



Obituaries

Hugh (Gus) Ferguson

1 July 1940 – 27 December 2020

My association with Gus goes back to our early years as students at the Cape Technical College. Although I was ahead of him in terms of our year of study, I soon appreciated his astute mind and infectious sense of humour. I was therefore delighted when he accepted the job as Director of the CWP Branch of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa. It was in that capacity that he unleashed his true potential as a multi-talented individual.



Although we had lost touch with each other during my tenure at Rhodes University from 1971–1981, we at least saw each other at the PSSA's annual conferences. It was on my return to Cape Town in 1981 that our friendship blossomed. He was always a pillar of support during my headship of the Pharmacy School at the Cape Technikon and it was from him that I sought assistance when I had to make the tough decision to abandon academe for the hurly-burly of commerce. Gus was not only lavish with his constructive advice, but I also always trusted him as a confidante.

Although he rendered yeoman's service to the pharmacy profession, his other interests like cycling and poetry were equally remarkable. I shall always treasure the watercolour that he generously gave me depicting snails pulling a wagon and entitled "Die Groot Schlepp". This will always serve as a memorial in my home office to an individual for whom I had the highest admiration.

I was also fortunate enough to be awarded the Hymie Barnett Award in 1988, and the certificate bears the signature of the convenor, H M Ferguson. This too will serve as a constant reminder of his brilliant and witty résumé at the annual PSSA conferences before the announcement of the winner of the award.

So many memories of Gus just keep flooding into my mind, but suffice it to say that Gus touched many lives with his acute intellect, witty humour, poetic mastery and artistic flair. A mighty cedar has indeed fallen in the pharmacy profession and may his dear soul rest in peace.

That is indeed sad news. Whilst I was aware of Gus's indisposition and poor quality of life, one is never quite prepared when the inevitable happens. The profession has lost an exceptional stalwart and his sterling service to the CWP branch over many years will always be remembered.

Our deepest condolences to Nicky and the extended family. Gus's intellect and wonderful sense of humour will be sadly missed.

With profound grief & sadness

Natie Finkelstein

2000 Hymie Barnett Award

Published as a tribute to its author, the inimitable Gus Ferguson

In presenting this first, 21st century Hymie Barnett Award, one that coincides with the fully unified Society, I have, as chief judge, decided to break from a long tradition and present this award in a less frivolous manner.

When I was first asked to judge the Hymie Barnett Award, our conferences were quite different affairs to those that we now attend. We have become more professional, there is better control, less hysteria and far fewer ritual displays of emotion.

In the early years of the Hymie Barnett Award, there was far more interaction from the floor. This interplay produced spontaneous utterances that were often both flawed and hilarious. The pleasure of my task was to replay some of these more comic and revealing Freudian slips. However the golden age has ended. Never again will we achieve the heights of verbal confusion attained by such luminaries as Graham Clarke, Barry Rudolph, Bernard Lapidus and other great and impromptu orators of that generation. I have collected literally hundreds of unintended jokes made at PSSA conferences, but none can match this one made by Graham Clarke during the inaugural Hymie Barnett Year:

"Mr President, the Pharmacy Council is emasculated because it has no teeth."

Part of the blame for our, frankly, duller conferences must be shared by the H Barnett Award. We have had an unfortunately salutary effect on the form and content of pharmaceutical debate. More's the pity. And for this I apologise.

If I may quote one of my hopeful entries for the Limerick Competition which is central to my case:

*"Our Councillors during debate,
now speak at deliberate rate
to prevent verbal slips
escaping their lips
thus closing the H Barnett gate."*

There is another deeper issue that is of concern to me. The previous style of the H Barnett award was (a) to send up errors and (b) to glorify the articulate. This often meant that the second language speakers were doubly prejudiced. They were both more easily lampooned and less likely to win the award.

We have, in our ranks, and have here at this conference, some first rate thinkers and some splendid speakers, such as Andy Gray, Clive Stanton, James Meakings, Vassie Naidoo, Geraldine Bartlett, Sue

Putter, Lourens van der Merwe, Humphrey Zokufa, our President, Brian Walpole, and that brilliant recruiter from the Unites States, who completely undermined the human resources crisis debate. Her charismatic powers of persuasion were such that we all wanted to rush off to California, to exacerbate, rather than solve our problems.

However, the characteristics of the above speakers are those of semantic clarity, control, and persuasive and perfect rhetoric. All this is well and good, but what about passion, expression of conflicting emotions, annoyance, enthusiasm and the plain mixture of all these that cause the spluttering neurological traffic jam?

The one thing I remember from Syncom 2000 was the quote:

"If you're not confused, you're not thinking."

The world unfortunately favours the articulate and discriminates against the verbally inept.

There is a Japanese proverb that says

"Just because I sit quietly and say nothing, do not mistake me for wall."

The Hymie Barnett Award this year goes to a speaker whose mother tongue is not English, and who makes, in his rapid-fire speeches, more mistakes and mixes more metaphors than any pharmacist in this room. However, and this is my point, what comes across, paradoxically, is his purity of purpose, his passion for our profession, his brilliant sense of humour and his unambiguous commitment to the role of the pharmacist as the provider of professional healthcare. His contribution to debate at our conferences has always given us a glimpse of what we really are and what we have to be recognised as being.

The winner of the 2000 Hymie Barnett Award is Johan Bothma.