

Solly Marks

It is with sadness I learnt of Prof. Marks's death; with his passing we have lost a giant of a man, a physician-scientist known internationally, held in great respect and with affection by so many, but whose spirit will be perpetuated by his numerous former trainees who now hold high position in many parts of the world, and by the superb department of gastroenterology he created at the Groote Schuur University Hospital in Cape Town.

I first met him in October 1976 at the 2nd H2RA conference at the Royal College of Physicians, London. Prof. I. N. Marks was already a key figure in the world of acid secretion and peptic ulcer; my "mental picture" was of a formidable person, perhaps somewhat distant. I was but a starter, so was surprised and humbled when a delightful jovial person asked how I was getting on, having introduced himself as "Solly". It then dawned on me that I. N. Marks was this very man – and felt very humbled.

Since then we met at various meetings and he would unfailingly give me encouragement and advice (which I certainly needed!). I felt greatly honoured when Solly asked me to join him in a lecture tour through South Africa (January 1991), an experience from which I learnt a great deal.

The trip had its amusing moments! He took me on a tour around Cape Town before I was to meet medical students in the afternoon and showed me Pollsmoor prison, where Nelson Mandela had been jailed. I was struck by its remarkable logo so took photographs – whereupon a couple of large angry guards appeared out of nowhere (yelling at me in Afrikaans), arrested me and marched me to the prison's commanding officer. After much pleading by Solly, the commander finally understood

I was not a journalist. Ultimately I was released – but terrified! At the major presentation next evening, he introduced me as “a recently released prisoner” – no, not Nelson Mandela but a friend from the UK!

It was a great honour to do a short sabbatical at Groote Schuur (end-2005). Despite the innumerable difficulties, the gastroenterologists performed wonders, all the more impressive for they were so young and inexperienced. “Inspiring” is an insufficient description: what I witnessed was the extraordinary achievements possible when a small group is united in purpose and driven by a shared passion. We used to have this in Rotherham in my younger days and I felt a terrible pang of having lost something precious. But the Cape Town experience reinvigorated me to continue with my work in retirement.

The achievements at Groote Schuur were made possible in no small measure by the leadership and inspiration Solly provided, his lasting testimonial.

My friend, Rest in Peace.

Yours, with deep respect and in admiration,

Chandu

Professor K D Bardhan

Consultant Physician & Gastroenterologist