



Siu Chuan Y. Leh, MD (1935-2013)

“When Giants Pass”

Frederick O. Leh, MD

When giants pass, they leave giant footprints and giant shoes to fill. Dr. Leh Siu Chuan passed away last August 2013, after suffering multi-organ failure following a stroke secondary to sick sinus syndrome. In life, he was a fighter, refusing to give up the ghost for three years and three months, living in an intensive care unit at the hospital he spent his life serving and loving.

Siu Chuan Y. Leh was born in Manila August 22, 1935, the third generation of Chinese immigrants from the Fukien Province in China. He was the second child in a brood of 12, easily the brightest child and the apple of his father’s eye. He completed his medical studies at the pontifical University of Santo Tomas. During the ignominious Vietnam War of the 60’s, he was able to get a position for a residency position in Otolaryngology at the University of Pennsylvania, and trained under the venerable Dr. Atkins, a protégé of both Dr. Jackson, Sr. and Dr. Tucker of endoscopic fame. He had to leave his family behind – his wife Benita Leh, and three children – Shirley, Frederick and Sandra. On his second year of training, he sent for his wife and son, Frederick who would later follow in his footsteps as an otolaryngologist.

Life was difficult during that time for a married resident. He received a stipend of only \$200 a month and had to moonlight in emergency rooms on weekends to make ends meet. When he finally completed his residency and passed the American Board of Otolaryngology exams, he gave up a possible lucrative partnership with his mentor to go back to the Philippines to serve his countrymen.

Dr. Leh was invited to the Chinese General Hospital and Medical Center, and served prominently as its brightest Ear Nose and Throat practitioner. He became well-known in the Chinese community, taking time to hold clinic in Ong’s Association Building along Benavidez in Chinatown. He later served as Chinese General Hospital’s Executive Assistant Medical Director until his health started to fail. He was also active in the Philippine Otolaryngology scene, serving continuously as a Board Examiner, much feared by examinees for his strict and no-nonsense grilling of would-be diplomats. Dr. Leh rose rapidly through the ranks to become President of the Philippine Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery. Under his watch, the PSOHNS expanded exponentially, gaining many new member hospitals and programs. He organized and professionalized the criteria for the accreditation program, ensuring high quality from all applicant programs.

With all the *kudos*, fame and fortune, Dr. Leh was still not done. He was asked to take over a fledgling Tzu Chi Philippine Chapter, part of a Taiwanese Buddhist Foundation seeking to bring relief to the poor of the world. Dr. Leh organized and founded TIMA (the Tzu Chi International Medical Missions and Assistance), which later became the model for other medical missions in the world. For this Dr. Leh was awarded many times by Tzu Chi Foundation. His dream continues as the TIMA continues to treat thousands of people daily, and will soon open a clinic and perhaps a hospital to serve the less fortunate.

Dr. Leh Siu Chuan is survived by his wife of 54 years, Benita Leh and two doctor sons: Patrick, an orthopaedic surgeon and Frederick, an otolaryngologist; and two daughters: Shirley, an auditor in New York and Sandra, district manager for E. Excel Pharmaceuticals of Taiwan. He will live on in the memory of his colleagues and loved ones and all who had the good fortune of knowing him.