

OBITUARY

Christopher John Bretherton Hundleby



Dr Christopher John Bretherton Hundleby, a general practitioner in Cape Town, died on 6 October 2017 at age of 86 years. He was a very special person, a truly humble and gentle man with an abundance of courtesy, kindness, consideration, compassion and goodwill. These attributes, coupled with his intelligence, intuition, thoughtfulness, sincerity, commitment and sense of responsibility, made him an exceptional husband, father, friend and medical practitioner.

He was born in the Eastern Cape on 29 March 1931, the first child of Charles and Constance Hundleby, teachers at St Matthew's Mission. His mother was also the mission organist and his father an Anglican lay minister, as well as being head of St Matthew's Teachers' Training College. Later his father became Dean of the Faculty of English at the University of Fort Hare, and later still was honoured by Rhodes University with an honorary doctorate and by the Anglican Church with the Order of Simon of Cyrene. It was within this culture and its altruistic doctrine that Chris Hundleby was brought up and developed his profound respect for Africa and its people. At the age of eight he went as a boarder to St Andrew's College in Grahamstown, where he excelled academically, such that when the time came his teachers recommended that he further his education at Cambridge University. His housemaster's recommendation for entry to Magdalene College at that university reads: '... He is a first rate young man and one with a particularly good academic record. He

wishes to study medicine; no sudden whim this. From the day he arrived, Hundleby's job in life has been clear before him. He sees in medicine not a means to an assured income but a study that interests him intensely and a profession of vital importance in the development of his country ...' This letter is signed 'Charles Fortune, Housemaster'. Chris entered Cambridge University in 1949 to read Natural Sciences, receiving his BA degree in 1952. From there he went to St Mary's Hospital in London to pursue his clinical training, obtaining his Cambridge medical and surgical degrees in 1956. Subsequently he worked in the British National Health Service until he returned to South Africa in 1962 to convalesce from a serious illness that had hospitalised him for three months. He joined a large Queenstown general practice, in which he was able to pursue his interest in anaesthesia, and then two years later went back to England, this time to Cambridge, primarily to support his younger brother James in his studies. While working there at Addenbrooke's Hospital Chris met his future wife, Rosemary Faith Milne, a nursing sister at that hospital. In 1966 they married in her home town of Aylsham in Norfolk, and it was typical of him that the marriage was conditional on he and his bride returning to Africa, which he did as a specialist anaesthetist. However, instead of continuing in anaesthetics in Cape Town, he took his wife and their two young daughters to the Ciskei to take up an appointment as district surgeon in the Stockenström area. There over nine years he built up a flourishing and vibrant clinical practice with an expanding infrastructure, dedicated nursing staff and loyal support services. He dealt with his responsibilities, which were heavy and varied, with characteristic thoroughness. For example, during a meningitis outbreak he and his team vaccinated 600 'at-risk' patients during one day.

Faith and Chris were very happy in the Ciskei. A loving and open home was created in Seymour, a third daughter arrived, the practice was thriving, and Chris was in his element. These were their happiest and most fulfilling, indeed golden years. However, the children's education took priority and their return to Cape Town became inevitable. Their leaving was a time of regret and sadness for many. A local paper of that time

stated that '... During the past nine years there have been tremendous improvements in the medical services in the whole area, all initiated and financed by the doctor. The consulting rooms and outpatient facilities have been enlarged and replanned, and as a result of requests from the people of the outlying districts, through the magistrate for medical services, Dr Hundleby purchased and started a mobile clinic with trained and qualified nursing sisters. At one period there were five but the number has been reduced to two at the present time, all salaries being paid for by Dr Hundleby. Mrs Hundleby has also been active in the life of the community ... Their going will leave a gap hard to fill.' It is no wonder that the community wept when the Hundleby family departed.

To return to hospital practice was not for Chris; he needed the intimacy of personal patient contact, so he set about establishing a consulting general practice near Mowbray Station. The local residents objected strongly, but the City Council smartly overruled all objections. So from humble beginnings, some days with only one patient, his reputation across the Cape Flats and far beyond grew such that eighty patients a day would attend. Why? Because he ran a model practice, efficient, comprehensive and productive; because of his own unique humanity and spiritual qualities of caring, compassion and competence; and because of his ability to converse with his patients in their own language. He would treat with successful outcomes, and when he foresaw that he could not, he would refer to the hospital up the hill. He sold his practice a few years ago, but went on working there, remarkably until the day before he recently left Cape Town for Johannesburg. And that at the age of 86.

Chris Hundleby was a family man, a devoted and most loving husband, who with Faith had a model marriage – how loyal she was, and how supportive of him in all his efforts of goodwill to others and caring of so many. She made him a wonderful home, and she raised and nurtured a wonderful family. His devotion to her was exemplified by his concern for and care of her during her protracted and debilitating final illness. He was for Faith a tower of strength, of attention and of care. When she died in August 2016 he was devastated, and clearly his grief never resolved. But despite his own emotional

distress he put his affairs in order, sold his house, and made his move to Johannesburg. He was too a model father, who adored his three daughters and in time their children, and they in their turn adored him. They were his treasures, and to their credit they

have lived by his example, his standards and his values.

Christopher Hundleby was the quintessential medical practitioner, for whom *agape* and altruism were his primary way of life; and yet more so, as a son of Africa, he

gave tangible meaning to the fundamental principles of *ubuntu*.

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