

# OBITUARY

Cató van Wyk, 8 October 1929 - 9 June 2020



Dr Cató van Wyk was a graduate of the University of Cape Town class of '65. When she joined the class in its second year, having been exempted from the first year because she had completed a BSc in home economics, she was a 32-year-old widowed mother of three. Warm, sensitive and motherly, and the oldest member of the class, she was held in great affection by all who knew her, and especially by those with whom she worked closely.

Cató was born on the farm Bo-Downes in Calvinia. She attended school in Calvinia, and matriculated in 1945 at the age of 16. She subsequently furthered her studies in home economics at the Huguenot University

College in Wellington and took up a teaching position in Robertson, where she excelled. Her textbook on senior home economics continued to generate royalties for many decades.

When her husband, Attie van Wyk, a farmer from Boereplaas, Nieuwoudtville, died prematurely, Cató was 30. She moved to Cape Town with her three daughters, in anticipation of her medical studies.

After her internship at Groote Schuur Hospital she worked in the GSH radiation therapy and oncology department, where she enjoyed being an investigator in many clinical trials and interacting with international collaborators. She later became a medical superintendent at GSH before moving to Helderberg's Faure Hospital, where the National Accelerator Centre was housed. Her final posting was as the first official full-time medical superintendent of the Heldeberg Hottentots-Holland Hospital in 1984, where she introduced the innovative 'spoke-and-wheel' district system with connections between this district hospital (level 1 services) and regional day hospitals.

As a hospital administrator, Cató led by example with sincerity and transparency. Her cheerful and positive outlook, dedication to her responsibilities, meticulous attention to detail, and concern for patients, staff and the services under her purview made her an effective and admired administrator.

Cató formally retired in 1995, but continued to contribute to the community through her involvement in charity initiatives as national president of a welfare organi-

sation, Project Daphne, and as founder of the Gordon's Bay Seniors, which organised activities for senior citizens.

In 2013 she recorded her life history in a memoir entitled *My Inspired Life*, a charming, forthrightly honest, jovial and heart-warming account of a life of dedicated purpose. It also revealed her resilience and courage in living through and overcoming adversity, while supporting her daughters' university education and career pursuits.

Cató spent the last four years of her life at the Summerville Home for the Elderly in Gordon's Bay, where despite her age she continued to work at her computer and regularly spoke on Skype with her children and grandchildren. When I visited her at her daughter's farm in February 2018 she was the same cheerful and warm colleague she had been at medical school, and she rejoiced in reflecting on many happy memories of her medical career and community life. Her hospitalisation due to deteriorating health during the COVID-19 pandemic sadly deprived her of the family visits she relished.

Throughout her life Cató remained interested in the humble origins of her family, and her life was anchored in her religious faith as expressed in her memoir.

She is survived by her loving daughters Marlette, Nelia and Adri and their families.

## Solly Benatar

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