

WITS UNIVERSITY MEDICAL SCHOOL

GRADUATING CLASS OF 1960

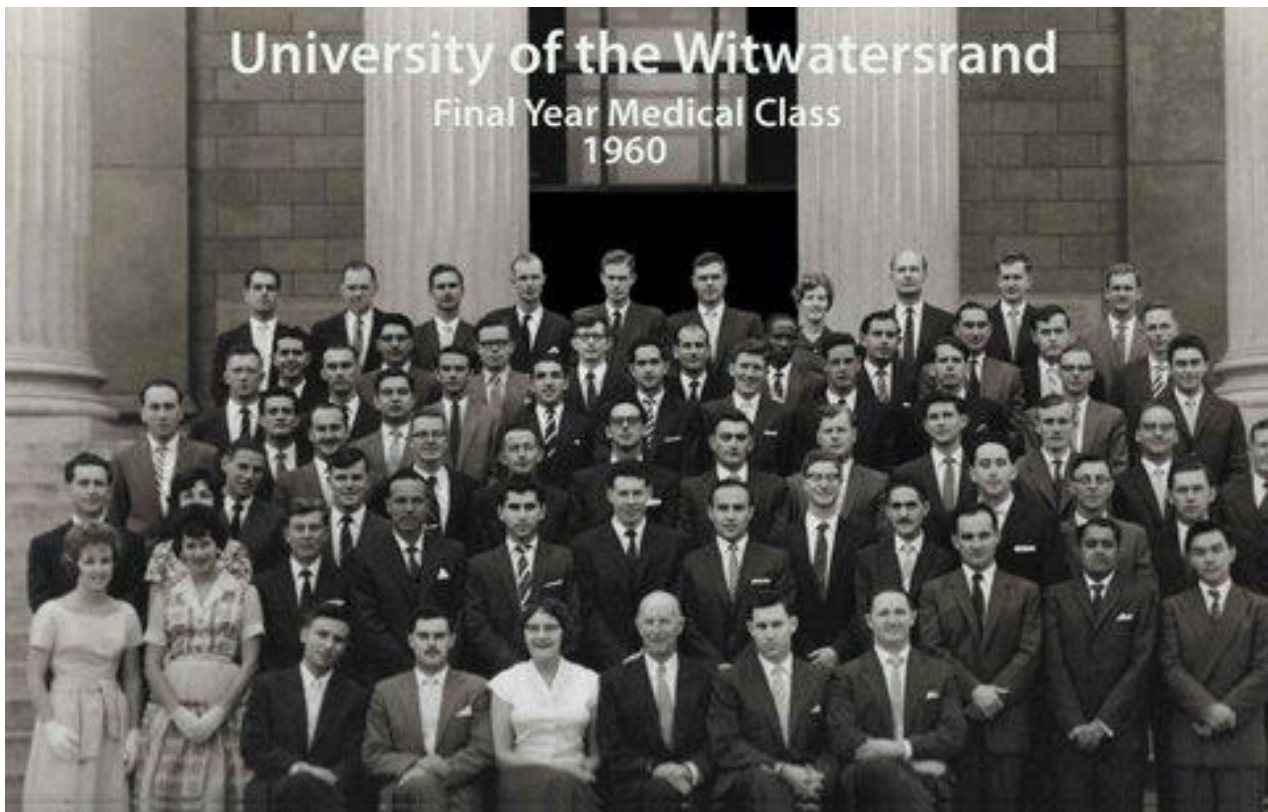
Newsletter #7 – Contribution to Medicine in SA

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE

London, October 2020



Contributions to Medicine in South Africa by some the Class of 60



Of the 90 or so Wits University Medical Graduates of 1960 (seen in the picture above) the overwhelming majority, 59, made their medical careers in South Africa. They became the skilled physicians, surgeons, general practitioners and pathologists, in private and public medicine in the metropolises of Johannesburg and Cape Town as well as in the smaller country districts. They were innovative and entrepreneurial in developing new specialities and facilities and carrying out ground-breaking research. Many became revered teachers at Wits and UCT. They all served their community with dedication.

In the 1950s, the Nationalist Party's Apartheid policy of removing 'non-European' students from Wits was abhorrent to most of our graduates. Many of the class of 60 students as well as their teachers, served on bodies seeking academic freedom for all South Africans. Some classmates, like Essop Jassat and Costa Gazidis, joined the fight against these policies – with serious consequences to their own careers. Others left as soon as they could to avoid it. Most put their heads down to do the best they could for their families and for the people they served.



From what we have found out, seventeen of our classmates ended up providing medical services spread across the USA; eight settled in the UK, most in London; three went to Israel; and a few to Australia and New Zealand. However, many of those who did decide to leave, had first provided up to thirty years of valiant and valuable service to South African medicine, before moving elsewhere to be closer to their children.

After the end of Apartheid, some of our classmates were held in high esteem by the African National Congress. **Jack Kussel** (seen on the left with Mandela and some of his own grandchildren) was invited to be the paediatrician for Nelson Mandela's grandchildren, and **Michael Plit** was Mandela's favourite 'go to' doctor for all his ailments for over 20 years.

New Specialities, Facilities and Medical Services

Members of the class of 60 gained specialist training and higher degrees both in South Africa and by visiting the UK and USA. They took a leading role in developing specialities and facilities in South Africa and created some completely new services. **Anthony Meyers** (right) developed the speciality of **Nephrology** in South Africa. He, with **Leon Kahn** and **Irving Lissoos** (urologists), were pioneers in developing **dialysis units** and **kidney transplants**.



Andre van As (left) worked in respiratory medicine and developed the intensive care units at the Johannesburg General and the JG Strijdom Hospitals with Professor Elliott. With **Mike Plit**, he was instrumental in the development the speciality of **pulmonology**. **Gloria Davis** added her expertise to the new speciality of **allergy** in South Africa.

Pieter Landsberg was a renowned worker in the field of **emergency medicine**. He pioneered safety procedures and equipment for the fire services. He also evolved the concept of a formal diving medical association. In 1992, **SAUHMA – the Southern African Underwater and Hyperbaric Medical Association** (logo right) – was formed with Pieter as its first president.



Alf Mauff and **Stan Zail** with graduates in other years, Zent and Skudowitz, set up **Lancet Laboratories** providing advanced pathology services.

Anthon Heyns was instrumental in

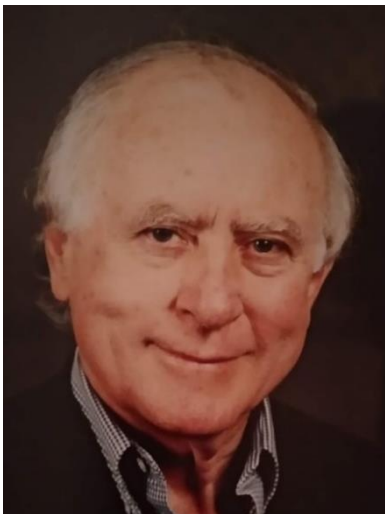


creating and operating the **South African National Blood Transfusion Service**.



Mervyn Hurwitz started the first sex therapy clinic in South Africa.

Innovative Research



Many of the class of 60 were involved in ground-breaking research both at Wits and at the South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR). Alf Mauff says, 'our classmate and my partner **Stan Zail** (left) was one of the most brilliant graduates (if not the best!) of our class. His achievement, to be part of the development of Lancet Laboratories and still to find the time and energy to do basic research, is unique and should be recognised'. His work, particularly in iron and red cell metabolism has been, and still is, internationally recognised and acclaimed.

Alf Mauff himself spent time at SAIMR doing research in Microbiology; **Anthon Heyns** carried out important studies there in blood platelets and blood safety; **Naomi Livni** worked at SAIMR in cytology and histopathology.

Higher Degrees, Professors and Teachers

Several of the class of 60 received an MD and other higher degrees from Wits: **David Paton**, **Stan Zail**, **Clive Rosendorff**, **John Lee**, and **Andre van As**. **Anthon Heyns** was awarded MD and DSc degrees by the University of the Free State for his research in blood platelets and an honorary MD for his contributions in haematology and blood transfusion.

Wolfe Rakusin, who started with the class of '55, but dropped back a year and graduated in 1961, received a PhD (Med) in 1975 for his thesis on 'Traumatic Hyphaema – A Clinical Study'. (Wolfe is on the left in the picture on the right with Jeff Freedman after receiving their PhDs.)

Many of our cohort became teachers and served on the faculty of Wits Medical School in several specialities.

Anthony Myers became the first **Professor of Nephrology** at Wits University, having developed renal services in South Africa. **Wolfe Rakusin** was the Medical Director of Undergraduate Teaching in **Ophthalmology** at Wits Medical School and chief examiner in ocular

pathology from 1975 until 1991. They, amongst many others were invited speakers at many international Conferences in their specialities and had papers published in various international journals.



Allan Gottlieb was a teacher and demonstrator in the anatomy department. **Mervyn Hurwitz, Naomi Livni, Gloria Davis, Alf Mauff, Stan Zail** all taught medical students from time to time. **Max Shaff** taught students in Radiology at Groote Schuur.

Clive Rosendorff (left) was Head of **Physiology** and then **Dean of the Wits Medical School**.

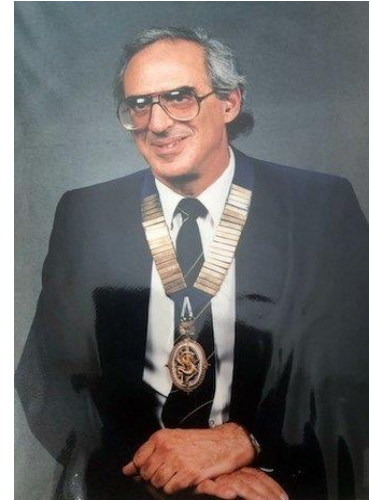
Antho Heyns, was recruited to become **Professor and Head of the Department of Haematology** in the new Faculty of Medicine at the University of the Free State.

Office Bearers for their Speciality

Almost all of the specialists of class of 60 have at some time been office bearers and leaders in the South African professional bodies for their specialities. They have developed and maintained international connections.

Professor Anthony Meyers has served as President of the South African Renal Society, and the South African Transplant Society. He had been the official South African representative on the African Association of Nephrology (AFRAN) and has served on the executive committee and as chairman. He was also the Africa representative on the International Society of Nephrology (ISN) executive committee; He has served as chair and vice-chair of the Johannesburg Hospital and Transvaal Provincial Pharmacy and Therapeutic Committee and on the Colleges of Medicine Examination Executive Committee (Johannesburg Branch)

Ivan McCusker was a born leader. He chaired the Association of Surgeons of South Africa from 1988 to 1995, was President from 1995 to 1996, and was awarded Honorary Life Vice-Presidency. He chaired many other committees. **Theo Kretzmar** (right, wearing the chain of office) was President of the East Rand branch of the Federal Council of Surgeons of South Africa.



Work in Rural Areas

From 1968 until 1982, Wolfe Rakusin was a regular 'ophthalmologist on tour' for the SA National Council for the Prevention of Blindness. This was a semi-governmental organisation, which provided ophthalmic services to remote rural areas of South Africa. He says: 'We would spend one to two weeks in South African rural villages, where there were no specialist medical facilities. We would hold clinics in schools or at the local Mission Hospital, where we would operate – mainly on cataracts and trachoma patients. The most gratifying experience was to see an old blind man being led into the hospital by his grandchild and then 10 days later seeing the same man in thick glasses, with a wide smile on his face walking out unaided.'

[Who's Who - The Class of 1960](#)

We have, so far, been able to find information on only some of the members of the class. We may therefore have left out some significant contributions. We hope that for those who are not yet documented in our 60th anniversary website, they or their families will get in touch. However, from the biographies we have already received, it is clear that the Class of 60 served the medical needs of the country exceedingly well and made lasting contributions to the health of its people. You can read more about each of them and their work by going to the page of [Who's Who - The Class of 1960](#) and clicking their names.

Tony Meyers reflects on some colleagues and teachers:

'How wonderful it is to read all the news about our class's contributions to medicine in South Africa. A few events remain clearly etched in my memory. On a happy note are my thoughts on the contributions of Dr **Leon (Leopold) Kahn**. During his training as a urologist, he spent eight months with me as a renal registrar. On qualification he and his wife **Naomi (Livni)** (also from our class) settled in Vereeniging where he became the local guru in nephrology – not only dialysis. We spent many hours on the old (and very efficient) telephone discussing renal biopsies. When Leon went to London to practice, his name as a 'no mean general nephrologist' was widespread. In fact, at that time, he probably knew more about renal histopathology than most nephrologists! Naomi, of course, is famous in her own right as a histopathologist. This makes me wonder how



many other 'husband and wife' doctors (see Naomi and Leon's wedding above) there may be in our and/or other classes and disciplines from Wits. What an interesting list this would make.

'On a less happy note we should spare a moment of our thoughts for our deceased colleagues. One terrible tragedy not mentioned in our earlier class newsletters, concerns the fate, soon after graduation, of our classmate Dr **Kleintjie van Veen**. He was an extremely hardworking and knowledgeable young man. Soon after graduating with overall high marks, he and his newly married wife set out for Durban on their honeymoon. They were both tragically killed when driving at night on the highway near Heidelberg. He could so easily have been one of our leading practitioners!

'Spare a thought as well for praising our teachers and life-long mentors – many of whom were mentioned in previous reports and, tributes to them can be seen on the website. Two names stand out for me during my training. The holistic, humanitarian and highly skilled practice of **Professor Tom Bothwell** has created indelible ideals for many of us fortunate enough to have been taught by him. A second giant and one with both immense knowledge and judgement, as well as iron-fisted social graces was Dr **Ben Goldberg**. But there were many more before and have been after, even up to this day.

'The excellence of both under and post graduate medical training at Wits is part of the reason why South African doctors applying for posts in other countries are snapped up. Long may this continue but the future remains most challenging. What we hope for in our young graduates is that they do not allow themselves to become inured to human suffering which, unfortunately, is now found more frequently in modern practice.'

The changing face of medicine in Johannesburg

Alf Mauff, (pictured right) pathologist of Lancet Laboratories wrote: 'When I joined my small practice in Lancet Hall, the heart of medicine was concentrated in **Jeppe Street**. This was the location of the famous 'doctor buildings': Lancet Hall, Medical Centre and the new pride of Jeppe Street, Lister Buildings. This was where we all had our consulting rooms and offices.



'Some small hospitals were located in central Johannesburg, the Lady Dudley, Florence Nightingale, Brenthurst, with the Kensington Clinic the most peripheral. However, medical practice was dominated by the state academic Johannesburg General Hospital and for pathology the South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR).

'Rapid changes, over the years saw the growth of solid medical aid systems, the prosperity of suburbia and the influx of clinicians and new hospitals. Initially they were centrally located, for instance, the Kenridge Hospital and Millpark, followed by suburban hospitals in Sandton, Morningside, Sunninghill and Garden City. This witnessed the complete transfer of clinicians from 'doctor buildings' in the city centre, to hospitals closer to where the patients lived.

'With the ever-increasing and sophisticated expansion of private practice, the class of 1960, although having lost many of our most talented members to distant shores, as well as to our own academic institutions, nevertheless contributed significantly to the maintenance of outstanding and sophisticated private medical services to the Johannesburg community. The names that come to my mind from our class who did their bit were: **Lissoos, Plit, Kussel, Crosley, Palmer, Bosman, Cochrane, Dove, Lampert** and my partner **Stan Zail** among others'

Anthon Heyns sums up:

Anthon Heyns who became Professor of Haematology at the new medical school of the University of the Orange Free State and the CEO of the South African National Blood transfusion service, sums up by saying: 'Medicine is a wide-ranging discipline and offers the opportunity after graduation to shape one's career to fulfil a personal interest.



Our class illustrates this: our passions range from highly specialised disciplines to general practice, and from doctors who are interested in treating and interacting with patients to those with a more scientific and laboratory leaning. In our class some pursued an academic career and some preferred private practice; a few successfully combined the two.

‘It is notable that the common thread through most of these stories is that our teachers have instilled in us a value system and ethical code that is central to the practice of medicine. This exposure to the culture and standards of the Wits Medical School in our formative years has shaped our lives and attitude to our profession. We have served all the people of South Africa equitably to the best of our ability and in a special ‘Wits graduate’ way. One can only wonder what could have been achieved if there had been a just and equitable government in the era that we qualified, and more members of our class could have contributed to the development of medicine in our country’.

Newsletter #7 – The Class of 60s’ Contributions to Medicine in South Africa

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE from stories received

and with contributions by **Anthony Meyers, Alf Mauff** and **Anthon Heyns**

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