

Reuben Silberman

Ruby died suddenly in Houston, Texas, on 25 June 2012. He had been ill for a long time and, although one never saw him without his portable oxygen supply during the past few years, the finality of his passing came as a great shock.

He obtained his MB BCh degree from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1951, and succeeded me as houseman to Dr Mosie Suzman. After acquiring the FRCS in both Edinburgh and London in the mid-1950s, he trained in the UK and New York, returning to South Africa in 1960. Early on he was appointed as consultant surgeon to the then new Natalspruit Hospital, later becoming a member of the professorial surgical unit and Department of Surgery at Wits (first under Sonny du Plessis and later under Bert Myburgh), a position he held until emigrating to Houston, USA, in 1979. Ruby was for many years a well-known practising surgeon in Johannesburg, with a large and successful practice. He and I occupied neighbouring offices. In Houston, too, his professional excellence was rapidly recognised and he established a large practice which he maintained until his retirement 12 years ago.

In the mid-1950s he met his future wife, Rae Mendelsson, who was then an intern at the Hope Hospital in Salford, Manchester, where Ruby was a surgical registrar. There are 4 children from that marriage. All but one live in Houston. Karen, the oldest, lives in Tucson, Arizona. She is married to Lionel Faitelson, a cardiologist, also a Wits graduate.

In Johannesburg, as in Houston, Ruby was recognised by his colleagues as an excellent doctor and surgeon with an enquiring mind and the highest standard of uncompromising professional integrity and honesty. He was also well known for his emotional volatility and frequent unprovoked outbursts. His legendary temper tantrums were, however, short-lived, quite benign and soon forgotten.

Ruby and I first met in 1945, when I was a first-year medical student and he was in his matric year at high school. We remained close friends and our lives were intertwined across 3 continents for 67 years. It was thus with great sadness and a huge sense of personal loss that I learned of Ruby's sudden death.

Norman A Blumberg

Houston, Texas, USA

monteflora@sbcglobal.net