

A MASTER—A FRIEND

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In October 1949, thanks to the British Council, I was lucky enough to take part in an information stay in Great Britain and to participate in a Course on Rehabilitation and Resettlement of the Disabled. I took advantage of some free time to visit the National Spinal Unit at Stoke Mandeville. That was my first contact with Stoke Mandeville and with Dr Guttman. He was small in stature, but always in high spirits, bubbling with enthusiasm and speaking rather curious English (excuse me, Sir!), but which I understood almost without any difficulty, which had not always been the case since I set foot on British soil.

The interest of this visit, though limited, brought me a lot of contacts and a realisation which seemed an example worth following. But, at that time, the young doctor that I was, ignored everything of the 'spinal cases'. The only paralysed I knew were those with poliomyelitis and I devoted myself exclusively to the learning of surgery.

Four years passed by. The Brussels Centre of Traumatology and Rehabilitation had been in activity for 3½ years by now and my Chief, Dr P. Houssa, hit upon the idea of nursing the paralytics as he had seen it done at the National Spinal Unit at Stoke Mandeville. The example was so striking and the ties between Dr Houssa and Dr Guttman had grown so close that a sports section had been created in the Brussels C.T.R. which was then still in its trial phase (25 beds).

The enthusiasm of Dr Guttman became obvious to me through Dr Houssa's explanations and in a matter of a few months an archery team had been formed. I was asked to accompany this team to the Stoke Mandeville games, which were soon to become the Paralympics.

29th July 1954 was my first close contact with Stoke Mandeville and on the following day my first *real* contact with the already famous Dr Ludwig Guttman. At that time I did not know how much that first contact would bring me: a great deal of satisfaction and such a fantastic lesson! In my diary I can still read that I had the opportunity of handing Dr Guttman a newspaper cutting that had just been published in a Belgian newspaper: 'This news item made him feel very happy and he was wreathed in smiles . . . his ideas had come true'.

One day only of competitions, 3 days devoted to the exhausting visit to the National Spinal Injuries Centre of which I had already heard. Since then, I cannot count my stays or visits in Stoke Mandeville or elsewhere in the world: Heidelberg, Toronto, Rome, Tel-Aviv, Cape Town for the games and so many other towns on the occasion of scientific or sports meetings, were always enhanced by the presence of Sir Ludwig.

How many memories since my first visit to Stoke Mandeville in 1954! I will mention only two of them, both different in context and importance. Both are the reflection of the omnipresent personality of Sir Ludwig. The first one took place in my own country and in my own city. The presence of Dr and Mrs Guttman at the opening ceremony of the first international games for paraplegics of Brussels and at the inauguration of the first sports grounds for handicapped in Belgium in

the presence of H.M. Queen Elizabeth of Belgium on the 6th of July 1958. The second one, was my accession to the Presidency of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia and the transference of the duties of Herbert Talbot at the end of the First Scientific Joint Meeting, held on the occasion of the 19th Veterans' Administration Spinal cord Injury conference at Scottsdale (Arizona), on the 31st of October 1973.

Not only in the specialised field of paraplegia but also in the world of sports for the handicapped, Sir Ludwig has been for me, and still is, an example who is impossible not to follow. Nearly 25 years have created affective ties between us. These years taught me my profession as a paraplegist and I owe the best of my knowledge of the treatment of paraplegia to Sir Ludwig. I owe to him the great joy I have encountered in my chosen work—the treatment and rehabilitation of paraplegics and tetraplegics.

For all the enlightening advice you gave me, for all your kindnesses toward me, for the evenings spent at your home, either at High Wycombe or at 'Menorah', Northumberland Av., for everything you taught me, for each particle of yourself you gave me, allow me, Sir, to tell you, like the thousands of handicapped athletes to whom you brought a new joy in life, 'Thank you Papa'.