



## IN MEMORIAM



### Lafras Marais Steyn

Lafras Steyn died on 4 February 2008 after a long and debilitating illness, leaving behind him the deep footprints of a leader, scientist, and a man of great stature and integrity.

He was born on 5 September 1951, the third child of Marais and Susan Steyn, his brother being Martinus,

and his sisters Melanie and Melissa. After matriculating at King Edward School in Johannesburg, where he was head prefect, he went to Stellenbosch University where he obtained the BSc (Physiology and Chemistry) and the MB ChB degrees. He also distinguished himself in that era by being ejected from a rugby team by Danie Craven, when he attended his sister's wedding instead of playing a match.

Lured across the Liesbeek River by Wieland Gevers and Arderne Forder, he found a home at UCT, where he obtained an honours degree, and then a PhD (Kinetic and Metabolic Studies in HPRT Deficiency), for which he was awarded the Bronte Stewart Research Prize. He joined the Division of Medical Microbiology in 1985, and was promoted, *ad hominem*, to Associate Professor in 1993. In 1998 he was appointed to the Wernher and Beit Chair in Medical Microbiology, and Head of the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences, and subsequently Head of the School of Biomedical Sciences.

During his tenure in Medical Microbiology he innovated and achieved much. One of his first achievements was the implementation of the BSc Honours programme in Medical Microbiology, which continues to attract a large number of students annually. In addition, he supervised 13 Doctoral, 6 MSc and 3 MMed students. His main area of research was tuberculosis, and in particular the response of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* to various stress factors, including heat and cold shock, with the object of understanding latency of the organism. In addition he made a considerable contribution to the knowledge of the molecular basis of antibiotic resistance. His work has been disseminated widely, with many publications, book chapters and editorials.

His interests and activities extended well beyond the Faculty. He held many positions in the Medical Research Council. He was deeply involved in the newly formed National Health Laboratory Service (N HLS), sitting on their Board, and having a major involvement in drawing up the umbrella agreement between universities and the N HLS, wherein he championed the cause of academic medicine. He was asked to inspect programmes at MEDUNSA, UNITRA and the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the Health Professions Council of South Africa. He was passionate about transformation, and brought his belief to practical effect by the guidance and promotion of

many transformational candidates. A proud moment for him was being a signatory to the Faculty Charter.

The Faculty was privileged to celebrate his achievements over an illustrious career at a *Festschrift* on 28 June 2007, when tribute was paid to his integrity, leadership in Faculty affairs, and his great compassion and strength of character – truly a gentle giant. He leaves his children Tai (Taillefer), Lesca, and Ronan, and their mother Kate. He also leaves his partner, Clare.

Faculty of Health Sciences