Roland Kazen M.D. 1936–2009

After a short illness Roland Kazen passed away on January 11, 2009. One of the outstanding reconstructive surgeons in the field of leprosy, Roland was born in Switzerland on the 4th October 1936 to a British father and a Swedish mother but the family soon moved back to Stockholm when Roland was about 3 years old.

He studied sociology and medicine and worked as a general surgeon. In his youth he joined the Stockholm Adventist Church where he met, and later married, the pastor’s daughter, Birgitta. In 1976 the family, now with three children, moved to Sierra Leone where Roland became the Medical Director at Masanga Leprosy Hospital, a government hospital, run by the Adventist Church. In Masanga Roland had the opportunity not only to serve his patients with his unique abilities as a surgeon, but also to share his knowledge with young medical students. In 1990 he moved his family to ALERT in Addis Ababa where Roland took up his responsibility as the surgical department head and became actively involved in the training of doctors attending courses there. For 13 years he successfully trained many doctors and physical therapists from all over Africa, South America and Asia. Roland and Birgitta stayed in ALERT until 2002 at which time Roland retired and they moved back to Sweden. Even in ‘retirement’, Roland spent 6 months every year travelling to many countries to train surgeons in reconstructive and rehabilitative surgery – an activity that Roland maintained regularly until just before he fell ill.

Among all the qualities that Roland had as a great surgeon and a wonderful human being, there is one characteristic that stood out: his love of music. He was a remarkable organist, harpsichordist and flutist. His deep knowledge and sensibility to music, the divine language, was translated into soft and gentle wording as a teacher and to the precise and subtle movement of his hands while operating.

In late January 2009 a memorial service was held in his memory, and it would be opportune to quote a paragraph from a letter prepared by one of his friends, Mrs. Yvonne Johansson Oster:

The long-ranging impact of the life of Roland Kazen was shown at his funeral and during the following memorial wake. Besides the flood of condolences from all over the world, and the fully packed church, the group of seven Sierraleonians who had come...
from the UK to pay their respects, gave us who were present, a deeper perspective on mission and the missionary lives of Birgitta and Roland in Africa. Now successful professionals, these former co-workers, patients and students from the Masanga area demonstrated in a powerful way how life-changing their meeting with the Christian mission and the Kazens had been. So a sad moment became a celebration to a life given in service to his Lord.

Mrs. Kazen has asked me to include in this message her appreciation to all of Roland’s colleagues, former students and patients, for all their kind and comforting words of sympathy to her and Roland’s family in this time of sorrow. She also expressed the wish that God may bless all in their work for those who suffer from leprosy. Indeed, Roland’s life has changed the life of many patients and students that were served by his skills. He held the conviction that it was God’s grace and power that made all this possible. He has had a rich life and we remain with the consolation that we had the privilege to get to know Roland while he lived here on this earth.

MARCOS VIRMOND, MD. Ph.D.