

# **ALOHA!**

**The Life Story of  
Walter K Patrick**



**Indika Karunathilake  
Chiranthi K Liyanage**

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## **The Life Story of Walter K. Patrick**

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**Edited by Ashwini de Abrew**

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**Portrait of the Front Cover**

Shanaka Kulathunga



*“Since when I first met Professor Walter K Patrick about a decade ago, I do not remember how many times I have heard his ‘aloha’ everywhere. In Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and other countries, he always shouted ‘aloha.’ Without knowing its deep meaning I and others also have repeated ‘aloha.’ He said it means ‘love,’ but it also means the joyful (oha) sharing (alo) of life energy (ha) in the present (alo) in the Hawaiian Language. He really is the person who shared his full energy with us to improve public health in this Asia-Pacific Region. His aloha spirit will be handed over to my generation and the next coming generations for long.”*

*Masamine Jimba, Japan*







## **Young Walter; the valiant stripling**

In 1930s, Batticaloa was a peaceful and breathtakingly beautiful coastal town in eastern Sri Lanka. This serene environment, famous for scenic beaches and singing fish - to be shattered decades later with a ravaging civil war and ethnic conflicts - was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious melting pot. The Patricks were a highly respected and elite catholic family in the town.



*Batticaloa, Sri Lanka*

Born to Rose and Canute Patrick on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November in 1935, Walter Kadramer Patrick was the eldest in a family of five siblings. His younger brothers, Michael, Padma and Angelo and his sister, Padmini followed him. Coming from a well-respected family, Walter had the privilege of receiving his primary education at the St. Michael's College, Batticaloa, an elite school established by Jesuit priests.

For younger Patricks, “Annachchi” (elder brother) Walter was the one to follow and emulate. Young Walter showed remarkable resilience and valor from a very tender age. At his remembrance, his youngest brother, Angelo recalled how Walter, at the age of 13 stepped in to care for his ailing mother at a time of adversity when his father was transferred to a city 12 hours away. Walter nursed his mother, who was desperately struggling for each breath due to severe asthma, into comfort with daily injections and basic care offered by medical science at the time.

He went on to complete his secondary education at St. Josephs College, Colombo. He was an exceptional student who excelled in academics as well as extracurricular activities and took every opportunity to support fellow students and youngsters to do the same.



*St. Micheal's College, Batticaloa      St. Josephs College, Colombo*

Walter entered the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ceylon in 1956, where he continued his outstanding performance in academics. Even during his undergraduate days, he was a keen sportsman who excelled in tennis.

Walter faced many hardships growing up. With his father's untimely demise, he took on the responsibility for the whole family at the young age of 22. By this time he was a second year medical undergraduate dealing with many stressors and academic commitments.



*Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo*

In spite of all the challenges he faced, Walter graduated in 1962 and began his internship at the National Hospital Colombo. Following completion of the internship he returned to Batticaloa, where he served his hometown for four years (1964 -1967).

Walter lived by the principle of caring for others even at the cost of personal sacrifice. After graduating as a doctor, he took upon himself to gently guide two of his younger brothers through University. It was only then he decided to settle down to have his own family when he was in his mid thirties. He married Vijiyalaskhmi (Viji) who is currently practicing Psychiatry in Texas.

## **Budding Plastic Surgeon Turned Champion of Public Health**

After his initial years of Internship and working his way around looking for a specialty, he embarked on Plastic Surgery, a very lucrative field in Sri Lanka. However, one incident turned his career and life around for forever.

In rural Sri Lanka, where there was no electricity at the time, bottle lamps with kerosene oil were primarily used as a light source. These unsafe lamps quite often toppled over, causing a majority of fatal domestic accidental burns. A young girl was once admitted to Dr. Patrick's ward for treatment of extensive burns due to a bottle lamp tragedy. This devastating experience changed his outlook on medicine and life. He realized the need for educating the lesser fortunate on safety, precaution and prevention of diseases and injuries. It was that day he decided to give up Plastic Surgery and embrace Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

From then onwards he never looked back and has left behind a trail-blazing career in Sri Lanka and the USA. He served as a primary care physician, in Public Health directorates at provincial and regional level and later, at the Education and Training Unit of the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka. In 1973, Walter received a WHO fellowship to study health promotion and public health at Universities of Denver and Michigan, United States of America.

He obtained his Masters' Degree of Public Health (MPH) from the University of Michigan in 1975 and returned to Sri Lanka the same year. He rendered yeoman service to Sri Lanka from 1975 to 1981 as a Health Education Specialist.

Dr. Patrick provided his expertise in Public Health as a WHO consultant and staff member in Tropical Diseases, Health Education and Community Participation at the WHO Headquarters in Geneva, the SEARO office in Delhi, India and in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia between the years of 1975-1983. His areas of expertise were family planning, maternal and child health and disaster management.

Walter moved to the United States and made it his primary residence from 1981. He obtained a PhD from the University of Michigan in 1983. Dr. Walter Patrick had a distinguished career at the School of Public Health (SPH), University of Hawaii where he was the Chair of Community Health and International Health Departments from 1984-1999. He also held the post of Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Leadership Development for nine years from 1995-2004. Later, Walter moved to the John A Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii where he was Associate Professor of Public Health.

He was an eminent academic who also served in the Editorial Board and as Visiting Professor to several universities. Among his many commitments, he worked as a consultant to UNICEF and other international agencies.



*John A Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii*

For any other, all these achievements would mean a remarkable career in itself. However for Walter, it only reads as preparation. The best was yet to come.

## **APACPH is Born!**

Prof. Walter Patrick's most significant and impactful achievement was his role in the establishment of the Asia Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (APACPH). In January 1984 in Hawaii, he, under the guidance of five Deans of schools of Public Health in the Asia Pacific Region facilitated the formation of APACPH. The five founding members were Universities of Hawaii, Mahidol, Peking Medical University, University of Philippines and National University of Singapore. The goal of APACPH was to improve and expand health care for the underserved through Education, Research, Service and Advocacy.



*APACPH was founded in January 1984  
on the garden island of Kauai, Hawaii*

The organization grew from strength to strength with Walter as the central figure providing strength, vision, guidance and motivation. Walter's WHO background facilitated strong links with legendary leaders of Public Health such as Halfden Mahler of WHO and James P Grant of UNICEF.

Walter's unmatched capacity for networking and personal touch saw leaders such as Professor Liming Lee (China), Prof. Kenji Hayashi (Japan) join APACPH and actively promote the organization in their countries. As the APACPH Leadership moved to the level of national health leaders and University Presidents, visibility and partnerships were strengthened.



*Walter Patrick receiving delegates for the first APACPH meeting in Hawaii*

*“In January of 1984 In Hawaii, I and four other Deans of schools of Public Health in the Asia Pacific Region founded the Asia Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health. One other academic was there assisting in that process at that time. That person was Professor Walter Patrick. For 30 years he has remained as the central figure in that global linkage, providing strength to that band of professional brothers and sisters, until his untimely death on May 22, 2014.”*

*Dr. Jerrold M. Michael, Hawaii, United States of America*



The turn of the century saw the APACPH secretariat moving to Australia, facilitated by Prof. Walter Patrick and Prof. Collin Binns. Later the secretariat moved to Hawaii and subsequently to Kuala Lumpur, again under Walter's guidance.

Since the first meeting in 1984, APACPH has blossomed into a leading and vibrant international organization. During these three decades, he remained the central leading figure of the organization, untiringly and relentlessly pursuing opportunities and networking with other stakeholders in the region to put APACPH on the map as a global pioneer in the field. Being the master of networking, Walter often made it a personal agenda to recruit new members through individual contacts and correspondence in order to expand the organization.

*“My first encounter with Prof Patrick was by a letter directly sent from him. He had read one of my articles and asked me to join the APACPH community.”*

*Koji Kanda, Japan.*

Walter always had an uncanny ability to see potential in others. He embraced them, and motivated them to become a part of his vision for a better tomorrow and created a milieu to achieve their goals through APACPH.

*“Walter opened up the opportunity for me and my colleagues first at USC and again at Claremont to participate in the APACPH family, something for which I will always be grateful.”*

*C. Anderson Johnson, United States of America*



*With Indika; a close friend and a disciple, at APACPH 2012*

Walter was the heart and soul of APACPH. Boundless was his enthusiasm and so single-minded was his devotion to the APACPH cause, he personified APACPH. His vision, leadership and sincerity will be sorely missed by all at APACPH.



*APACPH 2012 Conference in Sri Lanka which was attended by over 900 delegates*

## **Turbo Charged Trailblazer in Public Health**

His passion and determination for alleviating suffering were amply demonstrated in his efforts for injury prevention, disaster management, oral cancer prevention, uplifting women's health, island health and promoting peace through health.

Walter generously extended his support and openly encouraged groundbreaking work of like thinking colleagues to further the field of Public Health in the region. He promoted the pioneering work of close friend and APACPH past president Prof. Wen Ta Chiu, a neurosurgeon and Public Health specialist whose efforts to implement the use of safe motor cycle helmets, now saves over 3000 lives each year.



*Prof Walter with Prof. Wen Ta Chui and Prof. Tony Chiang*

It was the passion and dedication of Walter and Wen Ta Chui that saw the establishment of APACPH disaster management center at Taipei Medical University. With their leadership, APACPH disaster relief activities during the Asian Tsunami and Sichuan earthquake reached out to millions of victims of these natural disasters.

Walter provided the leadership for the APACPH oral cancer prevention project through networking, personal communications, site visits, meetings and securing grants. He was quick to realize the global health threat posed by oral cancer due to betel chewing which is the number one cancer in Sri Lanka and India, and the number four cancer in Taiwan and Malaysia. The Indian diaspora and the culture of betel chewing with carcinogenic compounds has spread oral cancer from Asia to the pacific islands and even to the Caribbean. Walter initiated the APACPH Collaborating Center of Excellence in Oral Health and Cancer Prevention at Kaohsiung Medical University, Taiwan with the objective of combating this growing public health threat.

His unique awareness and insight into the hardships faced by people in war-torn regions came from his own experiences with the ethnic conflict that ravaged Eastern and Northern Sri Lanka for 26 years from early 1980s. Walter was a passionate advocate for peace through health. He worked tirelessly, supported by a few junior colleagues, to establish Peace and Health as an academic discipline.

His innovatory thinking revolutionized the approach to health and preventive medicine.

*“During one of the symposia where I spoke on Displaced Women and their Health in Sri Lanka, Prof. Walter revealed to the audience some parts of his life, losses he has faced in our conflicted island, his departure from Sri Lanka and the harrowing circumstances surrounding his many losses and how conflicts influence health. He related these details without malice and with a great deal of dignity.”*

*Dr. Santhushya Fernando, Sri Lanka*



*With medical peace worker, Dr. Klaus Melf*

Prof. Patrick was a champion of “Health for All” and was a strong supporter of fostering indigenous communities in the region. As a frontrunner in public health and preventive medicine, he took a special interest in poverty stricken and less fortunate countries in the Asia Pacific.

He firmly believed that access to the poor, the underserved in rural and urban areas and those that are disadvantaged including the differently abled and elderly should be among APACPH priorities. His personal links with the Hawaiian Islands, Sri Lanka, Okinawan Islands, Sabah and Philippines, the Indonesian Islands and Taiwan further ignited this passion.

He laid down the ground work to establish an APACPH Collaboration Center for Indigenous Health on “Global Indigenous Health” as proposed by the Royal College of Medicine, Perak University, Kuala Lumpur and the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, India. The primary objective of this center will be to create a network of globally renowned institutions in indigenous health to promote research, training and advocacy for uplifting aboriginal/indigenous populations.



*“Global Health is about a concern for humanity”*

*Walter K Patrick*

## **The Educationist**

Walter firmly believed in the importance of capacity building in Public Health. The first WHO – APACPH Global Collaborating Center for Leadership Development in Primary Health Care was established in University of Hawaii in 1985 under his leadership. Hundreds of faculty and health leaders were trained in this center. Some went on to complete their masters and doctoral programs through the APACPH universities' network. A regional Master of Public Health programme was established in 1990 with the collaboration of the University of Hawaii, Mahidol University and the University of Philippines.

Through a US Aid funded project, Walter as the Chair of the International Health Department headed the research and training efforts on Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning programs conducted in Asia by the School of Public Health, University of Hawaii.



*First accreditation meeting in Bangkok, Thailand in 2011*

With his expertise in medical education he realized the importance of accreditation in ensuring the quality of public health training. During the later years of his life and till his untimely death, he spearheaded the APACPH initiative for accreditation of Schools of Public Health in the region. The APACPH accreditation model developed under his guidance aims to increase the overall quality of Public Health Education through mutual support and networking.

*“Being a great leader of Public Health, Walter had a far vision. He emphasized the important role of the university in education for public health, in general education and in professional education, and the “mission impossible challenge” of health, peace, and harmony in the Asia Pacific Region that faces increasing social inequalities, environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters with serious adverse health consequences.”*

*Tony Chiang, Taiwan*



## **A Beloved Mentor**

Being a strong advocate of cultivating and aiding young professionals in the field, he initiated the Early Career Network of APACPH to form a platform for networking and developing youngsters into future leaders. He believed in empowering those involved at grassroots level.

*“I met Walter when I was volunteering with a mobile medical response team during the aftermath of the Tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004. At the time I was only a fourth year medical student. Walter contacted me several months later and encouraged me to submit an abstract for the 2005 APACPH conference in Taiwan. It was my first international conference and I decided to select public health for my post-graduate studies. He connected me with several other young enthusiastic public health students and we formed the APACPH Early Career Network”*

*Kremlin Wickramasinghe, United Kingdom*



*Revitalizing ECN-in Taipei, Taiwan, 2005*



*With Isurujith, Ashan and Kremlin during an ECN photo exhibition*

As the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Leadership Development, Walter took an active role in encouraging capacity building and leadership training in the region. He has taught, mentored and guided many students in Public Health and young professionals through his visionary and revolutionary teaching and by example.

*“The results of his efforts in nurturing the principles of public health can be seen in the many students whom he mentored throughout the years.”*

*Satoru Izutsu, Hawaii- United States of America*

Walter's candid feedback and advice was extended to all those had the fortune of being taken under his wing. He opened up opportunities and encouraged all his students to be daring and adventurous, much like himself. He extended his support with unparalleled generosity and geniality to budding public health professionals across the globe.

*"He was forever challenging me to do new and bold things in public health, never the traditionalist, ever the reformer and innovator. This is Walter's teaching to me, and legacy: to be fearless in approach to solving public health issues."*

*Kolitha Wickramage, Australia.*



*With Young Investigator Travel Award Winners at an APACPH Conference*

## Love for Humanity and Zest for Life

Walter was a liberal philosopher who had a unique understanding of global health and who used his extraordinary aptitude for the betterment of all mankind. He was a romantic soul who loved poetry and nature and never lost his zest for life.



*In Colombo during the APACPH 2012 conference*

He had a free spirit and a great sense of humor. His practical jokes, which have left his family and friends dumbfounded at times and senseless with laughter, are legendary. His timely witty remarks light up all gatherings he took part in.

*“His energy seemed boundless and his dedication to the work and people he loved never wavered. I have many happy, funny, and touching memories of Walter at APACPH meetings and events over the years, and will treasure them”*

*Paula Palmer, United States of America*



*APACPH Gala Dinner, Colombo 2012*

Walter extended his warm friendship to all who crossed his path with the only condition that they strive to be the best and go beyond the limits of conventionality to achieve greatness. Age, religion, gender, ethnicity mattered very little to him.



*With Gumilar R. Somanthri, Rector, Universitas Indonesia*

His fascination with traditions and customs and relentless pursuit of the esthetic appeal inherent in them gave him an in-depth understanding of many cultures. He had a truly “international” way of life, never out of place in conduct and disposition even in the most customary gatherings.

*“He provided a warm friendship & gave us a deep understanding of different cultures.”*

*Fatma Lestari, Universitas Indonesia*



*At the APACPH 2011 in Korea*



*In Indonesia in 2012*

The care and affection with which he regarded his family and his two grandsons reflect the inherent gentle loving nature in him. He was a custodian who put others before himself; be they his family, friends or complete strangers.

Walter Patrick was a person who lived righteously, enjoyed every moment, laughed often and loved much, who has gained the respect of people, who leaves the world better than he found it. Even though Prof. Walter is no longer with us his legacy will live on in all those whose lives were touched by him.

His final days were spent in the pleasant company of his family and grandchildren. Prof. Walter K. Patrick passed away in San Antonio, Texas on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 leaving behind a grieving mass of family, friends, colleagues, students and followers.



*Walters' ashes were scattered in the waters that surround the beautiful isles of Hawaii - a fitting resting place*

*“They say that oratory leaves a smoke screen and eloquence, a vapor trail; but sincerity leaves an endowment. Dr. Walter Patrick has left us all an endowment. He is one of those special people that touched our lives in everything he did and left us changed for the rest of our lives. The gifts he gave us have become part of who we are- a legacy of wholesomeness that lives on.”*

*Dr. Jerrold M. Michael, Hawaii, United States of America*







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