

By KIRANMAYE JAYARAMAN

MY FATHER Dr Jayaraman Munusamy – or Nana as we children call him – turned 86 on March 22. What a life he has led! From his humble beginnings in Parit Buntar, Perak to his present abode in Kuala Lumpur, his journey has been nothing short of amazing.

Nana started his life in 1938 on a tragic note: His mother died shortly after his birth. My grandfather was devastated.

Thankfully, Nana's paternal grandmother was still alive, hale and hearty, so she raised him.

My grandfather, who was working for the British at that time, was offered a promotion which took him to Kuala Lumpur, leaving behind his son with the grandmother. Nana grew up mostly with his cousins, not knowing the love of a mother or the physical presence of a father to guide him. Nana also witnessed and experienced the Japanese invasion of Malaya which put a stop to his schooling.

My grandfather remarried when Nana was 10. His stepmother could not conceive and, after many years of failed attempts, they finally adopted a newborn baby from a Chinese family. Nana adored his baby sister.

Fast-forward to the 1950s when Nana left for India to further his studies. It was his father's dream to see his son graduate as a doctor, since my grandfather was not able to further his own studies due to family obligations. Little did my grandfather know that Nana was going to bring home a medical degree and a wife. Medical school was where Nana met his future wife.

We laughed upon hearing stories about Nana the atheist. I guess when your mother is snatched away from you even before you could bond and experience a mother's love, you wouldn't believe in God either. Nana's grandmother would fret every time they went to the temple because Nana would never enter the premises, preferring to stand outside while his grandmother finished her prayers.

Amma, on the other hand, is a devout Hindu. Over the years, with Amma's influence and after witnessing many miracles in his life, Nana finally made the leap to the other side. He doesn't stand outside temples with a

Honouring Father's legacy

The writer pays tribute to her first love on the occasion of his 86th birthday.



The writer, then aged four months, with her parents. — Photos: KIRANMAYE JAYARAMAN



Dr M. Jayaraman receiving his AMN title from the Yang DiPertuan Agong in 1976 for his contributions as the first Rukun Tetangga chairman in the country.

grumpy look on his face anymore.

After I was born, Nana set up his own clinic in Jalan Raja Laut,

Kuala Lumpur, despite facing objections from many, as the area was known to be a gangsters' haunt. Both Nana and

Amma established their practice very quickly and earned loyal patients.

Apart from running his private practice, Nana was also very active in politics. He made headlines as the man who took on the challenge to become the first Rukun Tetangga chairman in the country. Through the community's efforts, led by him, Kampung Kasipillay was spruced up and transformed into a safe neighbourhood.

Our house served as a hub for all sorts of charitable acts. I remember one night a few houses in the neighbourhood caught fire. Nana promptly reached the scene and managed to get help to prevent the fire from spreading. He brought the victims to our home to spend the night and didn't go to work the next day till the families' needs were addressed and they were sent to a shelter house.

Nana was an active member of Parti Gerakan for decades, working closely with many of the presidents, leading and garnering consecutive victories for the party in the Batu constituency during the federal elections.

He later joined PPP and served as an active member for some time. He held countless chairman positions in the community and in various societies and organisations. He also served in one of the boards in DBKL for more than 30 years.

Nana is known throughout the community and the political domain as a pillar of integrity, a beacon of honour and a steadfast guardian of principles. Nana embodies the values of honesty, compassion and dignity in everything he did. He set high standards, which he himself always met.

From a young age, my siblings and I were taught the importance of living according to principles by Nana, who instilled in us a deep sense of integrity. As I grew older, I carried these lessons with me.

Nana taught me to stand up for what was right in the face of adversity.

Through all his charitable acts, he taught me to lend a helping hand to those in need. He and Amma funded the higher educa-

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tion of many impoverished children. They were generous with their time and services and provided financial assistance to those in need. They were known to provide free medical treatment to those who could not afford to pay.

Nana is also known for his unwavering kindness, support, steadfast wisdom and deep unconditional love for his family. Every time I try to explain the term "unconditional love" to someone, I would end up using my father as an example. He never attached a price to the love he gave to those who mattered to him. The sacrifices he made, the dreams and aspirations buried and forgotten, and all the emotional and physical pain he endured have made him the man that he is.

Nana would always give, never receive. He always went the extra mile for his children.

Despite growing up without a mother, and without a father around to guide him, he still found it in his heart to love others unconditionally – yet he was often repaid with acts of disloyalty and deceit, betrayed by those he loved wholeheartedly, mostly for wealth and monetary gains.

He is my whole world, even though I might not have expressed it often in recent years. Nana was my guiding light, and a beacon of strength and love. I have unabashedly told my husband and children that my first love will always be my father.

His was a life well-lived, a life defined by principles, integrity and unconditional love.

I know I have disappointed my father many times over the years. I hope he has found it in his heart to forgive me. I wish nothing but the best for the man who gave me life and gave meaning to my life.

Nana, we may have disagreed and had heated arguments over many issues but my love for you has never dimmed. I pray you will continue to enjoy good health, age gracefully and live long enough to see your grandchildren honouring you in the future. – Your *chitti amma* (little one)