

Dynamite in a small package – saying goodbye...

It was with deep regret that the passing of Caroline Naidu, on 26 June 2009, was announced to SASOHN members and other members of the occupational health fraternity in South Africa. This is a tribute to Caroline, to share and record the achievements of an exceptional colleague.

Caroline was introduced to occupational health as a student at Technikon Natal (as it was then known) in Durban. She enrolled to complete a B.Tech.: Nursing (Occupational Health) degree, thereby beginning a very special relationship between her and SASOHN. At the time, I was the Programme Co-ordinator, which is how I first came to know Caroline. As a student, she was challenging, inspiring, motivated and a committed learner. During her studies, she participated in a research study that investigated the quality of spirometry in 2002, the results of which contributed to the drive to improve the quality of spirometry testing in the occupational setting in South Africa. In 2002, she graduated with distinctions. Caroline believed in the need for true professionals to engage in life-long learning. Consequently, she continued her studies by completing a B.Cur. Nursing degree, thereby qualifying as a nursing educator and administrator. She also participated in many informal educational activities.

As noted, Caroline was introduced to SASOHN during her student years. She became involved in the Northern Natal group and within months was elected as that region's Chairperson. For many years, she single-handedly ran the region – this at a time when she was also the National Secretary for SASOHN. She held the portfolios of Treasurer, Secretary, Education representative and Chair of the Northern Natal region, yet she fulfilled these responsibilities to a consistently high standard, reliably and with passion. The way in which Caroline carried out her duties as the National Secretary made my job as the President so much easier, because there was nothing Caroline did in half measures. She continually gave her all – and in a selfless manner. Caroline was also a confidante. If you opened your heart to her, you knew that was where it stayed and I can honestly say I never heard her speak harshly of anyone.

There was also a lighter side to Caroline! In 2006, we headed off to Milan for the ICOH2006 conference. As representatives of SASOHN we were taking journals over with us. The problem was the weight. Only being allowed 20 kg of luggage, meant we were going to be overweight. I phoned Caroline and expressed my concerns. "Not to worry," she says, "I am travelling light, so I can add them to my luggage." When we met at the airport, she entered the terminal with a suitcase bigger than herself (she was a small-framed individual, weighing around 50 kg). She promptly placed her suitcase on the scale to weigh-in at 27 kg. Airport officials then asked her to remove 7 kg of her luggage. She opened her bag, took a good look, assessed the situation, took out a bag of jelly babies and stood back to assess the impact. So, Caroline arrives in Milan with the maximum amount of allowed luggage. While in Milan, I attended many

meetings, during which time Caroline would go shopping. And every day there was more shopping to consider getting home. When questioned on her shopping, she always said "it's just a little something for my girls". When we were packing to return home, she had to purchase an additional suitcase and still had to pay excess baggage for the 10 kg she could not carry. She obviously was the source of many airline jokes from that point and gave a new meaning to the phrase 'travelling light'. But this aside, many people never experienced her good humour. She could laugh with us through all of those returns down memory lane.



Caroline Naidu

The side most of us knew was the Caroline that I first met as a student. She developed a love for occupational health during her time at the Technikon and was determined that she was going to make a difference in a number of ways. She achieved this. It did not matter what she had on her plate, as a full time employee, a mother, a wife and a perpetual student, her work was always on time and the quality was always inspiring. But her concerns in the classroom were never self directed. She would help her peers where she could and was always conscious of the needs of others. Caroline also had the gift of seeing potential in others and encouraged them to achieve. It was her belief and drive that resulted in two SASOHN members from Northern Natal achieving OHNP of the Year awards. Despite her remarkable achievements and standards, she never lost her humility. She certainly was a small package of dynamite.

Yet, despite her passion and drive for SASOHN and her studies, I believe these were always second to her love for her family. We learnt of her two wonderful daughters, Mikara and Kiara, of her husband Sam and of her siblings and her parents through her frequent tales of family activities. She once told me how her eldest had asked for a raise in pocket money. The ten-year-old was asked to submit a motivation for the increase of R5 per month! This came from her love for her family and for her desire to help her daughters achieve all they could from life. She spoke of them with love and pride and we always knew how they were doing.

We will miss Caroline. We have all lost so much with her early passing. Her drive, her enthusiasm and her compassion will leave voids that will be very difficult to fill.

Karen Michell,

SASOHN Education Representative and Past President