

OBITUARY

Harold Bloch, 1948 - 2020



It is with great sadness that I report on the death of Harold Bloch, a stalwart of the gastroenterology community and a personal friend of many of the 'retiring' gastroenterologists in South Africa. His father Joe, an Austrian and a prospective Olympic athlete, fled to South Africa in the late 1930s, where he met and married Sheila. They had four children. Harold, the only son, was born on 21 September 1948.

Harold received his schooling at Pretoria Boys High and Kearsney College in Natal. He studied medicine at the University of Pretoria in the same class as Hennie Grundling, Herbie Schneider and Peet van Eeden. They graduated together in 1972, and all became successful gastroenterologists in state and

private practice. Harold subsequently trained as a physician in the Pretoria programme and obtained his FCP in 1977. After a brief dalliance with neurology, he decided that gastroenterology was to be his career path, and he went to Bristol in 1979 to broaden his gastroenterology horizons. While in the UK, he passed the MRCP before returning to Johannesburg General Hospital in 1980 to head the GI unit. Two years later he entered private practice with Herbie Schneider at the Brenthurst Clinic in Johannesburg.

As well as his considerable talents in the field of gastroenterology, Harold had many other arrows in his quiver, and he tackled each with the same enthusiasm he was renowned for in his chosen profession. He was a brilliant aviator, photographer, naturalist and equestrian, and an enthusiastic 'golfer', cyclist and motorcyclist – though mishaps occasionally resulted in visits to orthopaedic specialists.

Harold married Jeanne in 1979, and they lived on a smallholding where they could pursue their equestrian dreams. In Jeanne he had a staunch supporter who shared his love for wild life, photography and horses. Despite his successful and respected private practice in Johannesburg, the allure of the Cape beckoned and in 1996 he moved south. Harold was desirous not only of a change of scenery but also of a change of lifestyle. He and Jeanne bought a fruit farm in the Banhoek Valley, which was converted to a commercial protea farm. He became a pillar

of the local community and re-established a gastroenterology practice at Vergelegen Mediclinic in Somerset West.

Throughout his career Harold was an ardent supporter of the South African Gastroenterology Society (SAGES) and religiously attended local congresses and industry-sponsored events. He was active on several local congress organising committees, including successful meetings at Spier and Sun City.

In those days SAGES had golf days, and on occasion I had the pleasure of playing with Harold. The P G Wodehouse adage 'to find a man's true character, play golf with him' fitted Harold to a tee. His regular golfing cronies in the Cape had several nicknames for him, the most popular being 'Babbler' and 'Twitcher' Bloch, as each fairway was a bird- as well as a ball-spotting exercise, during which illuminating conversations about politics, medicine, travel, wildlife and virtually any subject you care to name took place.

Those who got to know Harold were enriched by the experience, and he will be sorely missed by all. Harold was a devoted husband to Jeanne and stepfather to Michelle and Kim, and we offer our condolences to the family as they remember his many achievements and cherish their fond memories of this truly multifaceted man.

Sandie Rutherford Thomson

*University of Cape Town, South Africa
sandie.thomson@uct.ac.za*