

## **Benedict Martin Joseph Pereira (1957-2008)** **A Tribute**



It is with deep sense of sorrow I pen this obituary for Professor Ben M.J. Pereira, my bench-mate at the Department of Endocrinology, University of Madras, while doing our Ph.D. programme under the supervision of Prof. P. Govindarajulu during the period 1978-1983. Ben (that is how we call him affectionately), the youngest among the research scholars then, and loved by everyone, was always seen with a smiling face. Ben's presence made any gathering live and enjoyable, eased out tensions and strengthened bonds among the members. The famous "7'O clock idea of Ben", which used to be some of his funny solutions to tricky issues of our discussion at our evening tea club meetings, still lingers in my mind. These ideas of Ben used to bring not only laughter amidst us but also transformed tensed evenings enjoyable and made the warring members forget the differences between them.

The message of Ben's departure to the Heavenly abode, which reached me in the night of 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008 through Prof. M. A. Akbarsha while I was camping at a forest area with my family, shattered my plan of visiting him by another fortnight. I was searching for the smiling face of our Ben on the melancholic face of the moon reflected on the waters of Kadanaaru dam, while passing on the sad news to friends through SMS.

Benedict Martin Joseph Pereira, son of Stanislaus William Pereira and Maria Carolina Pais, was born on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1957 in his hometown of Mangalore, Karnataka, as the second son of a family of six. He spent his early years in Neyveli where his father was working at Neyveli Lignite Corporation and studied till the 10<sup>th</sup> class at Jawahar Higher Secondary School, Neyveli. In 1972 he moved to Madras (now

Chennai) when his father took over the post of Financial Advisor and Chief Accounts Officer of the Pallavan Transport Corporation Ltd. After completing his higher secondary examinations from Bharat Higher Secondary School, Madras, he did his graduation in Zoology at the prestigious Loyal College and masters in Special Zoology at the Department of Zoology University of Madras. After this he moved over to the Department of Endocrinology, Dr.ALM. Post-Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Madras-Taramani Campus, for his M.Phil. and Ph.D. programmes. His Ph.D. work on the role of thyroid hormones on epididymal intermediary metabolism, published in *BBA* and *International Journal of Endocrinology* during 1983-1984, opened up a new avenue in Reproductive Endocrinology. He was an enthusiastic member of the Research Scholars Association of Dr.ALM. Post-Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences and served as the Editor of the in-house magazine EYEBEAMS.

The following year, Ben joined as Lecturer in the Department of Biosciences and Biotechnology, University of Roorkee, which was later elevated to the status as The Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, and spent the next twenty five years at this institute in various capacities viz., Assistant Professor (1996-2000), Associate Professor (2000-2003) and Professor (2003-2008). During the two decades at Roorkee, Ben's research was on proteins / glycoproteins, particularly glycosyl phosphatidyl inositol (GPI)-anchored proteins on the surface of sperm and egg involved in gamete recognition, binding and fertilization. He headed the Department of Biosciences and Biotechnology during 1997-2000 and 2007-2008. Ben had been an active life member of SRBCE and organized the 24<sup>th</sup> SRBCE annual symposium at Roorkee in a memorable manner.

Ben married Sunitha Pereira on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1987 and was blessed with two sons, Gaelen and Nathan. During his spare time he enjoyed watching and playing cricket, a passion that he shared with and passed on to his sons. He was a loving husband and caring father. He used to share many personal things with me. He left smoking about five years back and when I enquired how it was possible, he answered instantly: "I keep my vow to God as He gave my wife back from the jaws of death".

His sudden illness in July 2007, when he was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma, was a great shock

but he recovered well after surgery. Although he returned to work in December, his condition began to deteriorate gradually and he silently began the journey towards his destination away from the earth.

The following are the clips from memorabilia of selected personalities to whom Ben has been someone special.

**Prof. P. Govindarajulu, Founder, Department of Endocrinology, University of Madras, Chennai, India (Founder & Patron, SRBCE)**

When I moved over to my present residence at Indira Nagar, Chennai, in 1976, one of my neighbours happened to be the warm and affectionate family of Ben M.J. Pereira, who soon became close friends of our family. At that time, Ben was an under-graduate student in Life Sciences and this brought us much closer, and quite often Ben used to share his thoughts and future plans with me. On merit he got admission to Ph.D. programme under my supervision in 1978. After coming to my fold, his association with me and my family became strong. We moved like one family and he enjoyed this kind of a friendly and cordial environment. Soon he became good friend of all his colleagues and a day will not go without him. He is such a lovable and affectionate personality with an open mind that no one on earth could ever ignore him. I found him as a devoted, enthusiastic young student with lot of plans and aspirations about his research career. I cherished those days when Ben was with me as a close associate. I saw an ignited spirit in him with overflowing love, affection, devotion and hard work coupled with enthusiasm. Though I desired to have Ben in the Department of Endocrinology, University of Madras, in some position, I could not really get it done. This did not deter him, and the merit in him earned him selection as Lecturer in the Department of Biosciences and Biotechnology in the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee. It did not take much time for him to prove his worth. He earned the goodwill of all his colleagues and they recognized his in-depth subject knowledge and hard work. In the meanwhile Ben got married, and his lovable wife always gave a good company and supported her husband in going up in the ladder of life. I cannot forget such a wonderful lady, who took care of the two sons and household and always stood with her husband as a strong pillar of strength. I feel that it was one of greatest strengths that Ben had in his life which he always shared with me. This has made Ben highly inflamed and was successful in getting good research projects and a team of devoted students. His contributions in Reproductive and Molecular Endocrinology in leading Journals were quite significant and earned a mark among the young Indian scientists. Ben was a person who achieved the dream in reality and to be remembered for ever for his devoted spirit. In such a short span of life, Ben was able to achieve what he aimed at and he had a fulfilment.

Probably, I feel that is why Almighty thought that it is time that Ben should be with "HIM". HE robbed him from us, his family, friends and students physically, but Ben is living with us, a kindled spirit which has no death or destruction. "Dear Ben, you are a great soul. We just cannot forget you or leave you. We cherish your memory".

**Dr. Daulat R. P. Tulsiani, Professor, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, USA**

[daulat.tulsiani@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:daulat.tulsiani@vanderbilt.edu)

When I electronically received the message that Benedict Pereira passed away I was deeply saddened. It felt like I have lost a very close relative and a dear friend. I first met Dr. Pereira in 1994 in the department of Biosciences & Biotechnology, University of Roorkee, where I was invited to speak in a symposium on, "Complex Carbohydrates and Advances in Biosciences". I returned to my home town in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, with many fond memories of the organizers and participants of the meeting.

In 1996, Dr. Pereira came to my laboratory and worked on a project in Reproductive Biology, an area close to his heart. He stayed in the Vanderbilt University for one year and greatly contributed experimentally and intellectually towards the publication of two research articles in high-impact Journals. Everyone who met Dr. Pereira, including senior members of the department and co-workers, were impressed with him intellectually and at a personal level. We continued our friendship and in 2006 he invited me to be one of the speakers at the XXIV Annual gathering of the "Society for Reproductive Biology and Comparative Endocrinology", after 12 years since I first met him. Then, Dr. Pereira was a senior member (a Professor and Chair) of the Department of Biotechnology at the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee. During these years he received numerous awards and was recognized as one of the established members of the Institute. The meeting he and his associates organized was well attended and all of us were contented with the organization of the Scientific and Cultural programs. I left Roorkee with many fond memories of the meeting and Professor Pereira and his research and training programs.

Ben, as we seniors fondly called him, directed the training program in Reproductive Biology. He attracted many talented students, and established a solid research program at the Institution. He was a committed and innovative teacher and researcher. He worked hard and gave endless hours to train young researchers and future teachers to keep science thriving in India. There is no doubt in my mind that all of us who knew Ben will miss him for a long time. However, in the hearts of his family, students, many colleagues and we the seniors, he will remain alive forever. I always say and believe that there are a few things over which we humans have no control. Death is one of these things. Good bye dear Ben; we

will all dearly miss you. May Almighty God grant your soul, the peace and tranquillity it deserves.

**Dr. Oommen V. Oommen, Prof & Head, Dept of Zoology, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, India. (Former President, SRBCE; Associate Editor, JER) oommen@bigfoot.com**

I have known Ben through SRBCE family for almost 2 decades. I considered him as a young, innovative and smart scientist who would have still climbed the ladder to greater heights, but for his sudden demise. However, during the span of life he had, he proved his worth as a Reproductive Biologist turned Biotechnologist. I have had occasions to closely interact with him in our meetings and even share the same room. I was happy that I could invite him to Thiruvananthapuram to receive the Peranaidu Govindarajulu Gold medal of SRBCE. I visited IIT Roorkee on his invitation and gave a talk there. It was Gods will that he organized the SRBCE meeting in Roorkee three years ago, after several hindrances. I am sure his contributions to Science will keep him alive in the minds of fellow scientists and, particularly, among the SRBCE family members.

**Dr. M.A. Akbarsha, Professor Emeritus, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, India, (President, SRBCE; Editor-in-Chief, JER)**

Prof. P. Govindarajulu's lab has been my second home in the sense next to my home research ground in Tiruchirappalli, I spent most time at his lab, learning techniques and making use of the facilities in my research. During the close of 1970's and early 1980's when I used to visit Prof. P.G.'s lab, it used to be vibrant, with many youngsters actively engaged in research, who all treated me as their own elder brother. Each one helped me, but in a manner very serious. A very handsome young boy used to be different, not showing much of seriousness but always playful and keeping the people around in a manner contagiously happy. And that was Ben Pereira. I later realized that he was indeed a serious researcher but the sociability in him camouflaged the seriousness of a scientist. He always used to keep the group alive. There was never an element of sorrow in him and that was out of his being always light-hearted. Both of us, all these years, were in contact as each other's admirers. We even went into research collaboration- to find a new herbal male contraceptive- at his initiative. Much before we could share the credit of the discovery, nature has taken him the toll. Every SRBCE meeting used to be by itself enjoyable, that being the annual get-together of people emotionally connected by bondage of togetherness in pursuit and propagation of the Science of Endocrinology and Reproduction, but Ben always added flavour to it by pulling us all to the lighter side life. So, he was always light-hearted and he took the cruelly dragging end also light. While every one of

us, his well-wishers, was in deep sorrow since the end of Ben was imminent, he used to keep us in good stead saying that he is going to recover. He kept this confidence till the end. Ben lived with certain ideals, be it the academic pursuit, career as a teacher or in personal life. Many voids of scientists can be filled but rarely that of a nice human being. We miss you Ben the humanist, we'll miss you for the years to come.

**Prof. A.V. Ramachandran, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodra, 390002, India. (Former President, SRBCE)**

I consider it my privilege to have known Prof. Ben M.J. Pereira, affectionately known to his friends as Ben, for a little over two decades. I was introduced to Ben as a product of the famous 'Govindarajulu School of Endocrinologists' from PGIBMS, Taramani. Ben was a very friendly person and soon both of us established a warm and cordial rapport and formed a strong bondage of like-mindedness and camaraderie. He was a man of subtle sense of wit and was very jovial, unassuming and fluently soft spoken. To me, he was very helpful, cooperative and adjustable and, a very down to earth man at that. I have enjoyed his subtle wit and jokes many a time whenever we had met. He had great reverence and respect for me and I cannot forget his gesture in adjusting his schedules to be at my department to deliver lectures, once for a refresher course in 1999 Dec – 2000 Jan and a second time as recent as 2006 for a Symposium organized by me at M.S. University of Baroda. He also participated actively in the SRBCE symposium organized at Baroda in 2001. Besides being a very good human being, Ben was also a very promising young scientist in the field of Reproductive and Molecular Endocrinology. It is indeed very sad that he was struck down all of a sudden in his prime by a late-detected life-threatening ailment. So to say, the duration between diagnosis of his ailment and succumbing to it was so short, 'was like a jolt out of the blue'. With his untimely and sad demise, I have lost a very personal friend and colleague and, the SRBCE community, a blossoming mid-career scientist. No words are adequate to express the anguish and distress over the way Ben left us, and we are left with no alternative but to accept the un-revealed uncertainty of life. I pray God, the Almighty, that his soul may find peace and salvation in its journey in this universe.

Friends, every one of us know that we have to bid adieu to our friends, colleagues and dear ones someday. However, some farewells are painful and not acceptable to our heart. Ben lives.

**Prof. M. Michael Aruldas,**

Secretary, SRBCE,  
Head, Department of Endocrinology,  
University of Madras, Taramani Campus,  
Chennai 600113, India  
aruldasmm@yahoo.com

