

A FOND ADIEU TO OSMUND JAYARATNE

Joyce Jayaratne

"Like the dew on the mountain
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain
Thou art gone and forever."

-Sir W. Scott

The saddest day of my life dawned on the 31st of August 2006 when Osmund breathed his last and departed from this world. The funeral took place on the 3rd of September. All that occurred during this period is etched and will remain forever in my mind.

It is not my intention to repeat here all that has been said in the speeches made and articles published in the newspapers extolling the life and work of my late husband. I would merely state that his life was a dedication to the upliftment of humanity in the fields of politics, science and education. Glowing tributes have been expressed by people from all walks of life – from the President of Sri Lanka down to the poor farmer in the deep south in a village called Hathporuwa in Tissamaharama. They all reiterated the value of the service and contributions made by Osmund during his lifetime, and mourned the loss of a true patriot of this country. To me it was a loss of a dear husband, friend and companion. Many were the trials and losses which dotted out lives, but we faced our tomorrows with fortitude with the knowledge that we had each other.

Osmund and I shared an interest in literature and music which we both enjoyed. I have gathered much information from his conversations which enriched my knowledge of science and politics. Recorded CDs and cassettes sent to him by his former students now working in the USA kept him updated about the happenings in the scientific world. He was fascinated with the vastness of the universe containing millions of galaxies. Our own galaxy, the 'Milky Way' was of special interest to him and he would listen enthralled to any scientific discovery made by astronomers and astronauts probing outer space.

Turning his attention to our known world, he enjoyed the beauty of nature, but deplored man's inhumanity to man. He always stood for justice and equality. Even in the early years he would observe certain injustices in the treatment of different categories of people. For example, the rich lived in comfortable houses and traveled in cars, while the poor laboured and toiled for a pittance, living in little huts and walking barefoot on the streets. Such a situation was unacceptable to Osmund. We were students then

and he would talk to me about these matters which greatly influenced my thinking. It surprised me to know that my views and ideas were the same as his. I admired his dedication to change the order of things in the society in which we lived. It was his firm belief that everyone had the right to claim in the words of Karl Marx, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." (It is significant that a similar reference is found in Acts 4 v.34 of the Bible) Such an era has yet to dawn, and perhaps it will in the not-too-distant future.

Osmund was happiest in the company of his colleagues, friends and students whom he loved. He would warmly welcome them whenever they visited us in our little home. Their response of love and regard expressed at the funeral was overwhelming. I am deeply grateful to all those who supported and assisted me in my time of grief.

In passing, I am sure that Osmund would have liked to leave behind a message to all of us and especially to the youth of this country, from a quotation by the poet H.W. Longfellow:

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.
Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

It is not an unknown fact that Osmund was an excellent actor. Even as an undergrad and after, he took a lead part in many of the plays directed by Prof. Lyn Ludowyk. These plays enacted in English became popular social events among the English-speaking population in Colombo and also in Kandy and Galle. His best performance was the role he played in *The Father* by Strindberg. Osmund particularly revelled in the plays written by Shakespeare, and had played the part of Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*. He would often recite with passionate fervour, some passages which he had memorized. In conclusion I would like to express my own sentiments by repeating from *Hamlet*, just a line which Osmund loved to quote:

"Goodnight sweet Prince, and may flights
Of angels sing thee to thy rest..." ■