

THE FIRST TEN WOMEN TO GRADUATE AS VETERINARIANS FROM ONDERSTEPSPOORT

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Veterinary science a century ago was regarded as the preserve of men, and this is reflected in the numbers of graduates who were women in the first 40 years of the Onderstepoort Faculty's existence: only ten! In addition, several of these women remember being actively dissuaded from embarking on a veterinary career, or being given a hard time while they were students. These sturdy, determined pioneers deserve our recognition and respect, and in the centenary year of this faculty we will give a brief outline of the life and work of each one. Should anyone have more information to contribute we will welcome further details.

1. Joan Morice

Joan Morice was the first woman to graduate as a veterinarian from the newly created (1920) Onderstepoort Faculty of Veterinary Science. Born in Barberton in South Africa, she had her school education in England. However, she returned to South Africa in 1922 making history by enrolling for the veterinary course at Onderstepoort. She qualified in 1927 but apparently only took up her first appointment in September 1928 as a temporary veterinary officer in Onderstepoort's Allerton Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg for a few months, terminating her services at the end of the year. She ventured into a practice of her own in Johannesburg, apparently the first Onderstepoort graduate to take this enterprising step. After her marriage in 1930 she was joined by her husband, Maurice Robinson, who qualified at Onderstepoort in 1928. Private practice was, however, not a permanent career for either of them. Discontinuing her involvement in 1935 she started doing charitable work for the SPCA and the so-called Bantu Animal Welfare Association in Johannesburg. Sadly, Joan died from lung cancer at an early age in 1944.

2. Maud Bales

Nineteen years elapsed before Joan had a successor, Maud Bales. Maud was born in Johannesburg, matriculating at Parktown Girls' High School with a 1st class pass. Determined to become a veterinarian, she initially had to turn to medicine at the University of Witwatersrand for 2 years before she was selected for the veterinary course at Onderstepoort. Though she had been in poor health from the latter part of her school days, she never complained and few realised how seriously ill she was. However, she persisted despite poor health and passed her final examinations successfully to qualify as a veterinary surgeon in 1946 and embark on a short-lived veterinary career that was full of promise. Ill health however caught up with her and she sadly died on 16 December 1947, just a year after graduating. Her bereaved mother provided funds to the Onderstepoort Faculty for the *Maud Bales Bursary*, which still exists.

3. Sheila Mavis McLoughlin

Little information could be traced on Mavis, as she was known to her fellow students. Like her predecessors, she was the only woman in the class. She is said to have had a very likeable, reserved personality and was popular with her fellow students. She qualified as a veterinary surgeon at the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1948 and married one of her classmates, Vernon Ernest Osborn. According to verbal information obtained from a surviving classmate, the couple decided to embark on a farming venture with Afrikaner cattle in the north-western Transvaal bushveld (now situated in the Limpopo province). Trevor Osborn, an older brother of Vernon who qualified at Onderstepoort in 1942 and

practised in Vereeniging, sold his practice in 1950 to join them in their farming enterprise. It has unfortunately not been possible to obtain further information on Mavis and the Osborne brothers.

4. Johanna (Joan) Hendrika Verdurmen

Attractive, with a very likeable personality, she was understandably very popular with her classmates. Like her predecessors, Joan was the only woman in the class. She was a member of the Onderstepoort Class of 1952, but was one of several unexpected victims of an external examiner in her final year, qualifying as a veterinarian early in 1953. Her domestic duties took precedence over early veterinary involvement when she married Murray Bernard Hofmeyr, Rhodes Scholar, gifted cricketer and rugby player and leading South African business personality in the Anglo American stable. The couple retired to a farm in the Knysna area where Joan died in 2008.

5. Margaret Irmgard Rose

Margaret Irmgard Rose was born in South Africa on 15 May 1931 and subsequently spent her childhood years in Germany, only returning to SA in 1947 to finish her schooling at Durban Girls High School in 1948. She was determined to become a veterinarian and in 1950 became the 5th girl to be selected for admission to Onderstepoort. Being the only girl in the class, she was petrified of the 'guys' and all she could do was put up a brave front, although her stiff upper lip approach sometimes caused her heartache when she missed out on some of the student balls by spurning the invitations. A gift of lipstick and pretty panties given by the class at a party hosted by Prof W Malherbe on her 21st birthday she regarded as a reminder that she was a girl and should therefore act less like a tomboy!

After qualifying in 1953 she was determined to stay in Durban to care for her aged mother and as no position of veterinary assistant was available, she assisted at the Durban SPCA and attended to odd needy cases. She even took on a receptionist post with a medical radiologist while slowly building up her own practice and lecturing part-time in Zoology to pharmacy students at the local Technical College to supplement her income.

She could fortunately make use of the experienced Dr Jim Dore's surgery. A large component of her practice was charity-orientated and she loved dealing with exotics. A founder member of the local Animal Anti-Cruelty League Committee in 1960, her animal welfare work increased dramatically. She was also appointed as veterinarian for the SAPS' dog handler squad in Natal and provided veterinary care for private security companies. In 1996 she stopped private practise, but financial pressure forced her to return to full time practice.

Margaret has always been actively involved in church work. She was married in 1955, and had three children, two sons and a daughter, and 6 grandchildren. Later, as a divorcee, Margaret married Tienie Roos, manager of the SAVA office for several years, in 1981, and attended the 50-year reunion of her Class in 2003. Tienie died on 19 October 2008 but Margaret attended the 60-year reunion in 2013. She retired early in 2019.

6. Maatje Marie Sophie (Malie) Smuts

Malie Smuts was born on 27 February 1933 in Potchefstroom, attending primary schools in Pretoria and The Strand and matriculating from the Hoër Meisieskool Bloemhof in Stellenbosch in 1949. She was selected for admission to the second year of the veterinary course at Onderstepoort in 1951. Malie qualified in 1954 and was awarded the coveted Theiler Medal as the best student in the final year. The 6th female Onderstepoort graduate, she was the first woman to receive this award.

Following a short spell as assistant veterinarian in the Rondebosch practice of Drs Faull and Burgess, in 1956 Malie joined the internationally active Moral Re-Armament movement, with head office in Switzerland, doing voluntary moral revival work until 1969.

Approached by Prof HPA de Boom, she was appointed lecturer in the Onderstepoort Faculty's Department of Anatomy in 1970, the first female appointee, and was awarded a DVSc degree in 1976 with a thesis entitled *The Blood vessels of the Cervical Vertebrae of the Ox*. In 1982 she succeeded Prof JMW le Roux as professor and Head of the Department of Anatomy when he became Dean of the Faculty. Her reputation as an always friendly but uncompromising examiner earned her the apt student nickname of 'The smiling executioner'. At her request, a rotating headship of the Department was introduced in 1986.

Most noteworthy of her extensive international veterinary involvement was an anatomical study on the dromedary conducted as guest on invitation of Prof D Cohen, director at the Ben Gurion University's Desert Research Centre in the Negev in Israel. The textbook, *The Anatomy of the Dromedary*, with Smuts as senior author, was published in 1987. She also served as guest professor at the Koret Veterinary School in Rehovot, Israel in 1991.

Prof Smuts' nominations and awards:

In 1976 she was nominated *Star Woman of the Year* by the Star newspaper; in 1979, *Outstanding Woman Veterinarian of the Year* by the Women's Veterinary Association of the USA; in 1987, *Pretorian of the Year* and in 1994 she received the *Laureatus Award* from the University of Pretoria. She also received *Ad Educandum* awards from the University of Pretoria in 1989 and 1992.

Prof Smuts retired from the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1993 and currently lives in a retirement facility in Somerset West in the Western Cape.

7. Lorraine Albré de Jager

Lorraine Albré de Jager, a part-time Free State farmer's daughter, was born on 27 October 1933. She attended the Jan Celliers primary and Helpmekaar Girls High schools in Johannesburg. Better known as Albré to her fellow students, she was the 7th woman to qualify as a veterinarian. Her interest in veterinary medicine evolved from the dedicated care of a pup with distemper as a 10-year-old girl to the realisation of a dream of becoming a veterinarian when she was admitted to the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1954. She suffered the then customary discrimination against female aspiring veterinary students by some university personnel and teasing by fellow students. This included a congratulatory kiss from each of the males of the class of 15 students on her 21st birthday. As there were as yet no hostel facilities for women, she was accommodated with the two hostel matrons for the duration of her Onderstepoort course.

Lorraine joined the Johannesburg SPCA after qualifying in 1957. One of her rather unique patients was a lion cub. She married a colleague, Anthonie (Tonie) Snijders - a 1953 graduate - in 1959. While raising four children, three sons and a daughter, she regularly did locums for various Johannesburg veterinarians, taking her pre-school children with her. She also ran a small practice from home. Tonie joined the pharmaceutical company Merck Sharp & Dohme in 1961 and was transferred to the USA in 1975 where he spent the next 13 years of his career.

Lorraine developed a special interest in cardiology when her father died of a heart attack a year after their arrival in the USA. After exposure to the discipline at a medical heart and lung hospital, she completed a master's degree in veterinary cardiology at the University of Pennsylvania, her thesis being on cardiac troponins. As a divorcee and with this unique qualification, Lorraine decided to settle in the USA, becoming seriously involved as a consultant in several specialist practices in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and concentrating on echo cardiology.

She currently resides in Lumberton, New Jersey and according to her eldest son, Louis, who is also an Onderstepoort graduate now practising in the USA, she still attends conferences regularly.

8. Lente van der Merwe

Lente van der Merwe was the 8th woman graduate of the Onderstepoort Faculty. As previously, the Dean of the Faculty was somewhat negative about her career choice, arguing that women denied male candidates destined to be breadwinners the opportunity to augment the country's chronic shortage of veterinarians. Later, when her large-animal practice was firmly established, however, he paid her a visit and congratulated her on her success. As there were as yet no hostel facilities for women, she was accommodated with a lecturer, Dr Daan Smit and his wife, for the duration of her course.

Having qualified in 1957, Lente was appointed as the first female state veterinarian in South Africa in 1958 at the Cape Town laboratory on a salary of £49-10-0 per month, on par with that of her male colleagues, where she did mainly poultry and quarantine work.

The next year she married André Hansen and established a practice for large animals on the farm Ludlow in the Transvaal (now Limpopo Province). As the first female veterinarian to seriously venture into this field among the conservative bushveld farmers, she initially encountered resistance but quickly showed her competence and earned their trust.

Heartwater of cattle was a nightmare for the local stock farmers. Sulphonamides were initially tried with limited success. However, the arrival of the tetracyclines brought hope. Terramycin tablets pulverised in a mortar, dissolved in boiled water and injected intravenously gave good results. In order to provide local beef and dairy farmers with well-bred bulls, especially from heartwater-free regions, Lente established an immunisation centre on the farm. The animals were stabled for ±40 days and immunised against heartwater with the customary method developed by Neitz and Alexander in 1945, of infection and tetracycline control as soon as a febrile reaction occurred. Thus hundreds of quality animals were made available to the cattle industry in this heartwater-endemic area.

The practice itself was mainly livestock with a few companion animals, TB testing and the collection of blood samples for brucellosis tests on behalf of the government, as well as pregnancy testing and routine visits to dairy farms. Having lost her husband in 1993, Lente was obliged to run not only the practice, but also manage the entire farming enterprise on her own, for which she gratefully acknowledges divine support.

Lente retired in 1995, when her son took over the practice. Lente emphasises that if she were ever again faced with a career choice, she would unhesitatingly choose to become a rural large animal-orientated veterinarian again.

9. Ingrid Wolleschak

Ingrid Wolleschak, the 9th female graduate was born in Johannesburg on 4 May 1936, the eldest of three daughters. Her schooling was at the German School in Johannesburg, where she matriculated in 1953 with a First Class pass and a distinction in German. She started the then 5-year Veterinary Science course at Pretoria University in 1954 and during the 4 years of study at Onderstepoort was the only lady in the first “big” class of 30 students. At the end of 1958 she qualified with distinctions in Surgery, Gynaecology and Special Hygiene of Meat and Milk and was awarded the ICI Prize for Surgery and Gynaecology.

In 1959 she joined the practice of Drs Paine, Solomon and Canham in Pietermaritzburg as assistant and on the 31st October 1959 she married her classmate, Cornelis Johannes (Neels) Roos, who later became the first veterinarian to obtain Master’s Degrees in both Surgery and Radiology. After the marriage Ingrid did various locums in Johannesburg and for a short time worked at the SPCA, then moved to Pietermaritzburg where she worked at Allerton Laboratories as a state veterinarian until early 1962 when they moved back to Johannesburg where their first child was born. In the interests of the well-being of their children, Ingrid opted to become a housewife for the next 17 years.

In January 1979, at the request of the then Dean of the Faculty, Prof CFB Hofmeyr, she started working again part-time at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort and was entrusted with the overall administration of the Veterinary Nursing Course (Dip. Cur. Anim., later renamed Dip. Vet. Nur.), which had been started in 1977, and also lectured and supervised practicals in the subjects Theatre Practice, General Nursing and partly in Surgical Nursing. Although the nursing students considered her to be too strict, they soon realised the value of high standards when they started working! Retirement followed 15 years later at the end of 1993. Ingrid looks back on this period of her professional life as the most fulfilling, and from the point of view of the veterinary and para-veterinary professions is certainly the most significant.

Ingrid and Neels have three daughters who obtained degrees in Limnology, Applied Mathematics and Dentistry, and now have 9 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. Family life was characterized *inter alia* by much pleasure from classical music and nature. They have travelled very widely over the years and especially enjoyed spending time in the few remaining primary rain forests and in nature in general.

In their 60 years together, Ingrid says she can truly look back on a fulfilled life which had fair and equal proportions of rewarding professional duty and a pleasurable and interesting family life!

10. Anne Lize de Villiers Pienaar

The 10th woman to graduate was Anne Lize de Villiers Pienaar, born on 31 December 1937 in Johannesburg where her father was a professor at the University of Witwatersrand. She attended the Jan Cilliers Primary School and Helpmekaar Hoër Meisieskool, where she matriculated in 1954. After completing her first year of medicine at Wits University, she started her second year medicine at Stellenbosch University but after 6 months decided to switch to veterinary science.

Anne Lize was selected for the second year BVSc course in 1957 together with another girl who dropped out after a year. Initial teasing by classmates of female students persisted, but Annelize took it in her stride and passed every year. Initially she lived in residence in the student’s hostel, but moved to her parents’ home in Pretoria North when

her father was appointed professor at the University of Pretoria. She contracted brucellosis in the middle of her final year and was invalided for 3 months. She requested an extension of the course into the following year and qualified in June 1961.

After initial *locum* work in Johannesburg, Anne Lize joined the Division of Veterinary Services as state veterinarian, stationed in Pietermaritzburg, being involved in the control of a rabies epidemic and attending to the animals at Cedara Agricultural College and two mental institutions. Protozoal and other infectious diseases and plant poisonings were rife, providing considerable field experience.

Anne Lize was transferred to the Stellenbosch Veterinary Investigation Centre where she was involved in field (TB-control) and laboratory work (milk ring testing for brucellosis) and care of the animals at Elsenburg Agricultural College and other government institutions.

Troubled by recurring brucellosis, she moved to the Onderstepoort Institute's Bacteriology Section and established and managed a diagnostic laboratory and coped with six experimental vaccines.

Anne Lize married fellow veterinarian David Mordant in 1967 and resigned her post at Onderstepoort when the couple moved to Johannesburg. She was at home for several years until she became a teacher in science and biology at the Townview High School in Krugersdorp where their daughters were pupils. In 1989 David, Anne Lize and a partner established *Farm Feeds Services*, an agricultural commodities trading business, initially based at home until they built their own office block in Krugersdorp. David and Anne Lize retired in 1998 and in 2010 they emigrated to Canada to join their surviving daughter and her family. They have travelled widely since retiring and are actively pursuing their respective hobbies - philately and the stock market (David) and gardening, sewing and gardening (Anne Lize).