

Obituary – Dr. Christian George Albertyn

Author:

Lynda Albertyn-Cross¹

Affiliation:

¹Child, Adolescent and Family Unit, Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital, Johannesburg, South Africa

Email:

drlcross@telkomsa.net

Postal address:

24 Duncombe Road, Forest Town, Johannesburg 2193, South Africa

How to cite this obituary:

Albertyn-Cross, L. Obituary – Dr. Christian George Albertyn. *S Afr J Rad.* 2014;18(1); Art. #711, 2 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajr.v18i1.711>

Note:

A previous version of this obituary was published in the *South African Medical Journal*. It can be directly accessed online, here: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7196/samj.8344>

Copyright:

© 2014. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:


Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Christian George Albertyn was born on 13 December 1920 in Bethal, Transvaal (South Africa). He moved to Middelburg and then Pietermaritzburg, where his father Dr Christopher James Albertyn was the district surgeon and who later served on the Gluckman Commission to investigate the setting up of a national health service in the 1930s.

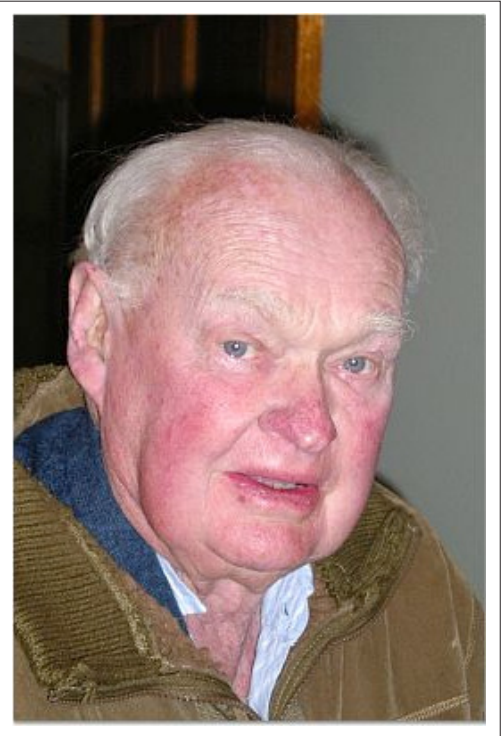
George started studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1939. His studies were interrupted by World War II; he enlisted in 1941 and served in Egypt and Italy. He returned home in 1945 and resumed studying medicine, qualifying in 1949. He did his internship at Edenvale Hospital.

George worked as a general practitioner in Vereeniging until 1966, when he started his specialisation in radiology at the University of Pretoria, qualifying in 1969. He worked as a radiologist in private practice until he retired at the age of 65 years, and then continued to work as a radiologist at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital until the age of 75 years, where he was involved in teaching registrars. During his career as a radiologist, George served a term as President of the Radiological Society of South Africa.

George had a wonderful memory; until the month before he died, despite his virtual blindness, he was able to keep up to date with events and to read avidly using his Merlin magnifier to enable him to see text. A few weeks before he died, he wrote to the Wits graduate magazine to correct the mislabelling of a name on a photo of a 1940s Wits water polo team. He could do complex mathematical calculations in his head. He remembered every telephone number he had ever had in his long life of 93 years. He could remember the names of people he had met in his childhood, and continued to be able to remember details of events in his life right up until his death. He adapted to new inventions, taking to the computer and later his iPad with alacrity. He could also learn new languages with ease, and spoke English, Afrikaans and Dutch fluently and picked up some isiZulu, Italian and Greek. He remembered the names of every winner of the US Open golf tournaments and almost all Wimbledon winners. If anyone wanted to know something from the past, George could invariably supply the answer. He did cryptic crosswords every day until the day before he died.

He was a keen sportsman. He swam for Natal and was captain of the Wits University Water Polo team. He played tennis into his 70s and golf until he was 90. He loved rugby and cricket and continued to take an interest in these sports until his death.

He was such an enthusiastic man. He loved music, mostly jazz from the 1930s and 1940s; to read; learning about new things; and the stories and activities of other people. He loved visiting game reserves and going on holiday with his family; he loved the sea and surfed until he could no longer manage the beach; to bake and cook, to teach, to entertain, travelling to other countries; and he adored his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was a very tolerant and stoical man and never liked to show that he was in pain or discomfort. He had a wonderful sense of humour and laughed plentifully.



Christian George Albertyn

He had enormous energy and zest for life, especially his interest in other people. He had a particular way of talking and meant every word he said. He listened with focused attention, genuinely interested in people and their accounts. His politeness and respectful attention to everyone, no matter their age or station in life, was a wonderful example to everyone he encountered.

George was not one-dimensional at all; he was cheerful company when entertaining friends but was also a methodical and careful professional and parent. He was blessed with the talent to use his energy astutely and effectively, thus achieving many things in his long life on a very broad front.

As a medical doctor, he sometimes had the sad task of helping families over their own grief at the passing of a loved one. He was a district surgeon at Sharpeville after the Sharpeville shootings, a bitter and terrible experience for a war veteran. This experience could have made a lesser man become cynical

but he knew and acted upon the knowledge that ultimately everyone is responsible for their own happiness. You have to 'turn up' for your own life – every day.

He used his close relationships to express his life and dreams. Thus it was that he and his wife Helen, also a radiologist, had one of the most remarkable and exemplary marriages one could imagine. Helen was his companion, guiding star, great passion and support. He had four children, ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and had a special relationship with them all.

George Albertyn has left us a rich and brilliantly lit path and example. He took hold of life with both hands and shared his journey with us all. Whether you were a tennis player or not, you were welcome on his court; if you could not remember the cards and lost every time at card games, there was still much enjoyment and laughter to be shared.

George died peacefully in his sleep on 20 March 2014.