

# Myint Myint Khin

Legendary Burmese doctor and teacher, and later a poet

**Myint Myint Khin (b 1923; q University of Rangoon, Burma, 1950; FRCP), had been in ill health for much of the past two years and died 19 June 2014.**

In early 1985 Myint Myint Khin was mired in a deep personal crisis. She was devastated by the recent death of her husband of more than 30 years, and her only son was locked up in political detention with no charge and no trial. So at 61 years of age, after 19 years of chairing the department of medicine at the University of Medicine in Mandalay, she retired early and left Burma.

Her first stop was as consultant at the National University of Malaysia. After a few months she was named as consultant in the World Health Organization's Southeast Asia regional office in New Delhi, India, where she spent nearly seven years. During those grieving years she began writing English language poetry, often focusing on her departed husband. In one, she writes:

But close to my heart is a treasure trove,  
To draw upon if I chose  
Happiness shared, joys that glow  
And tenderness, I only know

"I wrote poems because I could not bear *not* to write them," Myint Myint Khin said in a newspaper interview in March 2013, when her book of collected poems, *Poetry For Me*, was unveiled at a ceremony at the Myanmar Medical Association in Rangoon, Burma.<sup>1</sup> Writing poetry, she said, was an outlet for her "sentimental and emotive" side, a part of her personality that she admitted had been repressed decades earlier as a university teacher and administrator.

"I was very aggressive and abrasive," she admitted.

Myint Myint Aye, a retired chair of the department of medicine at University of Medicine, Mandalay, says of her elder colleague. "She had a strong personality and always spoke up to whoever contradicted her, including high government officials. No one could persuade her to change her decision. She also was a strict disciplinarian who made the junior staff and students fearful of her."

But Myint Myint Khin also was widely respected for her excellent lectures and informative clinical bedside teachings, says Myint Myint Aye, adding: "She recruited young graduates with promising potential and built the strongest department of medicine in Burma which produced hundreds



and thousands of doctors meeting the international standard. These doctors are now not only serving Burma, but all over the world."

Myint Myint Khin was born on 15 December 1923 in Bassein, Burma, which is now called Patheingyi. The oldest of three children, she grew up in the town of Henzada and as a teenager moved to Rangoon. In the 2013 newspaper interview, she said that during the years of the second world war and after she had to "overcome tremendous adversity," including "anguish at the deaths" of her brother and mother, and loss of property. Her son, Myint Zan, who ended up spending 10 months in detention and is now a law professor at Multimedia University, Malacca, says that his mother's brother "was hit by a bomb... my mother told me that she had to go and retrieve their dead brother's body."

"My life has not been paved with flowers," Myint Myint Khin said, adding: "I think I might not have survived if I had not suppressed the positive side of my personality at those times. But those sentimentalities and emotions that I have concealed came out in this poetry book."

She studied English language and literature at the University of Rangoon, developing a deep appreciation of the poetry of John Donne. After earning her bachelors degree in 1946, she studied medicine at the same university, qualifying in 1950. Her first posting was as civil assistant surgeon at Rangoon General Hospital.

In 1953 she married San Baw, who would become chief of orthopaedic surgery at Mandalay General Hospital and who pioneered the use of ivory hip prostheses to replace ununited fractures of the neck of the femur.<sup>2</sup>

Myint Myint Khin acquired additional training at the University of Pennsylvania school of medicine in Philadelphia, USA, in 1956, and at the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh.

In 1960 she was appointed clinical professor of medicine at the then Institute of Medicine in Mandalay. She was promoted to chair of the department of medicine in 1965. In a 1967 *BMJ* article on medicine in Burma, she is mentioned as the lone female professor of general medicine of the three Burmese medical schools.<sup>3</sup> But the article notes that in Britain there was only one female professor among 27 medical schools. During the 1980s she served on the WHO panel of experts in health manpower development.

After her return to Burma from New Delhi in 1992, she remained active until her death and was respectfully addressed as "Mummy Gyi," or "our elder mummy."

Thane Oke Kyaw-Myint, a retired paediatrician and founder of the Alumni Myanmar Institutes of Medicine Association, says the Burmese medical community felt a "reverence and admiration" for Myint Myint Khin and looked up to her as a role model.

"She really was larger than life in our eyes," he says.

She was a member of the Myanmar Medical Association, serving as chair and as a member of two of its boards, and wrote for the *Burma Medical Journal*. In 1996 she began writing books on topics such as living with cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. The author of 11 books in Burmese and two in English—including her vision of how medicine should develop in Burma—she also developed handbooks and audio tapes as study aids for medical students. She was the founder of a support group for elderly doctors in Rangoon.

She also continued to voice her opinions strongly. "She had openly written articles in the newspapers on what was wrong with educational systems in Burma, never hesitating to openly criticise the present and the past governments, a stand that very few of us could or dare to do so publicly," says Thane Oke Kyaw-Myint.

In September 2011 and nearly 90 years old, she wrote a poem about her impending death, titled "Don't grieve for me when I am gone," which included a reference to "countless sojourns in the universe and beyond."

Myint Myint Khin leaves a son.

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References are in the version on thebmj.com.

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## Patricia Barron



**Former general practitioner (b 1923, q University College Hospital, London, 1946; MRCS), d 16 July 2014.**

Patricia Barron (née Chippendale, and known as "Pat") met Peter Barron during training, and they were married in 1949 in Dedham, while he was stationed with the Royal Army Medical Corps. The couple established a general practice in Kinson, Bournemouth, where they lived "above the shop" and raised their children. Pat ran a flourishing practice, having meetings round the kitchen table with the secretaries, nurses, and other paramedical staff. Her carefully documented medical notes were always annotated with details such as "Don't forget to ask about the grandchild." Pat was a feminist, proud that three generations of women in her family had graduated from UCH. Predeceased by Peter in 2008, Pat leaves a daughter and two sons.

**Tim Barron**

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## John Blake



**Consultant surgeon (b 1932; q Queens' College, Cambridge/Westminster Hospital 1958; MA, FRCS), died after a myocardial infarct on 1 November 2013.**

John Blake was born in York, the only son of an army family, but spent his early years in India and later did his national service in the Middle East. He was appointed as consultant general and urological surgeon at Mayday Hospital Croydon in 1972, where he worked until he retired in 1994. A meticulous surgeon and a kindly and empathetic

doctor, he was also a popular teacher of medical students and surgical trainees. In his retirement, he took a foundation art course and rediscovered his interest in drawing and painting, but perhaps his greatest distinction was his extensive knowledge and great love of literature, poetry, and history, with an ability to find an apt quote for virtually any situation. John leaves his wife, Helena, and two daughters.

**Helena Blake,**

**Rupert Courtenay-Evans**

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## David James Hunt



**Former general practitioner in Tibshelf, Derbyshire (b 1932; q London Hospital 1957; MRCGP), died from prostate cancer on 20 June 2014.**

After trying general practice in Sheffield, David James Hunt came to Tibshelf in 1961 as an "assistant with view to partnership." He was something of a workaholic: as well as running a busy general practice, he found time to be police surgeon, trainer, chairman of his parish council, secretary of the Chesterfield division of the BMA and, latterly, doctor to the British swimming teams at Barcelona and Atlanta. I was privileged to work with him in partnership from 1974 until he retired in 1992, although he continued to do locum sessions for a few more years. He leaves his wife, Amanda; four children; and five grandchildren.

**Mike Duffield**

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## Barrie Patrick Marmion

**Clinical microbiologist and researcher (b 1920; q 1944; MA (Cantab), DSc Lon, MD Lon, FRCPATH UK, FRS Ed, FRACP, DUniv (Adel)), d 12 July 2014.**

After graduating, Barrie Patrick Marmion joined the Public Health Laboratory Service. He was seconded to Cambridge and the virus reference laboratory

at Colindale. He spent his long and distinguished career in the UK and Australia, and did groundbreaking work in Q fever, mycoplasma pneumonia, and hepatitis. His work contributed to the development of principles of the control of bloodborne viruses. In 1979 he accepted an appointment as senior director at the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science (IMVS) at Adelaide, where he built virology research into one of the leading research groups in the country. An exceptional scientist, highly regarded worldwide both inside and outside the virology sphere, he leaves his wife, Diana; a daughter; and two granddaughters.

**Jon Ayres**

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## Katherine Alice Mercer

**Former assistant psychiatrist Lancaster Moor Hospital (b 1920; q Edinburgh 1946), d 31 July 2014.**

Katherine Alice Mercer started an arts course at Edinburgh University but changed to medicine as she saw it being more use to other people than the arts. In those days, it was always men who were appointed to the prestigious early teaching hospital jobs. This angered Katherine so much that she complained to the professor of surgery. She was predictably waved away gruffly. After she graduated, however, the same professor invited her to be his house surgeon for two of his four wards. Having married and brought up three children while doing various medical jobs, she later trained in psychiatry and worked the rest of her professional life in a large mental hospital. Katherine leaves her husband, Douglas Young; three children; and six grandchildren.

**Anna France**

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## Elizabeth Gentles Sloan

**General practitioner and former missionary doctor (b 1914; q Edinburgh 1938), died from cardiac failure on 6 December 2013.**

Elizabeth Gentles Higgins ("Betty") was appointed by Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee to the Christina Rainy Hospital, Madras (now Chennai), India, in 1939. She married her fiancé, Tom Sloan, on 28 March 1941. Because of the second world war, the couple were



unable to return to the UK until 1946. Betty resumed medical practice on 1 April 1958. Tom was working with the Leprosy Mission in Nigeria, and Betty was appointed acting medical superintendent at the Mary Slessor Hospital, Itu, Nigeria, from May 1965 to February 1966. On their return to the UK in 1966, she took up an occupational health post. In 1977 Betty and Tom retired. She leaves three children, nine grandchildren, and 16 great grandchildren.

**Melanie Sloan, Robin Sloan, Evelyn Wood**

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## Muragasu Suntharalingam



**Former consultant care of the elderly physician Worthing (b 1938; q University of Colombo 1964; FRCP), died from complications of Parkinson's disease on 8 August 2014.**

Muragasu Suntharalingam ("Sunny Lingam") was born in Malaysia but moved to Sri Lanka at the age of 7, where he spent the rest of his childhood. He studied medicine at the University of Colombo and completed several junior posts in Sri Lanka before moving to the UK in 1970. His training took him and his family to Edinburgh, Exeter, Ipswich, and London, before he took up his post at Worthing Hospital in 1977. Sunny developed services throughout his working life, both in the NHS and in the charitable sector, and was recognised for this both locally and regionally. He retired in 2003 but was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease shortly after. He leaves his wife, Devi; three children; and two grandchildren.

**Jay Suntharalingam**

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