

## Hamilton Naki (1926 – 2005)

Much has been written and spoken recently about Hamilton (Hami to those of us who worked with him on a daily basis), but only Professor Solly Benatar has come close to capturing the true essence of the man, and I should like to add a little more about him. Hami's passing means the end of an era.

Professor Benatar, former head of the Department of Medicine and Hamilton's personal physician, wrote from Toronto: 'Hamilton Naki was a special man – in my view one of the world's true gentlemen. During his long career at UCT he set a fine example to all with whom he worked. He was also a proud and honourable family man. In the years during which I participated with other colleagues in his medical care I got to know him as a man of great courage, strength, warmth and dedication. He endured his physical ailments with patience and great dignity. He had a good sense of humour and he always had a wise word to offer in conversation that reflected the way he lived.

'Hamilton Naki was a distinguished member of UCT and it gave me and many others great pleasure that his work was recognised through several appropriate and prestigious awards.

Hamilton may not have had the conventional secondary or tertiary education but, as he said to Derek Watts in an interview for *Carte Blanche* some 15 years ago, "I stole with my eyes". He did this so effectively that he could indeed perform the complicated dissection for a liver transplant donor operation in a pig and point out any anatomical anomalies. At the same time he would be keeping an ear open for any changes in the respiration, telling other assistants when to administer certain drugs although the calculation of certain doses was beyond his limited school education, and checking that everyone else in the laboratory was appropriately occupied.'

After a visit to the laboratory in the early 1990s, Professor Claude Organ, the first black president of the American College of Surgeons, invited me to write about Hamilton in a series he was running in his journal about people who had changed the lives of surgeons he had met. It is entitled 'From tennis courts to transplants'.<sup>1</sup>

Hami had a fine sense of humour but, if stretched too far, could dismiss anyone. In the rioting days of the late 1960s, Hans van Leenhoff quipped 'Hami, if they start fighting would you shoot me?' Hamilton look at him and said slowly: 'No, but I would ask someone else to'.



Finally, to stress how long he actually worked for the university – because bald words do not make it clear – when he was about to retire and he went to the pensions office to arrange his affairs, there was consternation because no records could be found going back as far as he claimed to have contributed. 'Don't worry,' said Hamilton, 'your offices weren't here when I started.'

**Rosemary Hickman**, *Emeritus Associate Professor of Surgery and leader of the surgical team from 1967 to 1995*

1. From tennis courts to transplants. *Archives of Surgery (Reminiscences)*. 1999; 134: 451-452.

## Peter Brain (1922 - 2005)

Peter Brain was born into a very loving extended family. He obtained the MB ChB degree in 1949 at the University of Cape Town. His father, Charles Kimberlin Brain, came to South Africa in 1905 from England as an insect specialist, and became professor of entomology at Stellenbosch University. His mother was Zoe Findlay, eldest child of an unusually gifted family: her grandmother's youngest brother was Eugene Marais, and her father's mother was Katie Schreiner, eldest sister of Olive.

My father was brought up in a rarefied intellectual atmosphere, learning zoology, poetry and philosophy at a very early age from his uncles and grandparents on the veranda of the farm Xanadu, owned by his grandfather, Charles Hudson Lamb Findlay.

My father's strongest memory of his grandfather was of his immense goodness and charity, and this was something that came through to dad as well. He was someone who had no enemies, who never spoke ill of anyone, and was the least petty of men. There was a goodness in him that shone from his eyes, and it is this what I will remember him for. This is not to say, of course, that our father was an angel. Along with his purity of spirit went a certain impatience with the pedestrian affairs of daily life.

He abandoned his career as a GP in favour of further study, and qualified as a specialist pathologist in 1956. After a year or two at the blood bank in East London, we moved to Perth in Australia, where dad was the director of the Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service. He held that post until 1965, when the family returned to South Africa and dad started working with the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS), from where he retired. These were very happy years of his life and many of his anecdotes from that time have entered the family mythology. His NBTS colleagues remained close friends throughout his retirement. Even though pathology and blood transfusion affairs were important to him, he also had an enormous range of interests and abilities, and endless energy and inventiveness.

Since he died it has become clear to us just how many people he touched during his life. To list some of his areas of interest:

he made clocks that work, two harpsichords, award-winning black and white photographs. He made all his own lab equipment in Shabani, all the built-in cupboards in the houses where we've lived, did painting, tiling, electrical and repairs of every kind, fixed all our cars, developed a specialist knowledge of acacias, wood carving and turning, and later on a mastery of screen printing and design.

He knew all the stars and all the insects. He knew at least seven languages. At the age of about 40 he began a formal study of Classical Greek, going through the whole array of degrees. His MA on Galen was published by Cambridge University Press, and consisted of the first translations of his writings on blood-letting. He had three doctorates, one in medicine, one in Classical Greek and one based on his published work, which numbered in the hundreds.

He was a witty man with a legendary sense of humour. He loved nonsense verse, which he would quote at great length, revelling in a similar love in any of his children or grandchildren. He never took himself seriously, and was never boring or ponderous. He loved puns and wordplay and was never at a loss for a response.

Dad had a very profound religious life, which was something that meant an immense amount to him. He became a Catholic only after he had been married to my mother for some years, and it was one of the strongest aspects of his life. He was intensely interested in reconciling religion with the new physics and wrote about it later in his life.

Another unalterable love throughout his life was poetry. His memory was prodigious. He could recite from memory as much as anyone had time to listen to, from Homer, in the original; Dante, also in the original, and in his own translation; Chaucer, along with a convincing middle-English accent; Malory, Shakespeare, of course; Milton, Donne, Houseman, Yeats and Eliot, to name only a few. He did not like the moderns in music, literature or anything else much. Our dinner conversation was more often than not poetry. He loved the poetry that transcends, that calls up immortal longings.

Lastly, I have to mention his other great love, my mother. He was deeply in love with her for at least 58 years, and married to her for 56. His love never weakened. Even after 50 years together, he would return in haste from wherever he had been, leaping the stairs to be back with her. His devotion was extraordinary. I have ever seen him impatient with her, or heard them argue. At the end his concern was all for her, for how she would manage without him.

Go in peace, dad.

**Phillippa Beckerling**, *daughter*