



In memoriam

Adalbert Ibrahim Kapandji



Our colleague Dr. Adalbert Ibrahim Kapandji, best known as Mim to his mother and to his friends, died suddenly at home on Monday January 7th, 2019.

About two years ago, he turned up at one of my consultations, carrying a cardboard file, which he handed to me, saying that I would find the wherewithal to compose his obituary, which he asked me to promise to do when the time came. I had worked beside him for 25 years, and tended to think of him as indestructible! Being caught on the wrong foot by his request, there was little I could do except agree, adding only that I trusted there would be plenty time. The evening after he died, I pulled the file out of the desk drawer where I had left it unopened. Inside, I found his resume, several poems, No. 21 of *Maîtrise Orthopédique* of February 1993 (an edition devoted to him), and his latest book “*Qu’est-ce que la biomécanique?*” (Sauramps Médical, November 2011; in French), with a very kind dedication. This final publication was a summum of his conception of biomechanics, after three previous works on the subject, translated into 12 languages and which had made this man, with his rather odd-sounding name to our French ears, a well-known figure recognized throughout the world of orthopedics, hand surgery, physical medicine and rehabilitation.

He was born in Paris on April 17, 1928, to a Turkish surgeon born in Greece and resident of the Paris hospitals (a title of which he was especially proud). His father had the same inventive mind, and worked with Sauv e to develop the Sauv e-Kapandji distal radioulnar release technique that would make the pair of them internationally known, and which Adalbert would go on to improve. He also

developed the applications of the famous kinesigraph, following on from his father’s work on biliary pathway dyskinesia. During his general surgery residency in Paris between 1956 and 1960, Adalbert took a course in childhood orthopedic surgery under Pierre Lance, where he got to know Pol Leco ur. Then, as registrar at Broussais under F elix Poilleux, his personal interest in the locomotor system drew him toward orthopedics and traumatology.

He was headed for an academic medical career, but his ambitions were thwarted by his ideas, which were politically incorrect for their time, and probably by his origins. Not that that could discourage Kapandji, who decided to create his own workplace, in the form of a small private hospital in the southern suburbs of Paris, which he set up with a few colleagues, including his good friend Freddy Schimmel, who went on to become president of the French Urology Association. According to his own children, this little hospital was his third baby. It had just 60 beds, with an intimate family atmosphere where everyone knew everyone else and where he ruled, or rather attempted to rule, as master, despite the best efforts of “his Freddy” (as he called him), who was the only one able to stand up to him. For, while he was certainly brilliant and a visionary, he was no less cross-tempered, demanding, impatient, overbearing – all of which would have been excellent qualities in any of the university hospitals of the 1960s. The main problem with a personality like Adalbert Kapandji’s was how to manage to survive next to him – and you can believe me that it was no easy business! On the other hand, however sharp he could be, he was always frank, and you always knew just what he thought of you and of what you were doing. And what was truly exceptional was that he was always ready to come back and apologize when he realized he’d gone too far.

His reputation flourished: not only ex-President of the Hand Study Group [*Groupe d’ tude de la Main* (GEM)], and honorary member of the French Society of Orthopedic Surgery and Traumatology (SoFCOT) and of the French Society of Hand Surgery (SFCM) but also, on the international scene, a member of numerous hand surgery societies (in the USA, Italy. . .), and finally named “Pioneer of Hand Surgery” at the Congress of the International Federation of Hand Surgery Societies in Sydney in 2007. Quite a career for the “little surgeon from the suburbs”, as we called him among ourselves! He gave up the actual practice of surgery in 2006, to devote his time to setting up a new Yvette private hospital, which was larger and more modern and was opened in 2007 with Adalbert chairing the board.

Little by little, as he withdrew from surgery and fell prey to health problems and advancing age, he hardly recognized the new

establishment he had set up when it got sold to a commercial group – at the price of its soul. He then devoted himself essentially to writing his final book, poems and some rather mystical novels, and to drawing and reading. But he never stopped dreaming up new surgical techniques and instruments until the very end. He passed away calmly, in dignity, keeping – like Cyrano de Bergerac – his “panache” right to the last breath.

My thanks to the Editorial Board for agreeing to let my write these few lines for the journal, which can thus speak, well beyond our French borders, for the whole surgical community in addressing our sincere condolences to Adalbert’s widow Lydie, his children

Martine and Thierry, and his grandchildren and their families, in gratitude and the deepest respect for a Master who has gone to join the Masters.

Rest in peace, Mim Kapandji!

Christian Delaunay
*Service d'orthopédie, clinique de l'Yvette, 67-71,
route de Corbeil, 91160 Longjumeau, France*
E-mail address: c.delaunay@clinique-yvette.com