

# EULOGY: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE GREAT DAWID KRUGER



In 2019 the Class of 1969 celebrated their 50th graduation anniversary, and everyone was asked to submit a CV for the records. Dawie Kruger sent such a frank and funny one that it will serve as a tribute and memorial to him, to his life and his times. It has been slightly edited but retains his wry, quirky sense of humour and his irrepressible spirit.

"Hi there Friends, Family, Ex OP convicts, fellow Geriatrics and other earthly creatures. I bring you this narrative to remind you that for a short period of time you were in the presence of a great person, philosopher, student and various other good qualities. I hope you will not be bored to death, but then again at our age one has to die of something."

Hercules Dawid Kruger (the first name should already tell you of the stature of this man) was born on the 3rd March 1946 at Edenvale hospital near Johannesburg. His father, having preferred him to be female, adopted a baby daughter when he was 8 years old and she later turned out to be a real pain in the butt, telling the whole family that her "rich" vet brother thought he was better than them (the family), while he was working 24/7 to keep his three children, Gert, Doret and Retha, in shoes.

And of course, the family believed her because vets were thought to be overpriced. Even after trying to avoid the family he still got the nickname Ryk Dawid alongside the other family nicknames; Oom Dawid, Klein Dawid, and Jong Dawid. A lot of Dawids' in the family.

His father took the family on a tour of South Africa to show the people this wonderchild. The tour included towns like Grahamstown, Kirkwood, Queenstown and Port Elizabeth. Mixing mainly with English friends is where he picked up his immaculate knowledge of the English language. Finally, they landed upon the East Rand, Brakpan, Boksburg and Benoni and eventually (thankfully) Germiston. (Moved 19 times in 18 years).

He spent his high school years at Vryburger High School, where he was more au fait with the headmaster's office and cane than all the other classrooms put together. That made him even more "hardegat". Although I must admit that it was also maybe the right medicine, that allowed him to pass matric and be accepted at Onderstepoort [which in itself was a miracle]. There was another good thing that happened when he was in matric – he met this beautiful young girl Marthie (in standard 6) with raven black hair who he could raise to be loyal and obedient. Not that he succeeded. Don't tell her, but he was still gaga about her after 55 years.

He was of course called a cradle-snatcher after this became standard knowledge with the teachers. He then spent 9 months in the army (1964), 3 months in Bloemfontein, 6 months in Middelburg Transvaal, where it was so cold at night you could hear the rats' teeth chattering. Then on to university. He only passed the first year by receiving the answer papers to Physics 4 days before the final exam from the friend of a friend of a friend of the "oke" that was dating the prof's daughter.

The other miracle was passing the 4 years at Onderstepoort in 4 years (although he had a supplementary exam every year, qualifying in February 1970). In his final year, he failed Pathology by refusing to say "I don't know" to a question by Smitty (which would have resulted in immediate failure). If he wanted to fail him, Smitty had to do it himself, so he stared at Smitty's office carpet for 15 minutes whilst the 12 people in the office all maintained a deathly silence until a merciful Tustin said "You can go". He then saw the students waiting their turn outside, looking at him bug-eyed, wondering about the 15 minutes, and shaking his head he quipped "He is in a bad mood" thereby adding to their absolute inherent terror of the great man. He never forgot the patterns on that carpet.

He joined a Pretoria practice as an assistant in March 1970 but somehow failed to notice that the veterinarian's wife had red hair. At that stage, Pretoria only had 7 private veterinarians? Now there seems to be one squatting on every street corner. This fantastic human being treated Dawid as an equal and was an excellent teacher, especially in surgery where he was doing ops on the brain and middle ear, which boggled Dawid's mind but instilled in him his love for surgery. Back to the red-haired wife.

Dawid was having his pie and coke in peace during his lunch break, answering the telephone when she stormed in asking why he was so lazy just sitting there doing nothing. One word led to another and the crowning one was Dawid calling her something he should not have. Wanting to concentrate more on large animal work, he opted to go it alone.

His two choices in starting a practice were Bronkhorstspuit and Wellington in the Cape (too far from his wife's mother) so the poor wine-lover started in Bronkhorstspuit, where he experienced the following truths: farmers don't like vets, farmers don't like using vets, farmers think they know more about animal health and diseases than vets. Farmers think that "veeinspekteurs" are smarter than vets and finally, they don't like paying his overpriced bills. So after 17 years of this abuse, he joined a practice in Rustenburg as a partner (1988). This, unfortunately, did not work out and he and Ferdie Ipland built their hospital designed as a small animal facility.

In 1992 his heart attacked him for the first time and he had bypass surgery at Unitas Hospital in Pretoria. After 5 days he was released back into society. In 1996 he was diagnosed with brain cancer (of the slow-growing invasive and inoperable kind) and he retired in 1998 and there was our sad hero singing "O lonesome me" once again. In 2002 he had his second heart attack and unfortunately ended up with full-blown diabetes.

In 2002, two smartly dressed men entered the practice and started to measure Dawid's torso. On being asked the reason for this indignity, they replied that the straight-jacket must fit comfortably. He got the message and sold the practice to the wife of a SA veterinarian working in London, with the wife having to raise two kids in a London flat while longing for her mother staying in Rustenburg.

He then bought a family tent and freezer and with his wife and son toured the coast from Springbok to Cape Town and Port Edward, visiting all the small towns he had to bypass in the past. In Addo Elephant Park, three weeks into the tour, something strange happened to him.

Somebody approached him, looking exactly like him. Only on closer inspection did he recognise his soul catching up to him. He then spent three weeks loafing at home before starting to do locums. (His wife counted 38 practices between 2003 and December 2017), some once-off, some on a more regular basis.

In January 2018, after developing a roaring case of diarrhoea, he ended up in hospital with acute heart failure. Various scans and sonars confirmed he only had 30% viable heart muscle left, a human can live a reasonable life with 50%. He was promptly put on 11 different medications which caused a range of delightful side effects and was forbidden strenuous exercise, so he sat doing nothing the whole day which he did very well, playing with his laptop. Amidst all this moaning and groaning, don't get the idea that he was not happy. He felt that he had lived a full and joyous life, achieving most of his goals and dreams (except that ruddy Porsche!).

In conclusion Joshua in chapter 24 and the last part of verse 15: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." is a true reflection of his life.

Dawid Kruger died at peace on 8th August 2021.

Gareth Bath