocere" i.e. "first do no harm". Mr. Ekanayake is a true gentleman in every sense of the word and some of his admirable personality traits are undoubted honesty, unimpeachable integrity and trustworthiness. Above all, he is a paragon of virtue.

At this particular moment, I must not omit to mention something about his parents, in-laws and the family. His parents and father-in-law are no more. Now he gives the best possible care to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Grace Manchanayake, a retired school teacher. They all were very sympathetic and kindly to us. USK's late father, Mr. Kapilaratne Ekanayake was a school principal of a classical mould who was a strict disciplinarian and did not treat others with kid gloves. My friend is the 4th in the family of six siblings; they are a close-knit family where USK is the pillar of strength.

In summing up, I wish to state that it makes us sad to see that you are departing the Faculty of Medicine; the cherishable reminiscences of working with you will always remain with each and every one of us. You may rest assured that, your time with us cannot be measured merely by years but more in terms of memories. Dear USK, only thing I can see is that we had been part and parcel in an era of Peradeniya Medical Education community leaving the footprints in the shifting sands of time. You are retiring from the university service today, but you will continue to hear the echoes emanating from the Department of Medical Education. Of one thing I am pretty sure: USK would have a gainfully occupied retired life.

From the point view of the faculty, this deep-seated personality is unreservedly, the "last of the Mohicans".

We wish you a happy retirement!

Finally, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Madam Kosala Marambe and the organizers for inviting me and my wife for this important event.