In memoriam

Homage to Raoul Tubiana

Raoul Tubiana passed away on October 14, 2013; he was 98. Because of our close friendship and our work together founding the GEM, the study group on the hand that later became the French Society of Hand Surgery (Société française de chirurgie de la main) – I have the great privilege of recounting the high points of his prestigious career to the members of the Society of Orthopedic Surgery. Raoul was born in Constantine, Algeria, and he did all his secondary education in Algiers. After obtaining his PCB diploma, he went to Paris to study medicine. His brother Maurice, who was 5 years younger, had a brilliant career as a cancer specialist and also passed away this year. Raoul was accepted as a hospital resident in 1939, and immediately turned to surgery. He was lucky enough to work with the remarkable surgeon, Jean Gosset, a strong personality who I also had the pleasure of knowing. Three days after his marriage to Helen, he was called up as a reserve cadet officer for the Phony War which rapidly ended, allowing him to return familiar territory in the south of France, Saint-Tropez. He enlisted in the French Army of Africa at the end of 1942 as the head of a surgical team, and received his training in war surgery, learning to make rapid decisions in this difficult environment. After Raoul returned to Paris with the French First Army, Colonel Merle d’Aubigné assigned him to the Army Center for reconstructive plastic surgery which had been created with the excellent American plastic surgeon John Converse. This is how Raoul was able to work under two illustrious mentors and spend a great part of his career as a surgeon at the Ollier Pavilion at Cochin Hospital, built by the eminent Robert Merle d’Aubigné, founder of a highly and internationally renowned school of orthopedic surgery. Raoul was first placed in charge of burn surgery, then surgery of the hand, which became his passion. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship, he spent six months in San Francisco with Sterling Bunnell who had created the field of hand surgery as early as the First World War by opening numerous centers for this new surgical discipline. When he returned to Paris, Raoul specialized in surgery of the hand and opened a rapidly successful consultation in this field in close collaboration with rheumatologists. Like the Hand Club in the UK, in 1963 Raoul decided to launch a hand study group, the GEM (Groupe d’Étude de la Main), which has its 50 years anniversary this year, along with four other founders, Jacques Duparc who assisted him at Cochin, Jacques Michon, Raymond Vila! and myself. Because of the considerable progress in the discipline of hand surgery, Raoul also decided to create the Hand Institute, which opened in 1972 and is still a center of excellence today.

Besides his great talent as a surgeon, Raoul was also an extremely cultivated individual with a great interest in the arts, and in particular, privileged relationships with well-known artists. One only needs to have read his fascinating memoirs [1], which he wrote on his own, and which relates many of the unique episodes of his life, to fully understand. At the end of his hospital career, Raoul was especially interested in specific disorders of musicians; he created an original consultation for them and specific physical therapy, which is still under constant development.

With his marriage to Claude Delay, the daughter of the great academician, who is also a talented writer, Raoul led a full and eventful social life. I was close to Raoul right to the end, and was highly impressed by his intellectual curiosity and his strong sense of friendship. He had numerous fellows, and leaves behind an enormous body of work, as well as the magnificent example of a career of an exceptional surgeon.

Reference


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