

## Dr. Nadir, as I remember him...

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A very soft spoken teacher walked into our class, gently acknowledging our half hearted good mornings. It was our second semester of M.Sc. at IIT Delhi. It was in the dead of winters. Hushed voices among students announced that he was Dr. U. K. Nadir, who worked on aziridines.

He calmly introduced himself, took the attendance and started teaching right away. This was a shock. He did not ask any of our names, did not give us a questionnaire to find out how much we knew organic chemistry, did not even ask us what we wanted to do after M.Sc., did not give a 15 min. discourse on what he is going to teach and what is expected of us and how difficult he intends to make our life at IIT. He was certainly different from the rest of the teachers whom we had encountered before. He spoke in a low voice, audible enough but not loud. At last there was one teacher I could take lightly, who was probably too involved in his subject to pay attention to my mischief. Some of us (mostly boys) in the back benches started writing (aka copying) on our physical chemistry practical notebooks (from the girls who were ever so sincere and always finished their homework at home and not in class), which were due just after lunch. I was glad that my lunch hour would not be spent in writing the notebook and I would be able to go to the hostel to grab a quick lunch. He was too preoccupied in his lecture to bother about us.

However, there was something that I noticed which was putting a feeling of guilt in me as I was not paying attention in the class. This was strange as it had never happened to



Prof. Nadir at a Chemical Society function, April 2007

me, before. Lifting my head from the notebook, I looked at him. He was happily unfolding the mysteries of pericyclic chemistry. Yet it was an odd feeling, something about him made me feel guilty for not paying attention in class. I decided to listen to him for a minute and then get back to what I was doing. I was instantly swept off my feet by his lecture. He spoke the language of chemistry as if it was the language of communication. It had an effect of glue. I was drawn towards the subject like a fly to an electric fly-trap. I wanted to gobble each word uttered by him. Organic chemistry, this simple, it was totally unbelievable. I soon realized that the most foolish thing to do would be not to pay attention. The words that he uttered had magical effect on me and my fellow comrades. I saw that people around me were taking notes instead of finishing their practical notebooks. I joined them pronto and no sooner had I turned attentive, than questions came propping in my head. Each one of them was answered in the subsequent lines of his captivating lecture. Here was a teacher who had cared to prepare his lecture keeping his students in mind. He knew what

queries a student would have and addressed it even before the student had asked the question. I do not recall many hands being raised during his classes for clarifying doubts. It was his lectures that I never missed, the ones where I never had to spend money in photocopying book chapters, where I did not have to depend on some kind soul for providing me with lecture notes, they were the very first things I put in my bag when I came to Cornell University to pursue my PhD in chemical biology. I do not ever open Kemp; I go through his notes on organic spectroscopy whenever I need to refer to it. I have treasured the lectures of such a great teacher, who made me love the subject. His demise is a great loss for the scientific community, especially for the students at IIT Delhi who would never get to hear such great lectures ever again.