



Jean Mary Sharpe, 1929 - 2014

Jean was born in Johannesburg in 1929, the daughter of May and John Sharpe, who became the mayor of Vereeniging in 1934. After matriculating from Parktown High School for Girls at age 16, Jean enrolled at Wits medical school. She was one of very few women studying medicine at the time, and graduated MB BCh in 1951. She completed her housemanship at Baragwanath Hospital and was then invited to take up a registrar

post at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, UK. After qualifying as a specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist (MRCOG) in 1956 she returned to Johannesburg, where she worked in the cardiology department at Baragwanath Hospital. She commenced private practice in Johannesburg in 1961. In 1983 she was awarded the FRCOG.

Jean was a pioneer in the field of women in medicine, although she refused to belong to any 'women doctors' organisation, because she was adamant that she was equal to her male colleagues and that women in medicine should not see themselves as different to men. A passionate teacher, she lectured to student midwives for many years. She was widely loved and respected as a person and as a doctor. Her contribution to the medical profession, especially in the fields of obstetrics and women's health, was enormous over a period of more than sixty years.

In 1958 Jean married her childhood sweetheart, George Ballot. They were married for 51 years and raised four children, all of whom became graduate professionals. George passed away peacefully with Jean at his side in 2010, at age 85.

For the past 22 years, Jean worked in association with her daughter Dr Noelene Ballot, in a unique and special relationship. To her many colleagues, patients and friends, and to her family, she was an inspiration, icon, mentor, teacher and legend. Selfless and with a strong moral conviction, Jean was honest and direct and prepared to fight for what she believed was right. She was an accomplished surgeon and an astute clinician with exceptional diagnostic skills and medical intuition. Known for her intelligence, quick wit, humility, dignity and love of life, she was a great listener and conversationalist.

Jean approached her life and her career with passion, compassion, enthusiasm and energy. She was an accomplished sports-woman and as a student represented Wits in hockey, tennis and swimming. She played in the Wimbledon qualifying rounds as a young woman, and continued to play tennis until a few months before her death. A spiritual person, she had numerous interests and hobbies including birding, wildlife, photography, handwork, gardening, theatre, music, travel and reading. Her most passionate interest was her family. A devoted matriarch, she developed a successful solo practice while maintaining an active interest in the lives of her children and grandchildren.

Jean passed away suddenly and unexpectedly but peacefully at the age of 84, while still working full-time as a specialist. She will be deeply missed by her colleagues, her thousands of patients and her family, and will be remembered for her legacy of selflessness.

Jean is survived by her daughters, Prof. Daynia Ballot (Professor of Neonatology at Wits), Dr Noelene Ballot (specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist) and Jane Ballot, her son Carl Ballot, eleven grandchildren and two brothers.

Noelene Ballot

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