

OBITUARY

Harold Raymond Schaeffer, Neurosurgeon

21 June 1930 – 4 September 2021

22 FEBRUARY 1928 - 2 AUGUST 2021

Harold Schaeffer was born in Johannesburg, South Africa of a Jewish family who had fled from the Russian expansion into Lithuania in the 1880s. His father, Maurice was a lawyer and his mother, Ethel, sang opera. It was a small family - Harold and his brother, David. He was educated at Parktown Boys School and graduated in medicine from the University of Witwatersrand in 1952. At an early stage he decided he wanted to be a neurosurgeon and went to London to take the necessary Fellowship exams. His training in neurosurgery was under the watchful and demanding eye of Norman Dott in Edinburgh, obtaining his FRCS (Ed) in general surgery in 1955 at the age of 25. At that time a specialty exam in neurosurgery was not offered.

After returning to South Africa he soon realised that his path forward would be difficult as he was not of Afrikaans origin. He and his family moved to Adelaide in 1961 to be the third neurosurgeon working with Donald Simpson and TARD ("Jim") Dinning at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. He was awarded the FRACS in neurosurgery. In 1966 he was appointed as the sole neurosurgeon at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital where he worked for the next 30 years. In 1975 he was joined there by Glenn McCulloch and in 1991 by Ahmed Hanieh. He also had a busy private practice. After retiring from operative neurosurgery Harold did considerable medico-legal work as his opinion was much sought by lawyers and insurance companies. His reports were known as detailed and accurate. He ceased work completely in 2008 and spent time pursuing his interests of reading, baroque music and travelling.

He was a keen traveller with a love of France, Britain and the Scandinavian countries. He was a frequent attendee at neurosurgical meetings within Australia and Europe. Harold met his wife, June at a Rugby match in South Africa. He was a medical student and June a teaching student. They married in Scotland and had 2 sons and 2 daughters. Their older son, Ian, died tragically in 1970. His adult children (Deirdre, Fiona and Robert) and 7 grandchildren live in Australia and the USA.

Harold had long standing interest in politics and was a member of the Liberal Party for many years, doing the hard tasks such as door-knocking for support of the candidates and handing out how-to-vote cards. His wife, June, died in October 2020 after which his own health deteriorated. At the time of his death, he was the oldest retired neurosurgeon in Australia.

This tribute was written by Glenn McCulloch, FRACS.