

'Noel Bartholmeusz - Surgeon incomparable'
25/12/1910 – 25/11/1977

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“If you steal from one author it is plagiarism, if you steal from many it is research” this is a quote by Wilson Mizner and I would like to start by saying that I have done a lot of research to compile this oration. The more I read of the life and work of Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz the more I am made aware of his greatness, his passion for surgery and his passion for perfection - how small I am in comparison!

If you ask anybody who knew Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz as to what was distinctive about him, the unanimous answer would probably be that he wore a white satin drill suit with an orchid on his lapel. Indeed, this orchid was on his photograph on the cover of the book, “Reflections on the life of Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz - Eminent Surgeon” authored by Ms. Nirmali Hettiarachchi and myself.

The first phase of my research was to show this photograph to three leading florists in Colombo to identify it, but they failed to do so. A visit to Google brought up the image and it was aptly named “the Scorpion” orchid. Another visit to the florists to get some scorpion orchid flowers resulted in a strange response, “it is a common orchid and not in much demand, hence it is rare to find”. A visit to the Botany Department of the University of Colombo, now renamed “The Department of Plant Sciences” to get the correct botanical name came with the response that I should email the picture and requirements to a member of the staff specializing in orchids. Two emails were sent and there was no reply! So we went back to Google and we came up with the name Scorpion Orchid, *Aranthera*

(Genus *Arachnis*), which was the closest we could get to the identity of this “common” orchid.

These incidents are not without relevance. The true dedicated professional that he was, Noel would have pursued this or a similar problem with even greater zeal or passion than I did, and which applied to whatever else in his life or profession.

Next, common becomes uncommon or rare because of its commonality, what a paradox! I wonder whether there is a similarity in surgery. Take the specialty of General Surgery, for instance. Few want to take it up as a career – we must not let it become a forgotten specialty. Another example is the care of the diabetic foot. As the incidence of diabetes is assuming epidemic proportions in the country, the problems of the diabetic foot will become very common and may often be relegated to the care of junior doctors and nurses. I remember assisting Batho (as Dr. Bartholomeusz was fondly called) as a third year medical student one Monday afternoon during an incision and drainage of an abscess of the big toe in a diabetic patient. He asked me to drape the towels, and I did this, but not in the way he wanted it done. Patiently he showed me his way of draping the towels and proceeded to complete the minor operation with major care. These were the days when Consultant Surgeons were present in the operating theatre throughout the afternoon casualty list to supervise care. He went on to teach me that if this operation had not been done with care, there would be a chance of the patient losing his toe, or even his foot or leg, or even his life.

“In the hearts of people a healer is second only to the gods. However those quiet and dignified men, who throughout centuries devoted their lives to easing the lot of their fellow beings, are often relegated to cursory mention in history books, their achievements viewed with dispassionate objectivity”.

Healers fall into two categories, those who are pioneers and others who follow in their paths. The catalyst that spurs them, be it science, courage or humanism, to attain that degree of achievement has indeed been of immense succor to many patients. Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz falls into this category of pioneers.

To explore the path of a life devoted to service whose only reward is excellence and to place it in the context of history, is to say the least, a rewarding experience”- Nirmali Hettiarachchi

Noel Bartholomeusz was born during the last stage of British Colonial rule. It can be said that of the three western conquerors, i.e. the Portuguese, Dutch and British, the British had the greatest and most lasting influence on Ceylon. Descendants of the latter two formed the influential Burgher community. Noel was a Burgher of Dutch origin [1].

The genealogy of Noel starts in 1750s when a Dutch citizen Daniel Bartholomeusz arrived in Jaffna and married Helena Darius on 1st January 1760. They had 7 children. Daniel died in 1798 aged 68 years [2]. Seventy three documented generations later, Hugh Hamilton Bartholomeusz married Alice Maud Jansz at St Paul's Church, Milagiriya on 27th April 1908 - they had 5 children. The first was Hugh Hamilton and the second Lucien Noel born on 25th December 1910. Their father died aged 47 years, Hugh Hamilton the eldest son died in 2012 aged 92 years and Noel in 1977 aged 67 years. We know that Dr Noel Bartholomeusz suffered from polycystic kidney disease - an autosomal dominant inherited disease. “His father apparently died after suffering a lot of discomfort” and one could only

speculate whether he too had the disease.

Noel was educated at Royal College Colombo. He was quiet and studious and, in the late 1920s, entered university for a “Pre Medical Course” also called the 1st MB. In 1935 he qualified as a doctor and the marks sheet reads: R.L.Spittel 67%, L.D.C.Austin 68% and L.N.Bartholomeusz 74%. It is interesting to note that the top three went on to become legendary surgeons.

Dr. Bartholomeusz's basic surgical exposure was under the tutelage of Sir Arthur de Silva, a surgical giant of that time [1]. Sir Arthur was described by the late Dr. Shelton Cabraal (Neurosurgeon) thus: “his fingers were short and stubby, yet he used these same fingers with such precision and deftness that his operations were described as masterpieces of surgery. His punctuality was such that one could set one's watch by his arrival for his rounds at 8am and 3 pm. He was a man of few words but when he spoke he was listened to with avid interest”.

Following this period Noel then worked in Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, and finally at Avissawella. He was essentially a self taught surgeon, and even before he passed the FRCS, he set up operating theatres wherever he worked and his reputation as a clever, meticulous and safe surgeon spread fast.”He worked round the clock for his patients. He transformed the Avissawella Hospital into a haven for surgery. Patients from adjoining villages flocked to this hospital” - Mr. A.T.S.Paul [1].

Dr Philip Veerasingam, who has now retired and works at Avissawella in his private capacity, adds: Dr.Bartholomeusz was “DMA” at Avissawella Hospital in the 1940s (the time of the world war). He had become very friendly with a gentleman farmer of the area by the name Sardiris Appuhamy. Sardiris had a son and two daughters. The son Somasiri is resident now at Avissawella. Somasiri, who has since retired, worked in the Municipality here and told me the following stories.

Sardiris had become very attached to Dr.Bartholomeusz and his wife. He used to take rice pounded from paddy

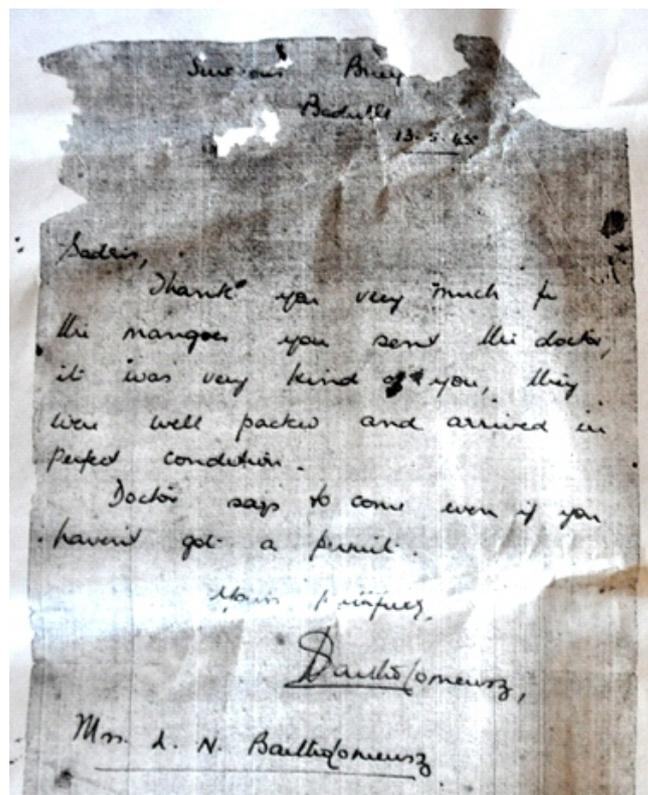
from his first harvest to Dr. Bartholomeusz. When Dr Bartholomeusz went on transfer to Badulla, Sardiris had collected the best fruits of the season like rambuttan, mangoosteen and mangoes transported by train to for Dr Bartholomeusz in Badulla. The Kelani Valley narrow gauge train transported the fruits as parcel to Colombo Fort and from there it went by the Badulla train to be collected by Dr. Bartholomeusz at Badulla. Shown below is a photostat copy of a letter sent by Nora Bartholomeusz to Sardiris.

Travelling from one province to another apparently needed a permit from the authorities during war time. That explains the last part of the letter and shows how 'Batho' was prepared to stick his neck out for Sardiris.

In later years after Dr. Bartholomeusz went to the UK and came back with his FRCS qualification, he was posted Surgeon at the General Hospital Colombo. Sardiris used to visit 'Batho' and during these visits he would take Sardiris around his garden to get advice on horticulture from Sardiris. Sardiris had received an earlier model of a Singer sewing machine which worked without a shuttle, as a present from Batho. He had also gifted Sardiris a 'Rudge' bicycle which the proud Sardiris rode all the way from Colombo to Avissawella.

At one point, 'Batho' had asked whether he would be willing to give his son Somasiri for adoption by him. Since Somasiri was Sardiris' only son the latter had politely declined the offer. Somasiri told me jokingly that if he had been adopted by 'Batho' he would have been the owner of the house now occupied by the College of Surgeons!

Noel married Nora Bevan on 26th November 1936. They had been meeting at St Michael's Church, Polwatte on Sundays. Although they had no children they led an extremely happy and mutually supportive life. Nora ran a comfortable home for Noel wherever he was posted and even at Avissawella she had a small but elegant house with a beautiful garden, helped no doubt with the



horticultural wisdom of Sardiris.

When Noel assumed duties as Consultant Surgeon at the General Hospital, they initially lived in a two storey house at Horton Place. This was most inconvenient and tiring for Noel as he had to keep coming downstairs very frequently to answer the telephone - wanting a house of their own, they had commissioned a reputed architect Bevis Bawa, to build a house for them. The records are as follows:

Name: House for Dr. Bartholomeusz (Geoffrey Bawa's Office/ The Architect's Office) **Location:** Colombo, Sri Lanka **Architect:** Geoffrey Bawa **Client:** Edwards, Ried, and Begg **Date:** 1961-1963 (20th Century) **Building Usage:** Office building/ Complex & Private Residence"

"The office had originally been planned as a doctor's house, but by the time the foundations had grown to ground level he had decided to stay where he was and Bawa was able to buy the property and convert it into an office" [4].

This contract had been terminated presumably as this too was a two storey house. It was later sold to Mr. Shan Fernando and is now a popular high end restaurant at Alfred House Avenue, Kollupitiya, and the Gallery Café. It is remarkable that, historically speaking, the College of Surgeons was fortunate that Sardiris did not agree to give Somasiri, his son, to Noel for adoption and that Bevis Bawa's masterpiece was not occupied by the Bartholomeuszs as it would have been most inappropriate for the College as its Headquarters.

They loved children. They supported the Nayakakanda Home for orphaned and abandoned children and Nora visited this home regularly to help bath and care for the babies. Nora would always come back in time to be with Batho during his lunch, which would have been a daunting task nowadays considering the traffic congestion on the roads!

We now have to go back a little in history to the making of Batho into a qualified surgeon.

“Following the cessation of hostilities in World War 11, the government of Ceylon advertised scholarships for training of doctors in general and specialist subjects in England. Noel Bartholomeusz, P.R.Anthonis and L.D.C.Austin were the first choices for surgery.”- (Mr. A.T.S.Paul [1]).

“Noel passed the Primary FRCS and the Final FRCS within two years. His experience in Ceylon stood him in good stead, and when in the final examination he was questioned on the technique of splenectomy, after describing it, Noel had told the examiner that he had not encountered any problems with any of the number of cases he had personally operated on!”[1].

Noel returned to Ceylon in 1949 and was appointed Consultant Surgeon to the General Hospital, Colombo until he retired in 1969. He worked round the clock both at the government hospital and private practice. A remarkable feature was his punctuality. “The morning operating list started at 8a.m.” meant that knife was on

skin at eight and not induction of anaesthesia at that time!

Anaesthesia was chloroform, oxygen and ether. There were no ventilators or intensive care units. Penicillin had just been discovered, and a little later, Streptomycin and Chloramphenicol, antibiotics that Noel widely used. Laboratory facilities were minimal and manually estimated. Only whole blood was available for transfusions, there were no blood components.

Emergency operations were done for acute appendicitis, acute retention of urine, strangulated inguinal hernia, intestinal perforation (often typhoid), acute cholecystitis, ruptured liver abscess and perforated peptic ulcers, ruptured oesophageal varices. These were common admissions almost on a daily basis. Elective operations were for large goiters, malignancies of the breast, stomach, colon and rectum, mouth, penis and gastric or duodenal ulcers and their complications. Urological operations ranging from urolithiasis, malignancies and prostatic hyperplasia and orthopedic surgery took up a considerable part of his operating time. All were open operations and the outcomes were remarkable. Working under what would now be called “primitive conditions” Noel achieved remarkable results.

These successes could be attributed to a precise knowledge of anatomy and the operating technique, fast surgery as dictated by primitive anaesthesia and meticulous haemostasis. Dr. Michael Abeyratne, one of his trainees, recounts the “tie and cut” technique to control blood vessels at which he was a master. The term equipment was a joke, and he had developed techniques that depended on sheer skill rather than on sophisticated instruments. His instructions on preoperative preparation were precise and meticulous as were those for postoperative management and this total care allied to his elegant surgery gave Dr. Bartholomeusz his amazing results”[1].

Praise from an anaesthetist is praise indeed. The late Dr. B.S.Perera recalls being called to Fraser Nursing Home to operate on an unconscious patient of British nationality. Noel performed a porto-caval anastomosis and Dr. Perera was amazed to find that the patient was nearly awake at the end of the operation! The next day, he had been boisterous demanding a glass of beer! This patient left the hospital ten days later and retired from his managerial post to return to England [1].

Noel excelled at whatever he did and this is exemplified by his technique for operations on the thyroid gland. Professor Geri Jayasekara, who had taken time off to assist him, said that the operation was a bloodless masterpiece. At the time, the popular technique was to isolate the upper pole of thyroid followed by mass ligation of the artery and veins using No.1 silk. The standard instruments on the trolley for thyroidectomy were an aneurysm needle, McDonald's dissector and a curved Sawtell's forcep to assist in this maneuver. Noel always tied off the vessels in the upper pole individually to spare the external branch of the superior laryngeal nerve. The other popular belief at that time was that there was a greater possibility of damaging the recurrent laryngeal if one goes looking for it! Noel always looked for it, and the gentlemen that he was, would only chuckle when this topic came up for discussion, making no comment. A patient recently brought a diagnosis card written for a patient he had operated on for a solitary nodule of the thyroid. The meticulous record of the operation and the remarks reveal more than what is said in it.

The late Professor Christopher CanagaRetna reminisced his training at the hands of Noel. "He taught me the use of the scalpel to perfection so that the mark left behind was almost invisible. His stitches were always immaculate. He used to perform plastic surgery (long before any other in Sri Lanka) and perfected the art of subcuticular sutures. These were the days when only nylon, silk and catgut were the suture materials

available for surgeons. Noel's often reiterated motto was "to teach by example" [1].

Another of his trainees recalls Noel's humility. Dr. Joe Fernando, the Plastic surgeon received the following letter from Noel after the former had delivered a lecture on burns at one of the sessions of the Sri Lanka Medical Association. It reads "I want to tell you how well I enjoyed your lecture and how thrilled I was to see some of the results of your work". Dr Fernando adds that it shows Noel's humility as he used the skin grafting technique that he himself had learned from Noel. The letter ends "congratulations on your excellent presentation on a subject that has always been of interest to me and for the excellence of your results". Not many General Surgeons, who had to manage burns patients in their wards during that era, could in all honesty make such a statement regarding interest in patients with burns [1].

His surgical versatility is illustrated by another case recalled by the late Dr. B.S.Perera. An English Government Archivist had been admitted with "a large fungating rodent ulcer involving half his head, right ear, right cheek, right eye and more than half his neck". Dr. Perera had been trained in hypotensive anaesthesia and Noel had challenged him to take on the case. Four hours later, and with minimal blood loss, a complete excision and skin graft was successfully carried out with hundred percent take and the patient returned to England minus one eye, of course [1].

Professor Channa Ratnatunga records how Noel's surgical spectrum included vascular surgery: In the late 1960's, one saw quite a few successful femoro – popliteal bypass grafts done by Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz and the surgeons of the "Hope Ship"; Dr. Kradijan in particular. It was Professor A.H.S. Sheriffdeen of the university surgical unit in Colombo, in the early 1970's having trained at St. Mary's London under Eastcott and others, who should be credited with the development of

reconstructive arterial surgery in this country. His unit not only performed with success emergency and routine vascular procedures, but trained many young surgeons to do so. The university surgical unit at Peradeniya followed in the mid 1970's and maintained an audit which helped to unravel the complex patterns of presentation in Sri Lanka [5].

A test of any one's character is the honesty that person displays when under stress. Dr Philip Verasingam recalls a story related to him by Dr. Burhan (who was in his early days compared to Dr. Noel in his dress, conduct and surgical prowess), that Noel had presented a case at a clinical meeting of the Ceylon Medical Association, where he had carried out an abdomino-perineal resection mistakenly for carcinoma when the histology later came as Crohn's disease. He did not hide the case as most of us would have been tempted to [3].

Dr. Vimala Navaratnam, who was a regular assistant in most of his difficult operations, states how he taught his students to be "bold and fearless in their diagnosis" and, at the same time, to accept their mistakes and take responsibility for them. "He was the embodiment of three Ps...Politeness, Punctuality and Perfection," she adds.

One day, after a partial gastrectomy for bleeding peptic ulcer at the Joseph Fraser Nursing home, the sister had meekly announced "Sir, we are short of a towel"-the peritoneal cavity was searched, still one towel short. "You know what that means? I will have to open the stomach!" - "yes sir" said the trembling theatre sister almost in tears. The sutures of the stomach were opened step by step and no towel was found in the stomach! Finally Dr. Batho's probing fingers located the towel snugly wedged in the pylorus. After the operation, Dr. Batho went up to the sister, shook her warmly by the hand and thanked her for her professionalism [6].

He set the bar high for himself in whatever he did, be it surgery, dress, punctuality, work ethic, inter personnel

relationships or moral and ethical standards. Noel could be immediately identified from any distance in his sparkling white suit and the legendary orchid on his lapel, a fresh one every day! And to complement this attire he behaved with equal dignity, always greeting even the most menial of labourers to the highest of administrators with a nod, smile and a "Good morning". The respect he received was complementary. He would often end the ward round in the female ward and at the end of the round single out the most ill looking and poorest looking patient to present the orchid from his lapel. This usually brought out a smile of joy and happiness from the patient and others around.

A former theatre sister, Annabelle Karunaratne recalls "on graduating in 1952 I was assigned to operating theatre "C" at the General Hospital to scrub for Dr. Bartholomeusz. "I found him to be the kindest of men. He never shouted, never threw instruments around, and never uttered a bad word". "Once when I took a trolley for the medical students' practicals, I realized that an artery forcep had gone missing. Correspondence between the Sister, medical stores and the Medical Superintendent went back and forth but the article was not replaced. Dr. Noel happened to see the correspondence in the Sister's office and promptly replaced the instrument with one of his own, much to my relief. Otherwise, I would have been surcharged for it. He never failed to make light hearted conversation and discuss the merits and demerits of a concert or play we had both been to and ask what I thought about it - It made my day!"[1].

Professor Arjuna Aluwihare, in a lecture on Noel (he was an intern house officer in Dr. Bartholomeuz's unit), recalls his unfailing courtesy and "minimal shouting, if at all". Batho was witness at Arjuna's wedding, and thereafter, the young couple became regular guests at Batho's house at meals. Arjuna praises him "for an exemplary life and career" [7].

Deloraine Brohier also recalls times with Batho as a host. "Nora's recent death, my mind goes back to the evenings my father and I spent with Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz and his wife Nora. Their home so elegant and beautiful, their hospitality so charming and gracious, it was sheer pleasure to be there. Conversation ranged over a variety of subjects - books and antiques, anecdotes of places and of mutual friends. Never a word there was that was ugly or harmful or hurtful to the people we knew. There was a warm glow that surrounded the four of us - as dusk settled over the well-tended garden and the birds took to their nests, when the soft lights within the sitting-room we sat in, came on. I was of the younger generation but I wrapped myself and absorbed every word and soaked in the atmosphere of fellowship and friendship. Forever, will remain the memories of those evenings"[8].

My first encounter with Noel was when, as a third year medical student, five of us walked into Operation Theatre "D" of the general Hospital, to "watch" an operation. Anne Ranasinghe, recently, at her 88th birthday, recalled how her husband Professor D.A.Ranasinghe was diagnosed with "gall bladder cancer" and how all the doctors had advised them to go to the U.K. for treatment. Noel had been amused and this was the first operation that I watched as a third year medical student in operation theatre "D" of the General Hospital, Colombo! After surgery, Professor Ranasinghe was left in the corridor alone on a metal stretcher. This was the recovery unit of that time. From time to time, the anaesthetist Dr. Laddie Fernando would come and slap him on the cheeks shouting "Raney, put your tongue out" and Professor Ranasinghe would oblige. Noel too came once and slapped him on his cheek and again said "Raney, put your tongue out". We had a rather mischievous batch mate who then told us "machan, this is the only time we will get to slap the Professor of Obstetrics, and making sure no one was around he went up, slapped him on his cheek and

shouted "Raney, put your tongue out" Professor Ranasinghe obliged. We others fled the scene!

Another time, my mother needed a surgical consultation when I was a fourth year medical student. At the end of a meticulous and thorough assessment my brother gave me a brown envelope with the fee and asked me to give it to Noel. He smiled and said I don't take money from doctors". "But Sir", I said, "I am only a medical student". "You will soon be one" he said smiling as he turned away into his office.

He did, however, fight fiercely to preserve both his dignity and that of the profession.

"I still remember the post-election euphoria of 1956 when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike came into power. As a medical student together with two others, Susil Manukulasuriya, now a Consultant Psychiatrist in UK and Lal Jayasena who became a Professor of Pharmacology, we were in the crowd that "stormed" the Parliament (near Galle Face) that memorable morning when "Ape Anduwa" came into being. The crowd surged into the chamber and I believe Susil sat on the chair before he was unceremoniously "unseated" by the huge strapping Sergeant-at-Arms, H.S. Ismail. Such was the euphoria that people power generated, that people attempted to enter the operating theatre of the General Hospital. Outraged by this, Dr. Noel Bartholomeusz, one of the leading surgeons removed his cap and gown and offered his scalpel, saying "Here are the people's cap and gown and scalpel, now operate" and was about to leave the theatre when the patient's relations implored him to continue the operation! Unfortunately, the euphoria died down with constant strikes and the Prime Minister's inability to make Sinhala the state language in twenty four. Ultimately, he was gunned down by a man in yellow robes. The rest is history [9].

The latter part of his life was not very pleasant as he had to cope with complications of the renal problem he had

and the dialysis that he needed. He developed pain in his hips and walked with a limp. He often bled from a peptic ulcer after dialysis as heparin was used. Batho used iced water down a nasogastric tube, after aspiration of the blood. Once there were no nasogastric tubes and Batho wanted a junior colleague to cut holes in a sterile IV giving set as an alternative! Fortunately this doctor had gone to Joseph Frazer Nursing home where the matron had given her two tubes. Joseph Frazer nursing home at this time was reserved exclusively for Europeans although the doctors were locals. However the Matron had said that if Batho needed hospitalization, she could bend the rules as the wife had a British Passport. She was prepared to stretch her neck out to help him. Such was the awe and respect they had for him. On another occasion, when he needed a blood transfusion, there was a problem. A private patient had been nasty to a medical officer in the Blood bank of the General Hospital and issue of blood to private patients was banned. A lady medical officer had a brilliant idea that since Castle Street Maternity Hospital was not under the purview of the Superintendent of the General Hospital, they could be approached. Again the Medical officer there gave the blood “gladly and willingly” for the great surgeon.

He was a true friend and never flinched in his duty, which to him was more sacred than his personal life or comfort. Dr. Batho had made arrangements to go to London for treatment of his renal failure; the appointment with his doctor in London had been made and even his flight arranged. Herbert Tennakoon, who was at that time Governor of the Central Bank and a close friend, unaware of Dr. Batho's problems, had sought advice regarding a perianal abscess, which needed immediate incision. Without hesitation, Dr. Batho had arranged the surgery, postponing his trip and rescheduling his appointment with his doctor in London. Mr. Tennakoon was in complete ignorance of the personal sacrifice made by his friend.

In spite of his infirmity, his commitment to his patients

was extreme. This was an era when surgeons were at a premium and Batho could have been arrogant and laid down the rules. He had scheduled a patient for a thyroidectomy and on that day he had dialysis and bled from his peptic ulcer. Nora, his wife had wanted their friend and doctor to be at the operation to see that nothing went wrong. Dr. Laddie Fernando his anaesthetist had agreed to say that he wanted the extra doctor to help with intubation in case Batho queried why she was there. However, Batho had been glad to have an extra pair of hands to help, and the operation had taken over double the usual time, but had been as meticulous as ever [6].

Noel Crusz, a former priest who assisted in the Direction of the movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai”, himself a patient with chronic kidney disease, on a radio talk show in Australia on kidney diseases: “In a Sri Lankan hospital in Colombo some years ago, I was setting up my camera and lights to film a major surgical operation. It was for a brilliant Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, London. His name was Noel Bartholomeusz. 'Sorry', he said, as he walked late into the theatre, 'I was on dialysis at home.' Throughout the years, he had lost normal kidney function, and here he was now to begin a five hour operation on the jaw of a young man” [10].

Somewhere in 1972, I was pleasantly surprised to get a call from Dr. Batho, wanting to see me regarding a problem. His radio cephalic fistula had clotted and he wanted to know whether I could re establish flow. After much discussion, I advised him to go to London and meet his surgeon Mr Ossie Fernando. I am glad I did this as I was not aware then as I am now that the correct treatment for this is to create a Brachio cephalic fistula and not to try and recanalize it.

I firmly believe that all Professionals must “plan for retirement” and that early in life they must cultivate interests and hobbies they could indulge later in life. These interests could be in fine arts like music theatre,

painting, writing, reading, or sport, travel, gardening, photography, religion etc. Surgery was not the only interest in Noel's life. He had a passion for fine arts, the theatre and classical music. Collecting antiques was another of his interests as was pet animals. His other less spoken of hobby was fishing. His love for orchids is of course, legendary. Everyone who knew him had nothing but praise for bar he set for his ethical standards. "Soft spoken", "gentleman surgeon par excellence", "generous to a fault", "if you got late you insulted not only your anaesthetists but also your patient", "Gentle and kind", are some of the quotes that described him. Finally, his wife Nora said of him "Although, from time to time, he may have had differences with a few people, he never allowed this to cloud his judgment. He had no enemies".

This inaugural oration meant to honour Noel Bartholomeusz for the magnificent gift of his house to the College is not complete if we do not also recognize others who were instrumental in setting the process off and in unraveling the legal tangles involved in such an exercise. There were three trustees, Ms Anne Ranasinghe, Dr. Vimala Navaratnam and Professor Harsha Seneviratne, together with Mr. M. Senathiraja of Ms. Julius and Creasy, a well known and respected law firm. If not for their cooperation and tireless work, this gift may not have become a reality.

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