

# OBITUARY

**Solomon Elias Levin, MB BCh, DCH, MRCP, FRCP, 2 April 1929 - 12 July 2020**



This is my personal tribute to the late Professor Solomon Elias Levin, who died recently in Johannesburg.

Many people have personal trainers, but I had a personal teacher, mentor and friend in Solly Levin (Solly to most, but Prof. Solly to the younger generation). He trained me as one of the first paediatric cardiologists to go through him as a 'Fellow'. Thousands of medical students, paediatric trainees and specialists, and cardiologists were taught by him. He was liked and admired by all who came into contact with him. He was the doyen of paediatric cardiology at the University of the Witwatersrand, but he was the consummate paediatrician as well. Brilliantly clever, he raced through school, jumping classes to complete matric at age 15. He then entered Wits Medical School and completed medicine when was only 20 years old!

As he had to be over 21 years old to practise medicine, Solly spent time in the Physiology Department under Prof.

Sydney Brenner (later the famous Nobel Laureate) until he could start his medical career. He did internships at Baragwanath Hospital, working in medicine and surgery and then as a senior intern in paediatrics. Solly trained in the specialty he truly loved, namely paediatrics. This was accomplished mainly at Bara, but also in the UK, where he qualified DCH (London) in 1955 and MRCP (Edinburgh) in 1956 (the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, conferred an FRCP on him in 1972). He returned to South Africa, completed his training in paediatrics in 1960, and was then able to practise as a specialist paediatrician. From Baragwanath Hospital he went to Transvaal Memorial Hospital for Children (TMH), as head of one of the three units,

It was at TMH that I met Solly, first as a student, then as a paediatric registrar, and then as a Fellow training in paediatric cardiology. He was a brilliant teacher and taught me everything I know. He could explain complex things in simple terms. While I was at TMH as a registrar, Solly did a fellowship in paediatric cardiology in Chicago. He said he had learnt from this experience, but I suspect they may have also learnt from him. He was wonderful to his patients and their families. He could make the most fretful infant calm down and be examined. Despite having specialised in paediatric cardiology, he was a brilliant diagnostician in every branch of paediatrics. No need for a dermatology consult for a rash, Solly would easily diagnose it – including Coxsackievirus causing benign hand, foot and mouth disease in an infant!

Looking back, I cannot recall any real display of anger from him for any reason. I also don't think he had any enemies or hated anyone. Wits University appointed him as Associate Professor in 1974, but only in 1978 was he appointed as *ad Hominem* Professor of Paediatric Cardiology. This was a great honour for him, but a little late, I thought. It should have been conferred on him earlier. When he went into private practice at Sunninghill Hospital, there were five other paediatric cardiologists he had trained also working there, as well as the cardiac surgeons he had influenced. On our floor were Ray Dansky and myself, and across the corridor were Jeff Harrisberg and Kenny Govendrageloo, together with Solly. Janine Meares was downstairs, and the surgeons Rob Kinsley and Peter Colsen were just down our corridor. Sunninghill was a great paediatric cardiology unit to practise in, and looking back, the standard of practice was very high. The Friday morning meetings at Sunninghill and the journal clubs were also of a high standard. I will always remember Solly with affection and awe.

Solly was married to his beloved wife Cynthia for over 60 years. They had three children, Bethia, Trevor and Haidee, whom they adored. Coincidentally, and tragically, his darling Cynthia died only days before him. To his family I can only say he was the most wonderful person, and a '*mensch*'. I offer my sincere condolences.

**Selwyn Milner**

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