

“FRIENDS ARE FLOWERS IN THE GARDEN OF LIFE”

LATE PROF. CHARLES SANTIAPILLAI

MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND

(PERSONALLY KNOWN TO THE WRITER AS “RANJAN”)



About a fortnight ago, one of the brightest stars in my life, ‘Ranjan’ (Prof. Charles Santiapillai), faded away into the darkness. Today I am reflecting on my memories of him, and what he left behind.

It is indeed very hard for me to write a tribute to my dear friend Ranjan who died on 29th October 2014. Ranjan and I were classmates, great pals, and studied at St. Patrick’s College, Jaffna. Patricians worldwide would remember, it was only a few months ago, both Ranjan and I, wrote tributes to another friend and classmate of ours Eugene Sittampalam who died in Canada. I never ever realized that Ranjan would leave me so soon.

As I have mentioned above, it is extremely hard to put on paper the sweet memories of my long long friendship with my dear friend Ranjan. However, I wish to touch briefly on the funeral service held in Kandy on 2nd November 2014. Initially, as my health condition was not satisfactory, I decided to stay at home and pray for the soul of my dear friend. But my niece, ‘Chitrani’ who knew about our close friendship, insisted that I should pay my last respects, and volunteered to take me to Kandy. She did and may God bless her. Incidentally, Chitrani was married to Ranjan’s first cousin Rajasekaran who died just an year ago!.

In Kandy, it was hard for me to see Ranjan lying motionless in that casket. A man who was walking the jungles of ‘Udawalawe’ and ‘Yala’ a few months ago on his research on Elephants, was lying at complete rest. It took a while for me to accept God’s will. With the Grace and Strength from the Merciful Lord, I conducted the “Vigil Service” on behalf of the Alumni Association of St. Patrick’s College, Jaffna, Colombo Branch, in which Ranjan was a Life Member. It was of immense satisfaction for me to see the entire family members, relatives, friends and University Students



joining me in the ‘Vigil Service.’ That day was another sad day as I had to face saying goodbye for the final time for a very close friend who was a tremendous influence in my life. There are people who come into your life and touch it immediately. I have had many friends throughout my life but many have come and gone as time passed but for my friend Ranjan it was very different. Ranjan, I did what I did, for your soul. I am positive you are with the Lord in Heaven. In the end, at the request of those present, I sang that very popular hymn “Adaikalamae” composed by my uncle, late organist Mr. Joseph Andrew of Our Lady of Refuge, Jaffna.



Though Ranjan did not take active part in the activities of the Colombo OBA, he was prepared to render any help that was needed. In fact, after I weaned off from active participation in the OBA, Ranjan suggested that we two take over the Association’s Popular News Bulletin “Bottled Sunshine” and help the Association. Well, it was not to be with Ranjan leaving me so suddenly. I add this paragraph to clear any misconception some of the members of the Association may have had of late Ranjan.

I learned many things on the day of the funeral about my friend as I listened to his son Praveen speak of him. You could see how much Ranjan meant to the family and how they all looked up to him. They loved him as he loved them and you could see how tight knit they were. It is always nice to hear family speak so lovingly as they grieve. It touches your heart and makes you proud. I embraced Anoma his wife, son Praveen and daughter Shyama as I tried to offer some words to console them. My heart is truly hurting as I feel the loss too. It is something we all have to learn to deal with. Losing a close friend makes you start to take stock of your own life and it brings you a step closer to realizing your own mortality.



In the modern world, more and more people are requesting they are cremated after they die, and that their ashes be scattered in their favourite places. Ranjan too seems to have requested that his body too be cremated and the ashes be buried in their family grave in Jaffna. Accordingly, the family members, relatives and friends took the ashes to Jaffna on 6th November 2014 and buried the ashes in the family grave after a service at the College Chapel where Ranjan prayed throughout his school career.

“Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.”

“Our wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance. It will not matter what we owned or what we were owed.” “Our grudges, resentments, frustrations, and jealousies will finally disappear. So too, our hopes, ambitions, plans, and to-do lists will expire.”

“What will matter”?

**What will matter is not what we bought, but what we built. Not what we got, but what we gave.”
“What will matter is not our success, but our significance. What will matter is not we learned, but what we taught”**

Ranjan, you have lived your whole life doing “What matters” and you have pleased God. I am positive you are with the Lord enjoying eternal happiness in His Kingdom.

In conclusion, I pray for his wife Anoma, son Praveen and daughter Shyama to be comforted at this very sad and difficult time. Ranjan would want his family and friends to live their lives and to just cherish the times shared but not to feel sad or to lose hope. He would want them to carry on as usual. That was Ranjan. I also convey my sincere condolences to Ranjan’s brothers Winston, Terry and Raymond. My special thanks to Winston who ensured that all the Holy Sacraments were administered to his brother before his demise.

I also thank Dr. Ravi Muthiah, a classmate and a very good friend of Ranjan, who came down from the United Kingdom to be with Ranjan for more than two weeks, soon after the surgery. Dr. Ravi is a General Practitioner in the UK. He took time off for his friend and family and was a source of great assistance. Another good friend of Ranjan, Bernard Thamotheram from Canada, was in constant touch with me monitoring the progress of Ranjan. I know it is very difficult to bear the irreparable loss, but again, as I have mentioned earlier, death is something that we all have to learn to deal with.

Ranjan, it is indeed hard to say goodbye to you. But the intercession of my classmates like you, Eugene Sittampalam, Percy Emmanuel, Deva Paul and the rest, who have left me so suddenly, will ensure a place for me in the Lord’s Kingdom. God has created each and every one of us to fulfill His Purpose. And until that purpose is fulfilled, He will lead us in this temporary world.

May your soul rest in peace.

Your true Friend

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