

# OBITUARY

## Jeanne Marie Erica de Villiers (née Du Plessis)



Jeanne de Villiers (née du Plessis) was born in Middelburg, Eastern Cape on 14 September 1933. After matriculating at the Hoërskool Sentraal, Bloemfontein, she studied at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and graduated with an MB ChB degree in 1956 as one of only 11 women in a class of 98 students. She was an exceptional student and was awarded the university's gold medal for medicine in her final year. The following year she was appointed as the first female intern in Prof. Jannie Louw's

surgical firm in the Department of Surgery at Groote Schuur Hospital (GSH).

After her internship, Jeanne worked in the UK, where she developed an interest in anaesthesia. In 1958 she returned to GSH to specialise. She showed an aptitude for research and began investigating problems relating to the rapid transfusion of cold bank blood that was becoming necessary for major surgery. In 1963 she was awarded the MMed (Anaes) degree by UCT for research on the safety of a novel radiofrequency blood warmer that was being developed as a collaborative project between UCT's Departments of Electrical Engineering and Anaesthesia. Dr Du Plessis was only the third female to specialise in anaesthesia at UCT. She became a lecturer in the department and published several articles in academic journals between 1966 and 1970. In her later years she was the medical officer at the Poisons Information Centre located at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Rondebosch.

She married Prof. J C (Kay) de Villiers, head of UCT's Department of Neurosurgery, in 1968. Unwilling to do things halfheartedly, she resigned from her professional duties and committed herself completely

to her new role as the supportive wife, mother and later grandmother.

Jeanne's sterling academic achievements and medical career are complemented by her genial manner, modest disposition, warm personality and abiding love of nature. She and Kay would oft be seen walking in the National Botanical Garden, Kirstenbosch, enjoying the splendour of the indigenous flora. She always subscribed to a rather simplistic philosophy of keeping complex matters uncomplicated. Besides being the very epitome of a lady, her loyal, loving support of her spouse and her kind, caring dedication to her children and grandchildren were exemplary and laudable.

She passed away after a valiant and patient fight against cancer on 20 November 2016. She had indeed lived life optimally.

### **Peter Gordon**

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