

IN MEMORIAM

Emile Cornelius Welgemoed



Emile and I were registrars in different departments at Groote Schuur Hospital in the late 1990s with challenges of long working hours, impressive workloads and interminable exams. I did not get to know him there beyond a friendly but occasional working relationship. I qualified and moved to begin my private practice in Knysna.

When he phoned me a year later asking if there was scope for another anaesthetist in Knysna, I invited him to come to visit, promising my support. And he did, with Heidi, baby Sebastian

and puppy in tow. Lilly arrived a couple of years later. Things were not easy at first. We were new at private practice and were often overwhelmed by the challenges, the responsibilities, the good and the bad of medical practice in a goldfish bowl.

His practice grew until he was the busiest anaesthetist in Knysna. We looked after each other's kids and families' medical needs, shared braais and boys' trips away. His circle of friends grew and he became the most popular guy at parties, someone at whose table you wanted to sit, because of the greater fun and laughter on his side of the room.

Together we took on the challenges, tackling those that stood in our way in the name of our patients and good, honest, transparent and effective healthcare. Emile was the full package anaesthetist, fulfilling the terms of the old surgeon's chirp: available, affable, affordable and very able. He told me the dirtiest and funniest joke I know. We covered each other's backs.

I was in awe of Emile's knowledge and expertise. While I dabbled with death and serious disease only occasionally, he faced it head on, working in the ICU, and many nights and weekends, with really big and challenging cases. Together we faced the minor skirmishes on the sides, and overcame them.

When I heard that Emile was dead, the idea was an obscenity, and there was disbelief and inconceivable shock, firstly for the loss to his family, and secondly for our friendship and partnership of ten years ripped apart. Our small medical community has been rocked and devastated by his departure.

I find some small comfort in knowing that Emile died suddenly, not ravaged by injury or disease, doing the things he loved, working his passion, building a farm for his family, and that he was having the time of his life doing it.

It is only in moments of loss that we come to appreciate the true value of others. Emile's was a life well lived, a success in every way, and he departed it at its peak. Its sudden end comes too soon, and I – we – will miss him bitterly.

Martin Young

*Lonely mountain paths
Of inspiration, peace, songlines;
And poetry.*

Haiku: Peter Folb