

Yusuf, fellow Rotarian who once operated on me

BY MIKE ELDON

I have known Yusuf Kodwawala since 1978 when I joined the Rotary Club of Nairobi, where he was already a member. By coincidence, soon after Yusuf passed away I came across a write-up of a meeting of our Rotary Club in March 2001, where our then president – who happened to be my wife Evelyn Mungai – invited me to pay tribute to Yusuf as he celebrated having been a Rotarian for 44 years. He became our club's president in 1981, five years before me.

He went on to become our District Governor, overseeing all the clubs in the region, then including the Indian Ocean islands. Before he took office, he asked me to chair the committee organising his district conference, the highlight of the year. The committee's work starts long before the conference, and it provided a great opportunity for the two of us to work closely together.

At the end of his year as "DG", I was one of those who accompanied him to the handing over district conference in Mauritius. I mention this because long after it, Yusuf enjoyed telling the story of the final dinner there, when a couple of the gorgeous dancers who were entertaining us approached the table where we were sitting.

To his dismay, rather than inviting him to dance, I was the one they approached to join them on the floor. "I was wondering why," Yusuf deadpanned, "and they explained that it was because Mike looked so much like Prince Charles."

Yusuf has told this story enough times that this is what many Rotarians have been calling me ever since.

What can I say about the 938 *Surgeon's Diary* articles that Yusuf has published in the *Sunday Nation* over 38 years? I was at the Rotary lunch meeting when, with no notice, he was asked to be the speaker on the topic "my job".

He spoke so well, with such humour and empathy, that another member present, Joe Rodrigues, then the editor of the *Nation*, asked him to write up what he had said for an article in the paper.

He also persuaded him that this would be the first in what would immediately become a weekly column.

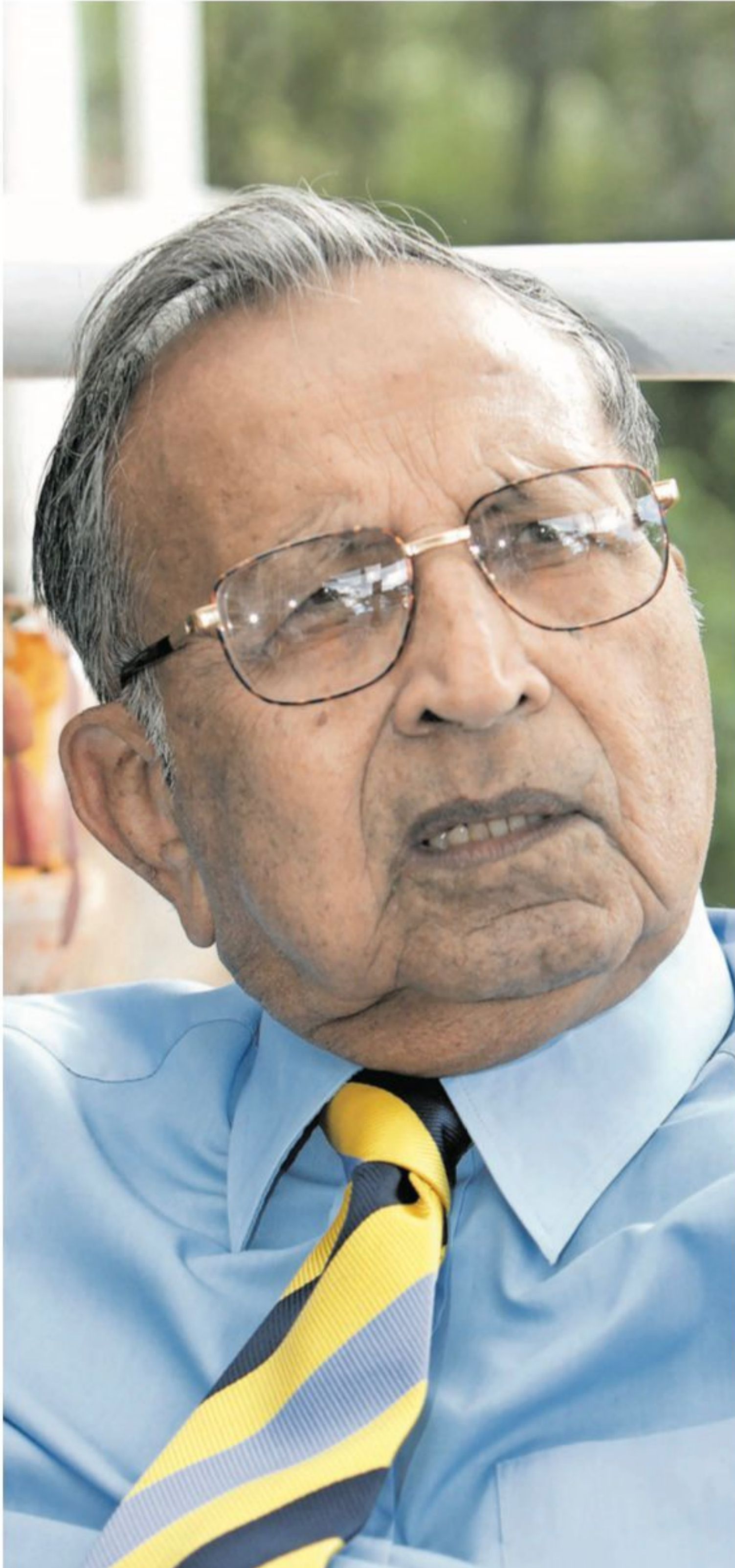
Like so many who have commented since his death that the highlight of their Sunday reading was his *Surgeon's Diary*, I too always looked forward to his words of wit and wisdom, with his powerful conclusions: sometimes happy, sometimes less so.

Yusuf also performed surgery on me, operating on my hernia – this when already 80 years old. As with the Mauritius dinner dance, it again gave his sense of humour an opportunity to express itself, for from then he boasted that he knew me "from the inside out".

He invited me to become a trustee of his MRD Foundation, which supported causes in the health and education sectors, and it was a pleasure for us trustees to see this humble philanthropist happily sharing his wealth with those in need, and it is on no small scale.

As I wrote to his family, his time had come, and he will now rest in peace after an extraordinary life over so many decades in which he touched the lives of so many.

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My friend, Dawood: A small man in stature, but a giant in giving

BY MOHAMMED HERSI

Ina Lillah wa Inna Illahi Raji'un.

Dr Yusuf Kodwawala, aka Dr Yusuf Dawood, was widely known to Kenyans through his *Surgeon's Diary* column that had a permanent slot in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper. I knew him as a fellow Rotarian, a senior Rotarian for that matter. He was District Governor, which, to non-Rotarians, means he was president of all Rotary clubs in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Uganda and Tanzania were later separated from the rest since the District had become too big.

I also knew him as my loyal repeat guest with his family when I was the general manager of Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort & Spa. He never missed a single festive period in December. It was always a pleasure to meet the surgeon in person. He would always book his holiday way in advance. As soon as he had checked out, he would place his booking for the end-year again, and he did this religiously. He would always come accompanied by his better half, Mama Marie. They followed this annual ritual from when their son was young until he got married and moved to the UK. Dr Dawood would then come with his son, who now also had a young family. It was always such a joy to host three generations of a family at the same time.

Dr Dawood was always relaxed. You would always see him walking around the resort barefoot, wearing only a pair of swim shorts. He would engage the guests who recognised him in the resort. He was a man full of humour and that could be one of the reasons he had such a long, joyous life. He was not a fussy guest and was easy to please, as most Rotarians are.

As he continued to age gracefully, he decided to get close to his son in the UK and he reluctantly left Kenya, a place he called home since he moved from India. We kept in touch with him through the Rotary Club of Mombasa WhatsApp group.

While he was no longer able to write as much, he was still able to send us best wishes all the time. My club, Rotary Club of Mombasa, was his favourite to make up any time he was at the Coast. He was also a major donor to Rotary and he would bequeath most of the royalties he earned through writing to good causes of Rotary.

This was a small man in terms of physique but a giant at heart in giving. He was generous to the core and I am pretty sure he kept giving even in his final days.

When I used to read his column before meeting him, I actually thought that Dr Dawood did not even exist and that my favourite paper, the *Sunday Nation*, was running a fiction column.

When I finally met him at a resort where I was general manager, it was such a wow moment. By then, I had also joined Rotary. He was not only my guest but also a fellow Rotarian. As Rotarians, we have this very special union of brotherhood and family that binds us together.

When Dr Dawood breathed his last, the Rotary Club of Mombasa was one of the first to be informed about his demise. His son, Jaan Yusuf Kodwawala, sent this message to his Rotary family in Kenya including his dad's favourite club, the 3rd oldest club in Africa: "My Dad slipped away from us in the early hours of this morning (28th Jan). May his soul rest in peace."

Well, you will be greatly missed, Daktari. To his son, better half Marie and family, Kenyans grieve with you since Daktari had made many friends through Rotary and his gifted hands both as a surgeon and as a writer.

Dr Dawood, aka the surgeon, will be sorely missed. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Mohammed is a Mombasa-based Rotarian