



## IN MEMORIAM

### Cyril D Kisner

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death on 5 November 2004, at the age of 89, of a great friend, a man who was so accomplished that in extolling his virtues it is difficult to know where to start.

Cyril graduated MB BCh from Wits in 1938. He had barely started in general practice in Edenvale when World War II erupted. He immediately enlisted and served in the South African Armed forces until he was demobilised in 1945, seeing active service in Abyssinia, where he served with great distinction and courage. His feats included the performance of major abdominal surgery by flashlight in a makeshift tent and crossing a river in a rowboat to rescue wounded personnel while under withering fire from the hilltops. Had he been classified as a combatant, he would undoubtedly have qualified for the highest level of military awards but being a non-combatant, he was, as he modestly told me, only 'mentioned' in dispatches.

After demobilisation, he began his training in urology at the Johannesburg General Hospital and with the conversion of Baragwanath Hospital from a British Military establishment to a TPA hospital and one of Wits University's teaching hospitals, Cyril rapidly rose to become chief of urology there. After entering private practice in the early 1950s, he was appointed part-time chief of urology at Coronation Hospital, a position he retained for many years. Later, he also joined the urology staff of the Johannesburg General Hospital and even after his eventual retirement from practice, he continued as head of urology at what had then become the Hillbrow Hospital.

Cyril was an original thinker and innovator. A man of keen perception and enthusiasm, he invented extraordinary procedures, e.g. for the reconstruction of the bladder and repair of frightful postpartum fistulae. Some of these were adopted in other countries and connected him with leaders in world urology, many of whom became personal friends. For his thesis for the MCh degree at Wits he chose bilharziasis (schistosomiasis), a subject in which he became recognised as a world authority. Those were the days before the availability of modern medical photography and all the illustrations were hand drawn. They are truly works of art.

Without being aware of it, he probably pioneered endoscopic biliary surgery some 40 years ago. A close family member had been left with a cholecystostomy after surgery for acute calculus cholecystitis. While her surgeon was on vacation, the tube spontaneously extruded and Cyril, after considerable

thought, dilated the tract, inserted a urologic panendoscope and removed, under direct vision, more than 30 stones! It never occurred to him to report this, but it might have been a world's first, since laparoscopic surgery for gallbladder disease started in the 1980s.

He loved wildlife and sailing. He was an artist of exceptional talent and his home was virtually a gallery of extraordinary watercolours of wildlife and marine topics. I am the proud owner of two of his works.

While he was a urology registrar, he was commissioned by Raymond Dart to execute five gigantic oil reproductions of the Versalius skeletons for display in the Department of Anatomy. These are finely detailed reproductions of completely articulated skeletons in varying postures, each standing about 2.5 meters tall, done in white enamel against a blackboard background. They required almost engineering techniques in their execution, since the boards were mounted upright on the walls. Standing on a stepladder, and with no margin for error, working nights, often after finishing a busy day's hospital schedule, each took about one month to complete. After the third one, the project was abandoned. These quite phenomenal works were permanent fixtures on the walls of the anatomy dissecting hall in the old (original) Medical School, familiar to thousands of medical students. I know not what has become of them, but they deserve a permanent home in a museum.

As were his paintings, so were his operations works of art; but never flashy, meticulous in planning and execution. Considering that he often had to deal with the most complex problems, the kind one so frequently encounters in Third World populations, his outcomes were often almost miraculous.

I was able to spend quality time with him just a few weeks before his death. He had been increasingly physically disabled in recent years, but his mind remained razor sharp and he was unfailingly enthusiastic, cheerful and good humoured. We shared reminiscences and had wonderful conversations and lots of laughs.

To his wife and lifetime pal, Phyllis, sons Allan and Terry, and daughter Joan, their spouses and all his grandchildren, I extend my deepest condolences.

**Norman A Blumberg**

*Houston Texas, USA*