

**A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR ANNA GUPTA  
BY  
DR. DATTA PILLAY**

Friends and colleagues of professor Anna Gupta, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am greatly honoured to be asked by Jaya, fondly known as Tupu to say a few words on behalf of her mother.

I have known Anna, one of the most elegant ladies in my life for a little over 50 years since she arrived on Windsor Campus in 1968. She was a humble, compassionate person with a passion for the nursing profession.

This gathering is a testimony to the love, affection and respect that she enjoyed among all of us. She had a very fulfilling life for 96 years and to day we are celebrating her life, achievements, contributions and successes.

Of course the last few years as her health was declining, it was a challenge for Jaya Tupu, a very devoted daughter, to be as a care giver. She has our greatest admiration.

I know how tough it is to be a care-giver, as I have personal experience for 5 years with my better half Sarah. Anna without further suffering has gone to the kingdom of God and will remain happy there with her husband Sunil Gupta.

We have read in story books in our primary schools, about Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp. Given her first love for nursing, Anna was a living and walking Florence Nightingale among us who was born just about 100 years after the original Florence .

To honour Anna , we have many university representatives in the audience today, the current President of the University of Windsor, Dr. Dr. Douglas Kneale, Dean Linda Patrick of the Faculty of Nursing, many former Directors of the School of Nursing Dr. Barbara Thomas, Dr. Janette Rosenbaum and several of her colleagues.

**Former President Dr. Alan Wildeman and his wife Dr. Debra Henderson have had many close interactions. Dr. Wildeman sent me an email, which I wish to read with his permission.**

*Dear Datta - Thank you for informing Debra and me about Anna's passing. She was a*

*wonderful person who was always very kind with us, and who would often call to chat. She lived a remarkable life, and the obituary is beautifully written. We are out of province right now and unable to get to her funeral, but I am sure it will be a well-attended occasion.*

*I hope that you are well. We of course think very often about the University of Windsor and have many wonderful memories. There are so many people and events that entered our lives in Windsor.*

*Very best regards, and please know that Anna will be very much in our thoughts as she is laid to rest. She was a remarkable person.*

*Alan.*

I wish to focus on three aspects of Anna's life.

First her life in India and her passion for nursing.

Then the next 50 years in Windsor

and Finally her social graces and community work.

Anna Mathews Gupta was born on April 6, 1921, in Kottayam, Kerala, India. Kerala is a state in the southern part of India, bordering the southwestern coast, beside the Indian Ocean. It is known for its high rate of literacy and relatively high percentage of Christians, in a predominantly Hindu country. Most of the people are very enterprising and moved all over India and different parts of the world in various professions.

As a teenager, Anna wanted to be a doctor. She applied to Vellore Christian Medical College, a prestigious Medical College, in India but was told the college was not accepting females into the medical program till the following year. Rather than wait a year (she has always been slightly impatient), she accepted an offer to the nursing program, enrolling at Vellore at the age of 17.

Anna trained first as a nurse and midwife. She recalled delivering many babies on her own, in remote villages, under very difficult conditions. Over the years, Anna worked up the ranks at Vellore to become an O.R. nurse, head nurse, "sister tutor" (clinical instructor) and administrator. While at Vellore, Anna's faith continued to grow, as she was exposed to people of

many Christian denominations, and people of many faiths. Although Vellore had been founded by Christian missionaries, its vision was to provide outstanding medical care and healing to all individuals, regardless of their financial situation, and regardless of their faith. Anna was inspired by the stories of Dr. Ida S. Scudder, and Dr. Ida B., as well as by the many other missionaries she came to know, work alongside, and befriend.

Twice during the 1950's Anna won scholarships to attend university in the U.S., at Wayne State in Detroit, obtaining both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Nursing. During her Master's, Anna focussed on the development of international nursing degree programs.

While studying in Detroit, Anna explored Michigan and parts of Canada on excursions and holidays with friends, who were often themselves the families of her missionary friends. After earning each degree, Anna returned to Vellore.

Anna was subsequently hired as Dean of the College of Nursing, Delhi University, in New Delhi India- a very prestigious nursing college. It was there that she met and married her husband of nearly 40 years, Sunil Gupta in 1961. Sunil was a career army officer, serving in the Indian Army as Major and Dentist when it was an extension of the British Army. He was a Hindu, from Bengal, a different state of India. Theirs was a "love match" (as opposed to an arranged marriage) and a "mixed marriage" (being of two different faiths), unique among all their siblings, and very unusual (if not downright scandalous) for the time.

Both Anna and Sunil were greatly influenced by the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi, by India's struggle for independence from the British, and by the ideal of a united, democratic, free India, a country that strove for tolerance and harmony among people of various ethnicities, languages and religions. Jaya was born two years later, in 1963.

In 1968, the family immigrated to Canada, settling in Windsor. Anna had been sponsored by the University of Windsor to serve as Professor of Nursing, and to launch its Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. She was hired from India without an interview, which is rare in university appointments procedure.

Anna worked at the university for many years, going on to become the Director of the School of Nursing for two terms. After her retirement, she continued to be active in research, setting up

conferences and fundraising for the university. She was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus, and subsequently was a recipient of the prestigious Clark Award, for outstanding voluntary service to the University of Windsor. Anna has always seen herself as a nurse, first and foremost. She is a beloved teacher and mentor to many generations of nurses.

Anna was active as a volunteer in many educational, social, and philanthropic organizations. She was a founding member of the South Asian Centre of Windsor. She did early work in breast cancer screening and awareness. She was active in her church (first Knox, then St. Andrew's Presbyterian). Being a proud alumnus of Vellore CMC, she was very active in fundraising for Vellore, which also necessitated committee work with the Christian Council of Churches.

**Social Activities** - Age was no barrier. Anna and Major Sunil Gupta being an older couple in town were welcome guests in the homes of all young, middle aged and senior members of the community and were quite at home. They were very popular and highly respected.

As an excellent cook, Anna had a reputation as a gracious hostess. Her home was a nexus for friends and family from near and far, and a safe haven for students a long way from home. Anna loved to travel, and saw much of the world. But Windsor, ON was home for over 50 years, on the banks of another river.

For many years, several families, including the Guptas would go to the home of Dr Percy Peter and his wife Iris, Detroit, Michigan for Thanksgiving dinner a fancy feast put up by Iris who is a great hostess.

### Evolution of Nursing Education In Windsor

In 1963 when I came to the University of Windsor, nursing just a section with two members, Ms Florence Roach and Ms Molloy in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

With the introduction of the Duff-Burdhal Report on university governance, many universities, including UW restructured with the establishment a University Government Committee.

The Faculty of Arts and Science was split into three divisions of Arts, Social Sciences and Science. Several autonomous schools were established including Nursing, Physical Education, Music and Visual arts.

Nursing was part of the Faculty of science and as its faculty numbers grew, many of them

obtained doctoral degrees and continued to do research and obtain grants. Finally, the school achieved Faculty Status and launched the graduate program.

In 1992 while nursing was still in the faculty of science, as Dean, I had promoted three nursing faculty to full professorship in one year which made history in Canada, I am happy to see the progress made by nursing faculty. Anna made her initial contribution to this final glory of the Nursing program in Windsor.

I have a great respect for the very noble nursing profession. When I had my quintuple heart bypass surgery(1988) in London, Ontario a young 22 year old nurse who graduated from Conestoga College looked after me in ICU with extreme devotion. Just, 4 months ago when I had an angioplasty,in Windsor, one of the nurses in the cath-lab recognized me as having taken a course in the biology of aging from me many years ago and how much she enjoyed. The success of physicians and surgeons depends of nursing staff who are competent and dedicated.

Our sincerest gratitude to the many health providers and staff who cared for Anna in the past few years, particularly the staff at Chateau Park and Anna's private duty team of angels. The family wishes No flowers but In lieu, donations gratefully accepted to either the University of Windsor ("Anna Gupta Scholarship Fund"), or to CMCHospitals.ca ("Anna Gupta Nursing Scholarship").

My personal thanks to all of you joining me for this special tribute to Anna.  
May her soul rest in peace.