A life blessed

Professor B. Ramanurthi died on 13th December, 2003. Whoever is born must die sometime. Although we are saddened by Professor Ramanurthi’s death, we must instead reflect upon what a gifted life he had. During his life he accomplished things that people can only dream of – professionally and personally. He set India on the neurosurgical world map. He built a dream neurosciences institute, not once but twice, under very difficult circumstances. He was a leader all his life, led by example and was admired by his countrymen and neurosurgeons all over the world. Hindus and Buddhists believe that the fortunes in one’s present life are the result of good Karma from our previous lives. Yet, how one conducts his present life is also dependent upon personal choices, and the individual accumulates good and bad Karma for this and future lives. Professor Ramanurthi accumulated as much good Karma as one can hope to accumulate in a lifetime. We must, therefore, be very happy for him and I am sure that he is happy as well, as he reads this article.

I would like to relate a few stories about Professor Ramanurthi and my father, L. S. Natarajan. They were classmates in the Madras Medical College, and close friends all their lives. My father was very upset and depressed by Professor Ramanurthi’s death and he died unexpectedly on December 26, 2003, 10 days after his friend’s death.

Ramanurthi was a brilliant student in Medical College, and used to stay in his sister’s house in Theagaraya Nagar, Madras. My father used to live in a rented house across the street, with many other classmates, all of whom went on to distinguished careers in Medicine later in life. These friends used to be very close and quite a group. My father and friends used to party quite a bit, and Ramanurthi would shout across the street, “Hi guys, settle down, and study!” In the morning, they would go to college together in Ramanurthi’s old car – they frequently had to push it, since it would not start!

When my dream was to become a microsurgeon, especially in the cerebrovascular field; microsurgery was not very popular in India at that time. However, Prof. Ramanurthi encouraged me. I had the privilege of being a Senior House Surgeon under Professor Ramanurthi at the Madras Neurological Institute in 1973, and witnessed his surgery, leadership, teaching, and patient manners at first hand. I realized that in order to ac-
complish what he had in India at that time, he had to have a very tough exterior. He had very high standards for himself, and held others to that same standard.

After I came to the USA, I had some trouble getting into the prestigious training program at the University of Pittsburgh. Professor Ramamurthi, during one of his trips to the USA, made a special visit to Pittsburgh and met with Professor Peter Jannetta to encourage him to take me in his program.

Professor Ramamurthi has advised and helped me at many critical times in my life, and inspired me to become what I am today. There is a bit of him inside me, and inside all those he has inspired, and trained.

My father, too, lived a very fruitful and meaningful life. He was quite different from me, very pragmatic, sure of himself, and his role in the family and society. I do not know how I would have done as an engineer in the Railways, or in a related field—probably my father and Professor Ramamurthi were God’s messengers, steering me into something I did not really want to do, but nevertheless, have been very successful in, by some standards.

I know that both Professor Ramamurthi and my father, L. S. Natarajan, had very blessed lives, and all of us should be envious of them. However, I miss Professor Ramamurthi’s regal manner and cheerful voice and face. And I miss my father; I miss them both very much.

I hope these two dear friends, wherever they are, will help to inspire a new generation of young people.

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