OBITUARY D. Ralph Millard (1919–2011)

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On Sunday, June 19, 2011, an era in Plastic Surgery came to an abrupt end. I was informed by Prof. H.S. Adenwalla that Dr. D. Ralph Millard Jr., messiah of children all over the world who were born with facial clefts, died at his Sunny Isles Beach home in Miami, Florida, USA.

Born David Ralph Millard Jr., on June 4, 1919, in St. Louis, he had recently turned 92. Millard chaired the plastic surgery division at what is now the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine for 28 years while at the same time serving as Chief of Plastic Surgery at the Jackson Memorial Hospital.

He was best known for developing rotation advancement surgery for cleft lip in the 1950s. A giant amongst his contemporary greats, his work was considered pure artistry and he was nominated as one of the ten “Plastic Surgeons of the Millennium” by the members of the American Society of Plastic Surgery. *Plastic Surgery News* called him “the most brilliant and creative plastic surgeon we have alive.”

According to the World Health Organization, cleft lip, with or without cleft palate, is considered a birth defect affecting about one in every 600 to 700 newborns, meaning that a child is born with a cleft somewhere in the world every 2.5 min. If that is the magnitude of the clinical problem, and if almost 80% of Clefts are treated by Millard’s technique, can there ever be another plastic surgeon who will impact more lives than the great master!

Millard, an Eagle Scout, graduated from the Asheville School for Boys, Asheville, NC. He received a B.A. in English in 1941 from Yale University where he boxed and played varsity football. His coach: Yale law student Gerald R. Ford went on to become the president of USA.

Millard graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1944 and interned in Boston before joining the Navy in 1945 and served stateside in the World War II Navy, got interested in clefts as a chief plastic surgeon for the Marine Corps during the Korean War, discharging with the rank of major. Lt.jg Millard joined a residency program at Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville.

In 1948, he left for England, where he trained under Harold Gillies. They would later co-author the first of his nine books, *The Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*. He wrote 149 peer-reviewed journal articles and 53 book chapters. A prolific author, Millard documented every one of his cases with pictures and notations and his books are an ample testimony to this fact. The world knew him for his *Cleft Craft* and in it he showed what a master and an innovator he was. His autobiography, *Saving Faces: A Plastic Surgeon’s Remarkable Story*, was published in 2003.

What he did, laid the groundwork for many procedures we are doing today. If not for his legacy, the Plastic Surgery as a specialty would have been a much poorer and deprived specialty.

Towering in both physical and professional stature, he was demanding, exacting, and a hard-task master to his students, but a very gentle human being to all the unfortunate children who came to him for cure from all parts of the world.

The Association of Plastic Surgeons of India deeply mourns the death of this great teacher. We, as a fraternity, have lost a very respected teacher, a very gifted surgeon, a very prolific author, and a very noble friend. May his soul rest in peace!

I would urge all of you to visit http://calder.med.miami.edu/Ralph_Millard/ to appreciate what a fantastic multifaceted personality this great man was!

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