



A Tribute to Raj Kumar Chawla - 05/May/38 - August 26/2011

A service was held on Thursday, September 1, 2011 at Rideau Memorial Gardens, 4239 boul. des Sources, Dollard- des-Ormeaux, Quebec , Canada . The time after the death or passing away of a person in India is given a lot of importance. As per the Hindu Holy Scripture like the Raj Kumar Chawla ,it is believed that the soul of the person who has just passed away is on its way to the next level of existence at such a time. As such, it is with an intention to help the departed soul in a peaceful crossover to that next level of his /her existence, that Indians observe so many death rites and rituals.

As Debbe Scott and I, who played badminton for over 30 years with Raj, entered the funeral parlour, we greeted the grieving family to the sounds of Indian music. Other badminton players, Richard, Goran and Peter, joined us and introduced themselves as badminton buddies of Raj. Debbe also extended condolences from others members of the badminton club who were unable to attend the service.

50 people gathered and witnessed the traditional Indian last rites and rituals. The basic idea behind the Indians' following all these funeral traditions is to show reverence to the deceased person. Normally during this time, all the family members share each others' sorrows and pray, so that the soul of the deceased person rests peacefully. It is during teraviih that the death rites are strictly observed, but traditionally, the death rites in Hindu religion extend up to a year.

After Raj's daughter, Neena, and his son-in-law had completed the rights, those present were asked if anyone wished to speak. Several people spoke and paid homage to Raj and the lasting friendships he had forged with each of them. Then those present were invited to approach the casket and say their good byes to their friend, Raj, while spreading rose pedals around the casket.

The casket was carried by the elders and family to the crematorium. I also participated and helped to carry Raj for the last time as a revenge of accusing me (always in jest!) of cheating at badminton, by calling "out" while the birdie is still in the air. I was known to the members of the badminton club as Mona and the "out in the air" calls became known as the "Mona rule"!

Another ritual was held in cremation parlour. Five pieces of wood were prayed over and given to Raj's daughter Neena, to place on the casket and then given to the cremator, a final farewell to a good man, while others waited out side.

After the cremation, a lunch was served. The tables were pushed together and we all shared and exchanged stories of the good times with Raj. Debbe and I could almost hear him saying one of his favourite badminton expressions "Let's teach these young punks a lesson or two" Among several sayings which Raj favoured and which Neena read during the service, was "Growing old is inevitable, growing up is optional". Raj defied his age and was youthful and full of life. He always greeted us with a smile, had a spring in his step (especially when the games were going his way!) and enjoyed conversations on a vast array of subjects while waiting for the next court to free up. Raj was not only an interesting person himself; he also took a genuine interest in people. Rest in Peace Raj, our Prince, our Badminton Buddy, you will always be playing with us in our hearts.

*By Dr . Wilhelmina C. Fredericks / September, 1st, 2011
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