

Dr. Adoorvalapil Gangadharan
A Eulogy

by
Win Aung

St. Marys Abbey, Delbarton School
Morristown, New Jersey, USA
December 31, 2002

We are here today because in some way or other we all knew Dr. Gangadharan, or Ganga, as we affectionately called him.

We each have our own perspective, our own personal remembrances of him.

For our dear friend Perla, he was devoted husband; for Sidhu, Vishnu and Seeta, he was beloved father. To Sidhu's two children, Ganga was the benevolent grandfather. To others here, he was friend, colleague, neighbor.

Our lives have been all touched by this remarkable man.

Ganga and I last spoke one week before Christmas. We had planned to celebrate the New Year together, by meeting at my house in Maryland near Washington, D.C.

Before uncorking the champagne, we would take in a show and do some hiking, maybe some biking, in the last remaining days of 2002.

And so, the news of Ganga's passing really shook me up on Christmas Day.

I first knew Ganga in the late 1960's, soon after both of us arrived in New Jersey. Starting as young engineers and raising families with children of similar ages, we had remained close over the years.

Every moment we shared was a joy because he was a thoughtful, easy-going, mild-mannered man who was always an inspiration to me.

This past weekend, I found myself going over the photos I took of him, his family and friends, over the years.

The latest photos were taken earlier this year at the wedding of Vishnu in Port St. Lucie in Florida, and of Seeta in Sausalito, California.

As I looked at these images, I marveled at how Ganga had kept so many friends for so long.

It was clear to me that Ganga was genuinely devoted to them, and they to him.

What was it in Ganga that made it so?

I started to think about his legacy.

Born in Kanpur, India and educated in Madras, India and Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A., Ganga was an eclectic man with many accomplishments, a man who plowed new grounds, wherever he happened to be.

Professional. Giving of himself. Helpful to others. Dignified. Optimistic. Loyal. Devoted to family and friends. Proud Father and Grandfather. Unassuming. Outdoorsman. Community leader.

These are all descriptions that applied well to this man, one who had etched a profound impression on most people who knew him.

To me, he was the quintessential all-around man, someone who was able to do many things well. Innovative and unconventional, he was a bird that would continue to fly into the night.

Today, engineering educators are looking for a shift in the teaching of engineering, in order to broaden it, so that engineering graduates are prepared to do many things during their careers. In this respect, Ganga was ahead of his time.

Hired by the Foster-Wheeler Corp. in the late 1960's, he rose to become a senior executive.

He was active in civic and community affairs, serving as a member and former president of the Parsippany-Troy Hills Board of Education, and was a past president of the Morris County Board of Education.

He loved to work with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and was an officer in the Association for Indians in America.

An avid tennis player with a mean back-hand, I was at the short end of many friendly matches with him.

For a number of years, we played poker regularly, though I suspected that he did it to keep us company rather than for the love of the game.

In poker as in life, win or lose, he never lost his cool, and never spoke ill of another person.

One of Ganga's favorite poets was the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 and one of modern India's greatest poets.

I would like to close by quoting from one of Tagore's poems, one about a solitary bird flying in the evening sky.

And I quote:

“Even though slow and sluggish
evening comes,
and stops as with a gesture
your song;
even though you are alone
in the infinite sky,
and your body weary,
and in terror you utter
a silent *mantra*
to horizons hidden by the veil-
bird, O my bird,
though it is darkening,
do not fold your wings.”

Ganga, I know you will not fold your wings.

Good bye, and thank you for your friendship.