

## Dr. Riley Fernando

I shall pass this way but once –  
any good that I can do  
any kindness that I can show,  
to any being or living creature,  
let me do it now –  
let me not defer it or neglect it –  
for I shall not pass this way again.

This quotation was left on the consultation table of Dr. Riley Fernando, Family Physician, poet and satirist, who passed away on 14 June 2003 following a brief illness, a few months after his 75 birthday.

Riley was the son of a postmaster and his wife who had eight illustrious children, among whom were a University professor, a Bishop and three medical doctors. He studied in Trinity College, Kandy where he won the Prince of Wales scholarship and passed the Senior Schools Certificate Examination with exemption from the London matriculation. He entered the University of Ceylon at 18 years and graduated with MBBS at 23 years of age in 1951.

After 2 years of service in the Department of Health he assumed duties at the Co-operative Hospital, Kurunegala. In 1955 he started his own practice and established the first private maternity home in the North Western Province. He was a founder member of the College of General Practitioners in Sri Lanka and the President of the Kurunegala Clinical Society 1970-1971. He authored an instructive and useful book titled "Motherhood and baby care".

He was very religious and served for several years as a warden of cathedral of Christ the King, Kurunegala. He also served in many other religious and social organisations in Kurunegala. After 22 years in Kurunegala he moved to Dehiwala, where he started a medical practice.

He inserted the now famous obituary in *Ceylon Daily News* in April 1974 when the press was gagged by the then regime.

"DEMO'CRACY, beloved husband of T. Ruth, loving father of L. I. Bertie, brother of Faith, Hope and Justitia. Interred on Saturday, 20th inst. – Araliya Medura, Panagiyawatte, Anduruwella". There were references to this in the *Readers Digest* and the international press.

He wrote regularly to newspapers both in prose and verse, and took part in the newspaper captions and crossword puzzles. Amitha Abeyskera in his column. "This is my Island" once described him as a "wit, literary innovator, versifier and satirist". He published an anthology of his poems titled "Rhymes of our times". His other interests were contract bridge, music and ballroom dancing. He was a live wire in the Trinity College over sixty club.

I met Riley at the Medical Centre of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, where he served his final stint until he passed away. He was an ideal doctor, he was up to date in his knowledge, meticulous in his work, compassionate and firm. There was no limit to the length he went to assist his patients. Being his junior for 30 years was no barrier to the friendly relationship we had. He had been mentor and friend to many at the Medical Centre. He was always with company. The smile he always had remained even after his death.

He leaves behind his wife Manel, who also shared his sense of humour, and two sons Rohan and Malin. The epilogue in the book of poems he published reads as follows:

"And when the final trumpet calls  
to beckons me hereafter  
may I depart with a happy heart  
and a face lit up with laughter"

May he rest in peace!

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