

NZAPS Newsletter December 2020

Jacob Johannes (“John”) de Geus, MB ChB, FRCS, FRACS

6 July 1940 – 20 October 2020

John was born in the Dutch East Indies in 1940, to Dutch parents who were missionary teachers. The Japanese invaded in 1942 and John and his family spent the next three years in Japanese Internment camps (John and his mother and sister were imprisoned separately from his father). They endured significant hardship to say the least. After the 1945 liberation of what would become Indonesia, John and his family returned to The Netherlands; subsequently they were part of the large Dutch emigration to New Zealand in the 1950s.

They spent time living in Whitford and Taupaki, but settled in West Auckland where John attended Avondale College. Despite speaking no English on his arrival in NZ, he worked very hard and excelled in both sporting (he was a champion swimmer) and academic fields. John attended Otago University graduating MB ChB in 1964. He spent his house officer years in Wellington, obtaining basic surgical training, and married Ros Allen. Having decided on a career in surgery, he travelled to England for further surgical training gaining his FRCS (Eng.) in 1971.

He worked in various units (Queen Mary’s, Roehampton, and Wexham Park under Magdi Saad) but had particular fondness for the three years spent in Liverpool with David Maisels, who gave him his early introduction and lifelong commitment to cleft lip and palate surgery. John frequently returned to Liverpool to visit his friend Maisels when in Britain in subsequent years.

John returned to NZ in 1975 and worked at Auckland’s Middlemore Hospital Plastic Surgical Unit, then headed by Mr (later Sir William) Manchester, initially as a registrar, then Tutor Specialist, and then Consultant from 1978. He obtained his FRACS (Plast) in 1980.

As a consultant Plastic Surgeon, he immersed himself in all aspects of Plastic Surgery – burns, hand surgery, and reconstruction. It was an interesting time to be a Plastic Surgeon with many new developments – muscle flaps, microsurgery, and breast reconstruction amongst others. He was involved in microsurgery, both replantation surgery and free tissue transfers, but interestingly probably performed the last Tube Pedicle flap (to the neck for a burn contracture) and cross leg flap (for lower leg trauma) in NZ in 1978-79. He also helped to develop breast reconstructive surgery both at Middlemore and by invitation at Auckland Hospital. However possibly his greatest interest was in cleft lip and palate surgery, where he was involved in a multidisciplinary team approach with dentists, oral surgeons, speech therapists, and orthodontists. He visited New Plymouth monthly to provide Cleft Lip and palate services for the Taranaki region as well.

John travelled regularly to Fiji and Vietnam with Interplast to treat burn patients and Cleft Lip and Palate patients in particular. It was in Suva that he developed a friendship with a young Fijian surgeon, the late Samesa Metanaicake. He was instrumental in arranging for Samesa to travel to NZ and work at Middlemore for 4 years, training to be Fiji’s first Plastic Surgeon.

In 1980 he opened a private practice in Anzac Street, Takapuna, shortly later (1985) moving to Bracken Avenue and establishing North Shore Plastic Surgery in an old villa, which enabled him to have his own operating theatre for local procedures. John developed a large private practice because of a combination of his excellent surgical skills, but also his infectious personality and great care of patients. He fostered great respect and loyalty from his patients and staff, born out by the fact that his secretary in 1980 was still his secretary/practice manager at the time of his retirement from private practice in 2010. He operated at the Auckland Adventist Hospital in St Heliers for many years until 1998 when it closed, and he continued to work at Southern Cross North Harbour until his retirement.

John was very interested in aesthetic surgery; being held in high esteem on both sides of the Tasman, elected President of the Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in the 1990s. He was very concerned at the development of non-Surgeons masquerading as Plastic Surgeons in NZ and damaging patients and Plastic Surgery's reputation. This led him to help establish the NZ Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery, becoming its inaugural President in 1991.

He was committed to the future of NZ Plastic Surgery and especially future Plastic Surgeons, both in the public and private sectors, mentoring young surgeons throughout the 1980s and 90s right up until his retirement. He took his responsibility to train others very seriously.

He was well liked and respected by his colleagues, both Plastic Surgical and others, as evidenced by the hundreds in attendance at his recent memorial service.

John eventually retired from Middlemore in 2005, having stayed on until he was sure that Cleft and Palate Surgery was covered by a successor. He continued in private practice until 2010 when he retired. Subsequently he was invited to return to work at Middlemore Hospital to do outpatient clinics and sagely advise and supervise registrars in the Manchester See and Treat Clinic, until his third retirement in 2017!

Outside of medicine, John had many interests. He part owned a yacht and enjoyed the waters of the Waitemata in the 80s and 90s. He played golf, initially being a member at Pukekohe, and later joining Royal Auckland Golf Club (where he had previously been entitled to play in the 1970s because of being a member of the junior staff at Middlemore Hospital). He made golfing trips overseas to Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia and Fiji.

John had a love of good food and wine, with an excellent cellar. His hospitality was wonderful - his satay parties on Boxing Day were legendary. When travelling overseas to conferences John would be the leader in forays in search of good restaurants; one particular ritual especially in the US was to dine on a huge plate of Alaskan King Crab, with an enormous bib covering his shirt!

His interest in good wine is remembered by schoolmates from Avondale College – in his senior year he organized an after-ball party at Blockhouse Bay beach – because he had “contacts”, he was designated to provide the “Dally Wine”, arriving with two flagons so they could all party through the night! On being reported to headmaster any repercussions were dismissed on the grounds that De Geus was “Continental” and therefore it was normal behaviour to drink!

He enjoyed France, travelling there, learning French and French cuisine and even buying a small house in the South west of France near Toulouse. So too he loved music and was a regular attendee at APO, NZSO and NZ Opera. In later years he learned Te Reo.

He was very generous especially with his time. He was always interested in other people – their lives, their families, and their careers.

John was very committed to his family and extended family. When he had returned to NZ and was working at Middlemore Hospital, after a busy week, he would often drive through the night on a Friday to visit his daughter in Wellington for the weekend, driving back late Sunday for work on Monday.

He welcomed Sarah his goddaughter into his family and became a father figure. When he married Elizabeth, her sons Tom and Joe really became his sons. When Elizabeth, his second wife was sick in Boston, he arranged for her return to NZ and nursed her at his home until she passed away.

In his last decade he had poor health, but he continued to walk, go to the gym and play golf (although he came to be a golf cart driver). He even climbed Mt Vesuvius! John passed away suddenly in Tauranga while doing what he had done so often during his life – visiting friends.

John was a great teacher, colleague and friend to many. He was an excellent raconteur and had a very good sense of humour, being tolerant of practical jokes played on him by hospital staff and returning

them with interest. John was fiercely loved, admired, and respected by his family and many friends and colleagues.

He is survived by his loving daughters, sons, daughters and sons-in-law Suzanne, Stuart, Sarah , Kevin, Tom, Penny, Joe, Jess, Liz, Gerhard, Troy , Kristen, and grandchildren Liv, Jacob, Sophia, Ted, Frank, and Beckett.

A well-loved surgeon, colleague, employer, friend and family man, John De Geus will be missed enormously by many in various parts of the world.

“Kua hinga te totara i te wao nui a Tane – A mighty totara has fallen in the forest of Tane”.

Cary Mellow FRACS

OBITUARY

**JACOB JOHANNES (JOHN) DE GEUS MB ChB, FRCS, FRACS
PLASTIC & RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGEON
6 JULY 1940 - 20 OCTOBER 2020**

“Kua hinga te totara i te wao nui a Tane – A mighty totara has fallen in the forest of Tane” aptly describes the sudden and unexpected death of J.J. de Geus some months ago. John de Geus was a great teacher, colleague and friend to many. A well-loved surgeon, colleague, employer, friend and family man, John was an excellent raconteur with a very good sense of humour, and he will be missed enormously by many in various parts of the world. John was fiercely loved, admired, and respected by his family and many friends and colleagues.

Jacob Johannes (known as John) de Geus was born in Indonesia, where his Dutch parents, Pieter de Geus and Jeanne Van der Made, were missionary teachers. During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-45) John together with his mother and older sisters, Ellie, Carla and Tina (and separated from their father), spent time in an internment camp where they suffered malnutrition and significant hardship. With the ending of the Second World War the family, including their father, were repatriated to the Netherlands. Finding life tough and cold, they decided to emigrate to New Zealand.

Living in Auckland John attended Avondale College, where he had first to learn English. He excelled in both sporting (he was a champion swimmer) and academic fields. Through studying hard, he gained a place at Otago Medical School in Dunedin, graduating in 1964. He spent his house officer years in Wellington, and subsequently obtained his basic surgical training there. During this time, he married Ros Allen, a physiotherapist. In 1971 John and Ros headed to England where John quickly gained his FRCS. The opportunity to gain some plastic surgery experience saw him spend 15 months during 1971-72 as a registrar at Queen Mary's, Roehampton, and at Wexham Park near Slough with Magdi Saad. He then trained in Liverpool for three years with David Maisels, who gave him his early introduction and lifelong commitment to cleft lip and palate surgery, a skill which John brought back to Auckland. In subsequent years John frequently returned to Liverpool to visit Maisels, who had had a significant influence as a teacher and mentor and remained a life-long friend.

John returned to New Zealand towards the end of 1975, obtaining a post as a registrar at Middlemore Hospital Plastic Surgery Unit. The following year he became the tutor specialist and, when Sir William Manchester retired in 1979, he was appointed as a full-time plastic surgeon. He obtained his FRACS in 1980 and became a part-time visiting plastic surgeon the same year. As a consultant Plastic Surgeon, he immersed himself in all aspects of Plastic Surgery – burns, hand surgery, and reconstruction. It was an interesting time to be a Plastic Surgeon with many new developments – muscle flaps, microsurgery, and breast reconstruction among others. He was involved in microsurgery, both replantation surgery and free tissue transfers, but interestingly probably also performed the last tube pedicle flap (to the neck for a burn contracture) and cross leg flap (for lower leg trauma) in NZ in 1978-79. He also helped to develop breast reconstructive surgery both at Middlemore and by invitation at Auckland Hospital. However, his greatest interest was in cleft lip and palate surgery, where he was involved in a multidisciplinary team approach with dentists, oral surgeons, speech therapists, and orthodontists. He visited New Plymouth monthly to provide cleft lip and palate services for the Taranaki region as well.

In 1980 John commenced in private practice and was soon busy, reflecting his great care of patients, excellent surgical skills, and infectious personality. He fostered great respect and loyalty from his patients and staff, borne out by the fact that his secretary in 1980 was still his secretary/practice manager at the time of his retirement from private practice in 2010.

John was committed to the future of Plastic Surgery and especially trainee Plastic Surgeons in New Zealand, both in the public and private sectors. He took his responsibility to train others very seriously and until his retirement was a supportive, generous and inspiring surgical mentor to a cohort of plastic surgical trainees. He was well liked and respected by his colleagues, both Plastic Surgical and others. John was very interested in aesthetic surgery; being held in high esteem on both sides of the Tasman, and elected President of the Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in 1998. He was very concerned by the

practice of non-surgeons masquerading as Plastic Surgeons in New Zealand and damaging patients and Plastic Surgery's reputation.

John was committed to helping those in need and was an enthusiastic volunteer with Interplast Australia and New Zealand, making numerous trips to Suva in Fiji and to Viet Nam. In this work he inspired a young Fijian, the late Dr Semesa Matainacake FRACS, who became Fiji's first plastic surgeon. Later Semesa Jnr followed and is now a plastic surgeon based in Suva.

John eventually retired from Middlemore in 2005, having stayed on until he was sure that cleft and palate surgery was covered by a successor. He continued in private practice until 2010 when he retired from that sector. Subsequently, he was invited to return to work at Middlemore Hospital to do outpatient clinics and sagely advise and supervise registrars in the Manchester See and Treat Clinic until his third retirement in 2017!

Outside medicine John had many interests. He part-owned a yacht and enjoyed the waters of the Waitemata in the 80s and 90s, played golf regularly as a member of the Royal Auckland Golf Club, enjoyed travel - buying a small house in the South-West of France near Toulouse, and loved classical music. In later years he learned Te Reo. With a love of good food and wine, and having an excellent cellar, John was a wonderful host. John's generosity cannot be overstated and there are many people, both within his immediate family and further beyond, who were recipients of his generosity and support.

During his last decade John's physical health began to decline, possibly a consequence of the nutritional deprivation he experienced during the Second World War. Despite that he remained active, walking regularly, attending the gym and playing golf. He even climbed Mt Vesuvius! struggling to the top with career-long friend Norm Olbourne.

He is survived by his loving daughters, sons, daughters and sons-in-law Suzanne, Stuart, Sarah , Kevin, Tom, Penny, Joe, Jess, Liz, Gerhard, Troy , Kristen, and grandchildren Liv, Jacob, Sophia, Ted, Frank, and Beckett.

This obituary is based upon those provided for the Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons by Michael F. Klaassen FRACS, Julian A. Lofts FRACS and Norm Olbourne and the New Zealand Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons and by Cary Mellow FRACS