

Muriel Bamford Richter



The difficulty in writing an obituary for this most exceptional lady – in every sense of the word – is not so much in deciding what to write as in what to omit. Born in Grahamstown in 1926 and schooled at Victoria Girls' High School, she interrupted her first year at Rhodes University to serve with the South African Defence Force Special Signals

Radar Section – certainly a signal that this was no ordinary freshette.

After her war service she graduated from Wits Medical School in 1950, this being only the beginning of her thirst for medical knowledge as between the years 1967 and 1986 she was awarded four further diplomas in Public Health, Industrial Health, Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and Health Service Management from UCT, Dundee (Scotland) and Wits respectively.





Obviously destined for a career in public health, Muriel began in Johannesburg, subsequently moving up the ladder via Durban and Pretoria. Always a happy, good-natured person, Muriel would not tolerate unfairness in any form, so it was no surprise that when she applied for the position of Medical Officer of Health in Durban, at a time when only male applicants were approved, her application was accompanied by a letter of strong protest against sexist bias in the department. The relevant authorities must have realised that they needed a fighter for justice: she was duly appointed MOH.

After her retirement from this position in 1990 while she still had much to give, Muriel became Senior Lecturer in the Department of Community Health at the University of Natal. Her serious committee work had begun in 1983 as a member of the Health Matters Advisory Committee and its subcommittees, leading her to eventually spending the years 1990 – 1993 on the Ministerial Committee on Health and Welfare Matters, Minister's Council of the House of Delegates.

Her Majesty the Queen honoured Muriel for her service to the Order of St John and in 1995 she was nominated for the Women of Achievement Award of Soroptomist International.

In addition to the above, Muriel served on many SAMA committees, which was where I came to know her best and to appreciate her zest for efficient work and steady level-headed control of the Natal Coastal Branch Council in 1994.

There are other committees, too numerous to mention, on which she served with diligent dedication such as Addington Hospital Board, SANTA and three different anti-AIDS bodies. In short, one can say that Muriel was in a sense the epitome of the dictum that a job to be done really well should be offered to a very busy person.

She did find time for recreation – as an ardent bird enthusiast who travelled far and wide. But now she has gone, a victim of malignant disease, leaving an enormous void not only in KZN but nationwide where she will be sadly missed and long remembered. To her family we offer sincere sympathy.

Peter Maytom

Paul Ronald Mesham (1924 – 2004)



Ronnie was educated at Cordwalles School in Pietermaritzburg and Michaelhouse in Balgovan. He excelled academically, with a particular bent for physics and chemistry. He was well liked and made lifelong friendships. After matriculating he did his first year of medicine at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg where he was awarded the physics prize. He then went to the University of Cape Town where he

qualified in 1947. He loved to recall his year as a houseman in the then small town of Ladysmith where some of his calls were done on horseback.

He then became an intern in obstetrics at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban and ran the labour ward virtually single-handedly. This cured him of any aspirations to become a gynaecologist and he switched to anaesthetics. He specialised in anaesthetics in the teaching unit of Liverpool University, a prestigious and renowned teaching hospital. Ronnie was the first South African to qualify as a Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetics of the Royal College and was placed in the top three in Britain. During that time he carried out significant research relating to the scavenging of anaesthetic gases in the operating theatre. He designed the prototype of gas scavengers that are still incorporated into anaesthetic machines today.

On returning to South Africa he started the first anaesthetic department at Edendale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg and from there went into private practice in Durban. He was the driving force behind the creation of the Durban Anaesthetic Clinic and for many years their senior partner. He was considered one of the leading anaesthetists in Durban and was often called on in difficult cases. He gained particular experience in paediatric anaesthetics during a period spent at the Boston Children's Hospital in the USA.

Ronnie had a large variety of hobbies, including sailing, carpentry, playing the organ, stamp collecting and building model ships. He was skilled with his hands and spent many hours in his workshop doing woodwork, boat repairs and modifying anaesthetic equipment. He was a well-known member of the Point Yacht Club in Durban and spent many hours sailing on his keelboat, Born Free. His love of and expertise in sailing brought him many friends and admirers of his skills. His tolerance of those less experienced was legendary.

Ronnie and his wife Noreen provided a happy, loving and stable home for their four children. It is a home that their children and grandchildren love to return to. It gave him great pleasure that his sons James and Michael followed in his footsteps in careers in medicine. Ronnie loved his alma mater, UCT, and liked to reminisce about his time at what was then called Men's Residence.

His oldest and lifelong friend, Dr Maurice Renton, paid the following tribute to him at his funeral service: 'Everyone loved Ronnie, he was a perfect gentleman in the true sense of the word with a lovely sense of humour and a beautiful smile. He was a most conscientious doctor and as all my colleagues present will endorse, a wonderful person with whom to work.'

His quiet dignity, uncomplaining nature, and strength in the face of adversity was at no time more apparent than in his year-long battle with cancer at the end of his life. His quiet stoicism was an example to us all, and he will be remembered with great pride a fine person who will be sorely missed.

Michael Mesham