

Prayer

changes lives

Son of a South African pastor, Richard Johanson was born in South Africa. His mother's obstetrician was Paul Bremer, an old friend of CMF, so much prayer must have surrounded him from the start. We met in 1984 when Richard joined our hospital team as a junior doctor, by now married to Charlotte. They occasionally visited my home, then years passed and paths diverged. In retirement I heard that Richard and Charlotte were back at our local hospital, she as an anaesthetist and he as a highly respected perinatologist. By now they had three children, lives were full and we did not meet up again, although his work was becoming internationally acclaimed. I was therefore shocked to hear of Richard's early death from a malignant melanoma in 2002. It is no surprise to note the affection with which he is remembered, or that an obstetric prize now bears his name.

Yet our tenuous connection did not end there. Not long ago our church family was blessed by the arrival of Linda, a research worker, and Paul, a lecturer in computer technology. Paul willingly came to my rescue over some teaching material I was trying to prepare and, after our technical discussion, I asked him how he and Linda had come to faith.

'It was through Richard and Charlotte,' he replied.

It emerged that Linda had been Richard's research assistant, and the two couples had been friends for six years before Richard's diagnosis. 'We thought they were great,' said Paul, 'except they were Christians, which we found a bit weird. We had a lot of discussions, though. Then we heard the awful news, and I got as

far as saying, "OK, God, I'll believe if you'll heal Richard." But he only got worse – from the start he'd only been given a few weeks to live. There was, though, a great sense of excitement and serenity about him which we couldn't understand.'

The 'few weeks' were extended to five months – a crucial extension. One memorable day, Richard invited Paul and Linda to take a walk with him through the woods.

'I do this every day,' he told them, 'I sit on a log and look out over the countryside.' Sure enough, there was the log and they sat down together to admire the view.

'What I do here is pray,' said Richard, 'and that's what I'd like to do now.'

'In his prayer he mentioned our names, and that did it,' said Paul, still a little choked.

'We just said to God that we gave in, and it was up to him what happened to Richard.'

Three weeks later, as very new Christians, they attended Richard's funeral.

'In spite of the sadness,' said Linda, 'there was such a sense of peace.'

Someone at the service directed them to our church, and so we met. Soon I hope to meet Charlotte again. Despite the great loss Richard's early death means to her and their children, and to friends and colleagues worldwide, we can surely thank God for answering those perinatal – and subsequent – prayers.

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