

Tribute for Prof. Hassan Saidi

Usually it is the death of a close blood relative that invokes, in most men a deep sense of loss and grief. But Prof. Saidi or Prof as I referred to him was not a blood relative. He was my mentor and my friend there are days he was to me a father figure.

My first interaction with Prof. was in 2011 as a first year medical student. This is similar to most other mentees in the audience. It began with a tough anatomy question. The thing about Prof. was his ability to catch you off-guard every single time you had an academic encounter. Mine was no different, we had just started our neuroanatomy dissection sessions and this enigmatic Professor was quick to stop me as I walked out of the dissection lab. He enquired what I learned that day and being the good anatomy student I was, I quickly gave an outline of the functional localization of the brain, complete with Brodmann's numbers. His next question was one I wasn't prepared for: asking me to localize the septal area and the nucleus accumbens and further state the functions. From that encounter I would spend the entire week reading preparing for our next meeting along the anatomy department corridors.

Fast forward to Prof. as my supervisor for my Intercalated anatomy degree. He was quite the supervisor, always available for consultation, reading through the drafts and offering valuable input. But those who've had him as their supervisor would know that his favourite question was: So What? I remember my first proposal. Being the lead supervisor he asked me to run it through as many eyes as I could before he could have a look at it. This is exactly what I did. On that fateful Thursday afternoon, I handed him the final draft which we would then discuss the following day over a cup of tea at Arziki. Long story short, I have kept that proposal till date. It was a scientific and writing lesson I will never forget. The results of that experience however was a proposal that was approved after the first submission without any corrections, scientific or grammatical, a feat I have not been able to achieve the last few years. Prof. was not only a brilliant mind, his attention to detail and finesse in his work was astounding.

Prof. was a mentor who was always concerned with our wellbeing outside the lecture halls and dissection lab. A fond memory of one such time is a day he popped into the BSc anatomy room before he left for home, something he did without fail every single day. On this particular day he enquired what we had for dinner, fortunately or unfortunately we had not had something to eat. Well I guess it was fortunate because Prof. drove my colleagues and I to an elegant Indian restaurant where he fed us to our fill. He would then drop us to our hostels. For him time with his mentees with something he didn't compromise on. He gave this valuable commodity selflessly.

He was one to show acts of kindness and care even when you least expected it. Prof. was stuck in traffic for 3 hours (something I found out much later) as he made his way to my

graduation ceremony. He did not consider himself too busy for this young man who wanted him to grace his occasion. That day he was not Prof. my mentor, he was Prof. my friend. My family was very moved by his acts of kindness and until his demise Prof. was a common name in our household.

Prof. was not only academic and scientific, he valued social stability and having good relationships with others. A dotting memory is one day Prof and I spent 4 hours seated in his office at Aga Khan (we even ordered some take-out) discussing how I was going to make my relationship work. “Brian these people are important, we need them. Now I need you to stop being cranial about these things, you will have to leave your scientific analytic mind at the department. They want you to be nice calm Brian”, he said.

I knew Prof. for 6 years. Getting a chance not only to work with him at the department of Human anatomy but also the Surgical Society of Kenya and the Annals of African Surgery where I was his intern until his demise. You would expect that this would be sufficient time to identify that there was something that was amiss (considering I am training to be a doctor, a health detective). I think my brain was not ready to accept that something might have been wrong, that he might have been unwell. Furthermore, Prof’s appearance was that of a person in their 30s or 40s. He played basketball often and swam from time to time.

After attending an editorial team meeting, in San Diego, a few months ago. Prof returned and he was unwell. I visited him at his home as often as I could and even got him medication for his chest on one of the visits. The conversation we had then was that he was going to get better and that we needed to go grab some black tea with lemon to squeeze (this was his favourite beverage). I would later be called the following weekend with the sad news that Prof. was not doing well and was admitted. Throughout the period he was ill, I spent almost all my afternoons after class with him. Telling him stories and laughing at how we hadn’t gone for our black tea with lemon to squeeze. He did not cease being a mentor all this time.

Prof. was true to his friends even truer to his principles. We have lost a great mind, a great mentor and teacher.

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