



SPECIAL REVIEW

Celebrity Surgeon

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Celebrity Surgeon: Christiaan Barnard — A Life. By Chris Logan. Pp. 340. Illustrated. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball. ISBN 1 86842 163 5 (soft cover). (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R169,95, members R160,00.)

The colossal impact on the world of the first human heart transplant on 3 December 1967 has perhaps had only one medical equal, namely the discovery of X-rays by Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen in 1895. The heart transplant catapulted Christiaan Neethling Barnard into the international limelight where he enjoyed unprecedented recognition but was also dogged by controversy.

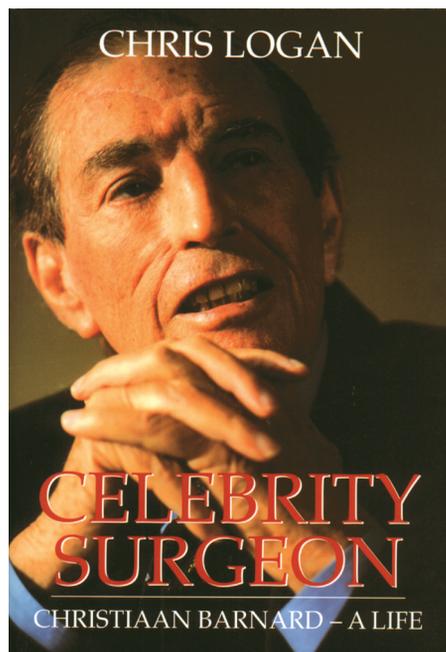
Even without the historical heart transplant Chris Barnard had a remarkable medical career. His earlier work on tuberculous meningitis and congenital bowel atresia, followed by many original observations in cardiac surgery, would have earned him lasting respect in the medical world. But the transplant profoundly changed his life and the lives of all those around him.

Chris revelled in the adulation heaped upon him and rapidly became expert at dealing with the media. He used and abused people but in turn was equally used and abused by others. His three marriages, which were successful while they lasted, all took strain from the glare of publicity and the recurring theme of his insatiable appetite for affairs with other women.

Contradictions abound. His care of individual patients was legendary, but others thought that he cared much more about his statistics (his surgical results were outstanding). At his charming best he was irresistible but he could also be thoroughly destructive in his relationships. He was head of a famous cardiac team but was essentially an individualist. He was parsimonious yet capable of largesse, notably donating the proceeds of his book *One Life* to the UCT Medical Faculty and his large and valuable collection of international gifts and

awards to the Beaufort West museum. In politics he publicly opposed the apartheid rule and yet they were also able to use him for their own purposes. Acclaimed as a great medical scientist he also dabbled in doubtful enterprises concerning 'rejuvenating' products.

Barnard's life is a compelling story from humble origins to great fame and relative fortune, but ends with one feeling sorry for a famous but lonely figure. He had a huge influence on medicine in South Africa and the world. This book was written when it is still possible to record the views and experiences of innumerable colleagues and family of Barnard. Chris Logan has provided a timely, accurate and fascinating account of Chris Barnard's fame and failings.



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