



My remembrance of and engagement with Prof Peter Matter

by Suthorn Bavonratanavech, AO Past President

I met Prof Peter Matter for the first time in December 1978 at an AO Basic course held in Davos. As a young participant without knowledge about the surgical treatment of fractures pioneered by the AO, it was eye-opening for me to gain this fascinating knowledge in operative fracture treatment. Prof Matter was the course chairman and also faculty. This first AO course made me decide to become an orthopedic trauma surgeon. Although I was afraid to talk to all the famous AO surgeons and just listened to their presentation, I had a strong inspiration to follow in their footsteps within the AO. Prof Matter was a typical Swiss, very kind and straight to the point, with systematic approaches to the clinical problems with possible options for a solution. I was highly impressed with his character; a truly unique, brilliant, and charismatic personality.

In 1981, I came back to Davos to attend the AO's advanced course after two months of AO fellowship with Prof Allgöwer in Basel. During the AO course, Prof Willenegger introduced me to Prof Matter as a young surgeon from Thailand who was interested in AO teaching. That was the initial stage in having a conversation and continuing the collaboration with him related to AO activities in Asia. I could not have imagined that this working relationship would build up a strong and lifelong relationship between the two of us. During Prof Matter's responsibilities as the President of AO International, I was appointed unofficially by him as an AO representative for the countries in Asia. My role was to support the need for AO education and provide him with suggestions on how to start AO teaching in different countries in Asia. He gave me the great opportunity to be a faculty member in AO courses in Davos, during which I gained a lot of knowledge and teaching skills from many senior AO Faculty members. One afternoon during the AO course, there was a meeting between the members of the AO International working group in which I had to present the report on the progress of AO activities in the region. I have learned a lot from him about the management of complex organizations, and he has impacted my professional life with his legacy of inspiration, human generosity, and dedication to continuous personal and professional improvement.

Prof Matter was an excellent and diplomatic leader as he always explored the best way of solving difficult and controversial problems. One of the highlights was his support in the successful establishment of AO East Asia, and in particular, his decision to invest in storing workshop materials for AO courses in Asia. This was a huge amount of money to invest: ten sets of instrumentation for nine different exercises. It cost about CHF 6 million, which was shared fifty-fifty by AO International and Mathys Medical. This was the main reason for expanding the AO courses within Asia.

The relationship between Prof Matter and me had strengthened more and more in the past 25 years, and our personal relationship had also extended into members of both our families. It was a great pleasure for me and my wife to meet him and Barbara at different Trustees meetings as well as during the courses in Davos. Prof Matter had raised me from an unknown young surgeon to a successful AO career. I have had a great chance to continue my work and progress in higher positions within the AO because of his kindness. He provided me with a lot of support and advice whenever I sought a solution. It was fortunate for me to have an opportunity to meet him for the last time during the AO Davos Courses in December 2025. During dinner at his home, we enjoyed a friendly conversation about several old stories. He had a great memory of a lot of AO history, and I always enjoyed listening to him.

Prof Matter had contributed plentifully to the AO, an organization that he had belonged to since the beginning. Thousands of surgeons and millions of patients have obtained tremendous benefits from his hard and dedicated work throughout his engagement with the AO. During his active years, he



traveled to many different countries around the world to teach AO courses. There were many initiatives and projects within the AO that he had started and supported, such as AO Publishing and the AO Surgery Reference. He dedicated himself to the AO without asking what he would gain. Personally, Prof Matter was the main role model for me, and a real AO surgeon. He was indeed my inspiration as a great leader, a great mentor, and a highly qualified surgeon. I will always remember the wonderful time that we shared and will continue to follow a lot of his guidance. His great dedication and AO spirit are the model for the next generation of trauma surgeons to follow. Losing Prof Matter is one of the deepest sorrows for me, my AO colleagues, and all orthopedic surgeons who knew him. His goodness, wisdom, and teaching will be the precious legacy that he leaves for us.