

# BEING LEFT-HANDED



**MANI KURUVILLA**



## I AM LEFT-HANDED... and

Growing up left-handed, in a world designed for the right-handed was challenging, especially in India. Not only was I left-handed, but starting primary school, I was doing strange things, mirror imaging my letters, with B's and C's facing the wrong way and straying away from writing left to right! I was constantly a source of embarrassment to the elders, they were especially aghast when I regularly reached out for food in public with my left hand, blissfully unaware of various non-eating allocations designated for the left hand. The Principal at Loyola, the school I attended in Pune, 1961-73, reassured my worried parents, 'Nothing's wrong with the boy, just let him work it out himself!'

In the 4th grade we graduated to use the mandatory fountain pen...a left hander's nightmare! However,

**As I labored through courses and examinations, seated on chairs fitted with writing tablets on the right, many a supervisor gently probed "did you have a disabling accident?"**

by hooking my hand around to the top of the paper, I could avoid smudging the freshly inked pages. My left hand had developed this solution naturally.

Left-handedness and footedness did have some advantages on the sports field, and with a strong left kick in soccer and playing power guard in basketball, I played all the way through medical school. There seemed to be an advantage in racket games too. Like in table tennis, the sleight of the left hand serves, and backhand smash could be confounding to the opponent, though seasoned players saw through this by the first set!

Barely a week into Medical

School, and we were subjected to the "common room experience"! First-year students were rounded up at breaktime, and interviewed by seniors, a form of intellectual hazing! We were randomly assigned to sing, act (both hero and villain!), my task was to pen and recite a line or two of poetry. Seeing my left hand clutching the pen in the hooked style, trying to recollect a couplet, the psychiatry resident's eyes lit up with fascination, "I need you for my research program," he announced, "Wada's test for you, free of cost!" I was then clueless, but I did venture into the library and searched the Index Medicus. (yes, no Google in 1975!) To my horror and fascination, Wada's test consisted of