

Professor L. C. J. (Boet) van Rensburg

20 August 1925 - 25 April 2008

Lucas Carl Jansen van Rensburg (universally and affectionately known as Boet) was born in Parys, Free State, but for most of his youth home was on the Zambian copperbelt. This necessitated many long train journeys to and from boarding school in Bethlehem, and later to medical school at the University of Cape Town, where he graduated M.B. Ch.B. in 1949. His postgraduate surgical training was also at Cape Town, under Professor J. H. Louw. He attained the M.Med. (Surg.) and one of the earliest Fellowships of the College of Surgeons of South Africa in 1961. The following year, after periods working at St Thomas' and St Bartholomew's Hospitals in London, he was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Boet's full-time association with the Department of Surgery at the University of Stellenbosch got off to two false starts, one after his return from England in 1963, and again in 1976. On both occasions he accepted appointments, only to find that the conditions under which he was expected to work were unacceptable. Possibly this was a good thing, as periods of outstandingly successful private practice in Port Elizabeth and in Cape Town followed these respective resignations. When he was eventually appointed Professor and Head of Department in 1981, he was able to bring a unique perspective on what surgical practice is all about to academic training. Together with brilliant clinical acumen and technical ability, this was a winning combination. He would be the first to admit that administration and faculty politics at the time were not his forte, but he more than compensated for this by bringing a somewhat insular department into mainstream surgery in this country.

Together with a generation of surgical trainees, I learnt and benefited from Boet's example. At national level his status was recognised by his election as President of the Association of Surgeons of South Africa for the 1988 - 1990 biennium.

On his retirement from academic surgery at the end of 1990 at a very youthful 65, Boet continued to practise very rewardingly in a private capacity in Stellenbosch for a further 5 years. I was privileged to be associated with this practice on a part-time basis, and continued to learn from him. Even

after this period in his life, and despite the allure of his beautiful retreat at Banhoek outside Stellenbosch, Boet was unable to accept the prospect of comfortable retirement, and the idea of not looking after patients. He accordingly accepted a full-time position as Consultant Surgeon at Paarl Provincial Hospital and rendered outstanding service there until 2003, when provincial authorities decided that his contract could no longer be renewed on the basis of his age, rather than failing ability. Undeterred, he embarked on a new career in district surgery, examining prisoners and assault victims and performing postmortem examinations. He equipped himself for this by becoming the oldest ever Diplomate of the Colleges of Medicine, in Forensic Pathology, at the age of 79. He continued with this service, despite his terminal illness

diagnosed in July 2007, until two weeks before his death.

The last years of Boet's life were clouded by the senseless murder of his and Liz's beloved son, Dorian, on Franschoek Pass in July 1999. It is a measure of the man that he did not retreat into bitterness, but continued to serve his fellow human beings, both alive and dead, until the end. For this, and for his contribution to surgery in this country, and at Tygerberg Hospital and Stellenbosch University in particular, we salute him.

Brian Warren

*Division of Surgery
Tygerberg Hospital and Stellenbosch University
W. Cape*

