

In Memoriam

Dr Fritz Zollner: 1949 - 2024



Fritz Zollner was born on 21 Sept 1949 in Lydenburg, shortly after his missionary parents arrived in South Africa by boat from Germany. Over the next 19 years this big family, with a total of nine siblings, also lived in Bloemfontein and Swakopmund before returning to Germany in 1968. Fritz, however, returned to South Africa the next year and started his working career as a medical technologist in Bloemfontein. He earned two international diplomas in Chemical and Clinical Pathology, but his love for all creatures, great and small eventually got the better of him and 10 years later he started to pursue his real calling when he went to Onderstepoort and qualified as a Veterinary Surgeon in 1986.

Fritz spent the first 18 years of his veterinary career in Bloemfontein at the VETOVS Animal clinic mainly working with horses, cattle, small animals and assisting at the zoo. He also completed numerous locum tenens in mixed and horse practices in the UK, Germany and Austria until the early 1990s. In April 2004 he moved to the Cape where he worked in Somerset West at Country Animal Clinic and Altena Animal Clinic in Strand, before he moved to Malmesbury in April 2006. For the next 12 years, he worked at the Malmesbury Animal Hospital and since April 2018 he has been part of the Groenkloof Animal Clinic, until his sad departure at age 75 on 13 May 2024. Fritz was a member of the SAEVA (equine) group of SAVA.

Lize Venter, a private vet in Swellendam remembers: *"I was a 16-year-old girl when I first met Dr Fritz Zollner, tending to a sick horse at the yard where I was riding. His enthusiasm for his work and willingness to explain to a young girl what he was doing immediately made a lasting impression on me. 18 years later, qualified as a veterinarian myself, we met again in Gordon's Bay. I sensed the same enthusiastic spark for life and the love for people even stronger. Dr Fritz, without knowing it, became one of my favourite veterinary mentors. When I was at my wits end with a case, I could call on*

him to give me (often very creative) advice. But it was more than advice that he gave, he gave his precious time and made you feel important while giving it. Over Christmas and Easter, he would send messages reminding me of what really mattered. We shared the same passion for our Creator and His creation. Dr Fritz, I salute you. Your place in our veterinary community will be empty now, but may we continue with your legacy by helping and cheering each other on as you have done." NJ Heyns, owner of Groenkloof Animal Clinic: *"It is with profound sadness that we mourn the passing of our beloved veterinarian, Dr Fritz Zollner, who has been an integral part of the Groenkloof family for the past six years.*

Fritz was more than just a vet; he was a cherished friend to both pets and their owners, known for his unwavering dedication and compassionate care. Dr Fritz was well-known and deeply respected in the horse community, where his expertise and gentle touch made a significant impact. He had a special fondness for treating exotic animals, including birds and small primates, bringing his unique skills and enthusiasm to every case. His love for these special creatures was evident in the meticulous care he provided. One of the many endearing qualities of Dr Fritz was his infectious joy and positive energy. He was always ready with a little dance to celebrate even the smallest victories, bringing smiles to everyone around him. His coffee was legendary among us – the strongest known to mankind, a testament to his vibrant personality and zest for life.

Dr Fritz was deeply loved by the entire Groenkloof team. He arrived at work each day with a smile, always asking everyone how they were, and genuinely caring about their well-being. His presence brightened our days and his absence will be profoundly felt. We will forever remember Dr Fritz not only for his professional excellence but for the warmth and kindness he brought into our lives."

Sewellyn Davey, state vet in Malmesbury for many years remembered with fondness the story of Fritz's raptor patient who demonstrated its successful recovery and rehabilitation by almost swiping an unsuspecting Chihuahua that walked into the practice with its owner. It was with great agility that Fritz prevented a looming tragedy and rescued the little doggy just in time to become lunch.

Annelie Cloete, state vet at Elsenburg: It was a privilege for me to work with Fritz for the past 6 years as a facility veterinarian for multiple security service providers using dogs for safeguarding. We spent many hours on the phone working out how to feasibly implement the legal requirements of the 2016 amendment of the Performing Animal

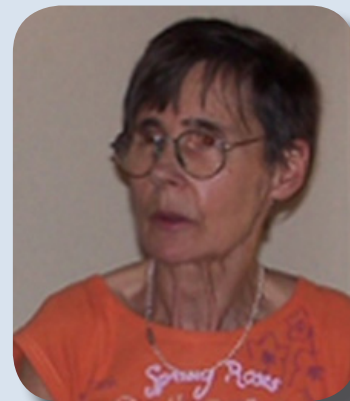
Protection Act for his many clients. Fritz was absolutely amazing in fulfilling this essential role and he walked the extra mile many times over, visiting facilities across the province. I never met Fritz in person, but that did not prevent him from sharing his wit and joy abundantly.

Rest in peace, Fritz. You will be greatly missed, but your legacy of love and care will live on in the hearts of all who knew you.

Fritz leaves behind his wife and best friend of the past 18 years, Carina, his children Alexandra and Nicolas, several siblings and his Mother, aged 105, in Germany.

Annelie Cloete

BY THE VETERINARY HISTORY SOCIETY



Gertruida Hermanna Gerdes ('Truuske') 1939 - 2022

Truuske, as she was universally known, was born in Cape Town to Jan Frederik Gerdes and Henderika Everdina Cato Mulder, both immigrants from the Netherlands. Her father was a radio technician and he also established a general dealer shop in Wynberg, Cape Town. She had a younger brother Willem Adriaan Gerdes. Schooling was at Plumstead Primary and Wynberg Girls High. Truuske started her studies at the University of Cape Town followed by

5 years at the University of Pretoria in the BVSc course at Onderstepoort. She was an early female graduate at the Faculty and was the only girl in her class. After graduation in 1962 she worked for 18 years in small animal private practice in Cape Town and in Italy. In 1983, Truuske was appointed Researcher in the section of Veterinary Virology at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute. She was made Acting Head of this Section from 2001 to 2006 and was contracted to continue with her work after official retirement in 2004, until she left to retire in Cape Town in 2010.

During her time as a virologist she became highly respected both nationally and internationally for her classical diagnostic skills in isolating and identifying a large number of viruses from different animal species, including crocodiles, ostriches, poultry, horses, rhinos, buffaloes, ruminants, pigs and insects. She identified and described at least one novel serotype of equine encephalosis virus. Truuske was a highly valued team-player in diagnostic work and she helped to solve many disease problems. Her expertise was recognised by her being named the international reference expert by the OIE (now WOA) on African horse sickness, bluetongue, lumpy skin disease, sheep pox, goat pox and Rift Valley fever. She played a leading role in representing the ARC-OVI in a multi-country EU-funded research initiative after the unexpected outbreak of bluetongue in northern Europe in 2006. She was passionate about conservation and the environment and when the Department of Agriculture decided that a consignment of beautiful tropical birds should be killed because the importer had not complied with measures to prove that they were free of specified diseases, she was able to prove that they were not a virus disease risk and gave evidence to this effect in a subsequent court case, saving the birds from unjustified destruction despite her shyness and reluctance to speak in public.

While at OVI, Truuske contributed to many international scientific meetings and co-authored many refereed scientific articles.

She did not marry but found a cherished partner in her fellow virologist Dr Vasco Mendes who sadly died before she retired. Although she was very reserved, she is remembered by her colleagues and friends as a polite, friendly, kind and shy person who was always perfectly and stylishly dressed and ready to help wherever she could. She died in Cape Town on 21 October 2022 after suffering from a stroke.

Sources:

[FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)

[Linked-In](#)

[Truuske's colleagues and friends](#)

<https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/80208>

Gareth Bath

July 2024

Photo extracted from Chapter VI of "Aleen Cust, Veterinary Surgeon" by Connie M Ford (Bristol, 1990)



Edith Gertrude Knight 1996 - 1995

The first woman to be registered as a Veterinary Surgeon in South Africa

Edith Gertrude Knight was the first female to be registered as a Veterinary Surgeon in South Africa and the first female veterinarian to practice in South Africa. She was registered in Durban, Natal [now KZN] on 8 January 1927.

In Vol. 1 Issue 1 of the South African Veterinary Medical Association Journal, published in 1934, a reference was found to:

Knight E G (Miss) - Qualified MRCVS 1923 - Registered as a Veterinary Surgeon by the Natal Veterinary Board on 8 January 1927. GN 69.

The search for more information about this early female veterinarian in South Africa began...

FamilySearch.org database gave a first tantalizing glimpse: on the 14th of January 1926 Miss E G Knight, Veterinary Surgeon and 29 years of age, embarked on the *Grantully Castle* Mail steamship in London and sailed to Durban in Natal. But that was all we could find since we did not even have her full names. Enquiries to the RCVS Knowledge Archive then yielded the following information:

Her Obituary (under her married name of Edith Gertrude Taylor), published in "The Veterinary Record" on 22 April 1995: Death on 23 March 1995 of Edith Gertrude Taylor (nee Knight), BVSc, MRCVS, of The Mu, Brick Lane, Albury, Guildford, Surrey. Mrs Taylor qualified from Liverpool in 1923. Extracts from the Obituary: Edith Gertrude Knight was born in Bruton, Somerset on 13 April 1896, the daughter of WA Knight, the Headmaster of a local school. She was a tomboy of note with a passion for horses, becoming skilled both in riding horses and in drawing and painting them. In 1914, rather than continue with academic studies, she decided to take up work on a farm in Buckinghamshire as an agricultural labourer, until her father persuaded her to go to Reading University to study agriculture.

After gaining her Agriculture Diploma from Reading University in 1918 she worked with a veterinary surgeon who encouraged her to become a vet even though the RCVS did not admit women at that time. She submitted 3 consecutive applications to the RCVS who were finally obliged to alter their Charter in January 1920 to allow the admission of women. She entered Liverpool University Veterinary School in October 1920 as a second-year student, having been granted exemption of most of the first-year subjects because of her Agricultural Diploma.

Although she was not to become the first British woman to be registered as a veterinary surgeon (the first was Aleen Cust), Edith Knight was the first woman to take the British veterinary degree, qualifying with MRCVS on 19 December 1923 and BVSc in December 1925.

Using the information about Edith obtained from her obituary, we searched for further information about her in the FamilySearch.org database and found her family. We can assume that one of the reasons for her coming to Natal in 1926 was because one of her elder brothers, Arthur William Knight was living in Durban and was working as a Master Mariner in the port. Edith applied in 1926 to be registered as a Veterinary Surgeon by the Natal Veterinary Board, obtaining registration as a veterinarian in Natal under Act 21 of 1899. The Board registered "Knight (Miss) E.G., M.R.C.V.S. 1923" as a Veterinary Surgeon on 8 January 1927. Her Registration was published in G.N. [Government Notice] 69. She was the first female veterinarian to be registered in South Africa and her Certificate granted her the right to practice and work in Natal. But within 2 years she was back in England where, after struggling to find employment again, she set up her own practice in Dorking. She married Ernest Leonard Taylor on 12 January 1929 in Bath; Ernest had been a fellow BVSc student at Liverpool and had specialised in parasitology. Edith's practice flourished and she took on a partner, Marjorie Jordan and remained active in the veterinary field. Edith and Ernest Taylor and their 3 sons continued to live in Dorking. This pioneer in the veterinary world and the first woman veterinary surgeon to be registered in South Africa was independent and active until she died on 23 March 1995, 3 weeks before her 99th birthday.

References:

1. *FamilySearch.org*
2. *Chapter VI of "Aleen Cust, Veterinary Surgeon" by Connie M Ford (Bristol, 1990)*
3. *Obituary (under her married name of Edith Gertrude Taylor), published in "The Veterinary Record" on 22 April 1995*

With grateful thanks to Lorna Cahill Bannister, Archivist at RCVS Knowledge, for setting us on the right track.

Gareth and Anne Bath

May 2024