

OBITUARY

**MR FREDY JACOB DANIEL MBBS MS FRACS
CARDIOTHORACIC SURGEON
25 MAY 1939 - 22 FEBRUARY 2021**

Fredy was the surprise second twin born at home in a small town in southern India, in 1939. In spite of his medically challenging start to life, Fredy thrived at school, completing his education in a boarding school some 80Km from his hometown. This was the same school as his older brother, Willy John Daniel had attended. After secondary school the two brothers' academic paths diverged with John coming to Melbourne to study medicine and later completing his surgical training, while Fredy went to medical school at Manipal Medical College in Udupi, Southern India, and then on to the Kanpur Medical College to undertake a Masters in Surgery. Having completed his basic surgical training, Fredy worked at the Calicut Medical College Hospital in northern Kerala, India. It was there that Fredy, a surgical registrar, met Dr Valsa Thomas, an intern doing her surgical rotation. They decided to marry in 1969.

From there, Fredy applied for and was successful in achieving a position in thoracic surgery at the Royal Melbourne Hospital in the early '70s. This was the beginning of a new life in Australia for him, his wife Valsa and 10-month-old son, Dennis.

In his early years in Australia, Fredy completed cardiac surgical training at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, under Mr George Westlake and Mr John Clareborough, cardiothoracic surgical training at Royal Melbourne Hospital, working closely Mr Ian McConchie, and spent two years training in paediatric cardiac surgery at the Royal Children's Hospital. Mr Ian McConchie went on to become Fredy's most respected and admired mentor, and a very close friend.

Fredy, Valsa, Dennis, and their daughter Ann, then a one-year-old, spent a year in Portland, Oregon, in 1976-77. It was here that Fredy completed a Fellowship in cardiac surgery at Providence St Vincent's Hospital, under the auspices of Professor Albert Starr, the renowned and innovative American cardiac surgeon known as the inventor of the artificial heart valve and its insertion. This was an exciting time for Fredy and a great adventure for the young family.

It was with Mr McConchie's support and encouragement that Fredy Daniel was able to return to Melbourne, Australia and attain a sought-after thoracic surgical position at the Austin & Repatriation Medical Centre in 1979. He became a significant force in thoracic surgery in the northern suburbs of Melbourne with senior consultant appointments at the Repatriation General Hospital, Austin Hospital, PANCH (Preston & Northcote Community Hospital, where he was Director of Thoracic Surgery), The Northern Hospital as well as working in the private sector.

A skilled and accomplished thoracic surgeon with diverse surgical interests that included Pulmonary and pleural surgery, Fredy also had extensive personal experience with oesophageal surgery for both benign and malignant disease. He was a quiet achiever, who had expert surgical skills as well as being a lateral-thinker who developed an innovative and clever modification of standard stapling techniques to reduce post-surgery strictures and anastomotic leaks in oesophago-gastric surgery. Always keen to explore and develop new surgical techniques, he became skilled in the application of endoscopic LASER therapies in thoracic surgery. Similarly, he was also quick to adopt and develop the techniques of VATS surgery in addition to his profound skills as an open operator. Fredy had remarkable hands and was flexible and dextrous in a way that many have tried to emulate with variable success. His was an opinion you would seek for complex situations. He was generous with his time and expertise, and he was always great to work alongside with in theatre.

A keen surgical educator and a member of the Court of Examiners of the RACS, Fredy contributed to the training and development of most of the senior members of the thoracic surgery craft group currently practicing in Australia, many of whom still employ skills and wisdom that can be attributed to Fredy's teaching. He always delivered patient-focussed care and, needless to say, became a mentor to numerous young surgeons and trainees who remember his collegiate support with great fondness.

Another aspect of Fredy's life was his resolute support of Valsa's career as a General Practitioner in the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne, and in the establishment of their clinic, Bellfield Medical Centre, which continues to thrive today.

Aside from surgery, Fredy leaves a legacy in his involvement with the Melbourne Malayalee Community in Melbourne. He was steadfast in his religious faith, making significant contributions to the Indian Orthodox Community in Melbourne, having helped purchase a former Anglican church to convert to their Orthodox place of worship. After a disastrous arson attack on this purchase, he was a significant member of the group who re-financed the rebuilding of what was to become St Mary's Indian Orthodox Cathedral in Coburg. This church and community were to remain an important element of his spiritual and Malayalee community life that was somehow squeezed in amongst the demands of both family and surgery. Fittingly, St Mary's was the chosen site for his funeral service.

Fredy was also very involved, in his early years in Melbourne, in the formation of the Malayalee Association of Victoria, an organisation that provided support to immigrant Malayalee families from Kerala and gave them a way of maintaining and celebrating their cultural identity in this new country. He used his prowess in painting and design to build much-loved sets for community performances over the years.

With his flair for drawing and painting, Fredy had always planned to apply these skills to woodwork when he retired. Sadly, these plans were thwarted by the arrival of Parkinson's disease, which in turn precipitated his far too early retirement. Thankfully, his love of gardening was able to continue and flourish and provided much satisfaction to the very end of his days. Fredy's life was shared with Valsa, their three children Dennis, Ann and Deepa and to his great joy – his five grandchildren.

The broad ranging legacy of Fredy Daniel lives on. His colleagues, family and patients alike, all mourn the passing of a skilled thoracic surgeon and a caring, humble and gentle man.

This tribute was written by colleagues: Hamish Ewing, Siven Seevanayagam, Simon Knight and Fredy's wife Valsa and daughter Deepa.