

## OBITUARY

### TONY RIEGER PLASTIC SURGEON 1931-2026

Tony Rieger or RAR as he was often referred to is an extraordinary Surgeon and extraordinary man.

Firstly about Tony the Surgeon. Tony was probably always destined to be a surgeon. The son of eminent surgeon Sir Clarence Rieger, Tony always wanted to follow his father in a surgical career.

After training in general surgery in Adelaide, he continued his studies in the UK. He trained during what was probably the Golden age of Plastic surgery at the Canniesburn Unit during the era of Tom Gibson, Jack Mustarde' and Ian McGregor. Fellow registrars were Ian Jackson & Graham Lister.

It was during this time that he described and published his paper "A local flap for repair of the Nasal Tip", "The Rieger Flap", which has been quoted in every major Plastic surgical text since.

He gained his FRCS and returned home to Adelaide in 1963 and set up Practice as one of the first Plastic surgeons in Adelaide. There was only one other Plastic surgeon in Adelaide, at that time, Don Robinson, with whom he shared rooms for many years. Tony was a Jack of all trades, in those days all plastic surgeons were, as there was no super-specialisation.

He was interested in and performed every type of Plastic Surgery, Paediatric, Cleft lip & palate, cranio-facial, hand surgery, burns, head & neck and cosmetic. The early days of his career in Adelaide were very demanding. He was the first and sole Plastic surgeon at the newly established Queen Elizabeth Hospital and was always on call and very busy. He was also on call for the Adelaide Children's Hospital, the Repat & the RAH. His wife Margaret has admitted that in the early days she was largely single parenting. Tony has inspired a generation of Plastic Surgeons. To see Tony operate was like observing an artist at work.

He rarely marked more than rudimentary lines or planned the repair in exact detail. His was more of a free-hand approach, but everything always fell into place without effort or tension, exactly as he had envisaged in his mind's eye and to the amazement of everyone in attendance.

He seemed to be completely ambidextrous, and often rather than swapping sides would start operating with his left hand. Outpatients were enjoyable and a focus for teaching. Patients loved him. That was also in the days when patients wore a tie to outpatients because they were seeing the specialist!

All new patients were reviewed together by the consultants, the registrar and the resident. The entire team saw every patient, discussed the diagnosis, the plan, and saw the outcomes and the complications. This was of course before all the political correctness, and safe working hours that we have today, which means that the patient rarely sees the same doctor twice, let alone have the same team plan, operate and then manage the patient to full recovery.

His Registrars adored him. He regarded the Registrar as part of his family. Saturday morning ward rounds and teaching session were always a highlight for the registrar & resident. This was one on one teaching where you learned all the tricks & this is how to do its', and the especially valuable tips for the fellowship exam, Tony having been an examiner for many years.

I'm sure he missed valuable time with his family, because of this, but a generation of registrars, who are now Fellows, are forever grateful.

In the early days the Plastic Surgery ward at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was also the Children's ward.

It was tradition that a Christmas day ward round was held with gifts for all the patients and the registrar would always be the one to wear the one size fits all Santa suit. Hugh Bartholomeus without doubt was the best Santa ever, with his fine portly physique and deep Ho-Ho-Ho.

Tony has always been involved with the College and Plastic Surgical Societies. He was a founding member of Australian Hand Club as it was known in the early days, and subsequently President.

- Board of Plastic Surgery 1970-80
- Chairman of the Board of Plastic Surgery 1978-80
- Senior Examiner in Plastic Surgery
- State Chairman RACS 1986
- Board of MDASA, and Chairman of the Claims Committee.

Tony was also a great asset to the Interplast Program. I can recall that on one of his trips to the Gilbert Islands his interest in shell collecting became known to the patients and staff. He soon had all the small children busy collecting shells for him and bringing them to the clinic.

On another Interplast trip to Borneo, he reports having grave fears for the safety of the registrar who accompanied him, when a female orangutan took a fancy to him. Working with Tony wasn't just about Plastic Surgery, it was also fun!

Now about Tony the man.

This is the man who always seems to know everything about anything. His interests are diverse. He is a renowned artist. Tony Riegers' landscape paintings can be found in art collections both in Australia and around the world. Whilst keen on art studies at school, it wasn't until he was older that his fondness for painting returned, and he would paint for an hour or two in his studio the evenings after work. When he was in his 40s, he joined art classes with David Dridan. Subsequently, he spent a lot of time painting in the company of friend and artist Bruce Swann in the Mid-North of South Australia.

He has held several exhibitions in galleries around Adelaide and interstate featuring local themes such as the seascapes of the Southern Fleurieu Peninsula and landscapes in the mid-north of South Australia. Following retirement Tony & Margaret travelled to Florence to live and further his art studies at the Piazza Spinelli.

He was also keen to learn to speak Italian, already being entirely fluent in both French and German. Following that he continued his painting in Chipping Norton in the Cotswolds in a medieval glove-makers workshop and residence they had purchased and restored some years before.

Many would also be aware of Tony's passion for owning and restoring vintage cars. His garage was like an engineering workshop with huge lathes and milling machines. In fact, he would often need to scrub extra hard before the first case of the day to remove all the oil stains on his hands, as he would have been making some crucial component from scratch, for one of his vintage cars the evening before.

As previously mentioned, Tony is an avid shell collector and it was with great pleasure that rather than a gold watch, on retirement from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, we were able to present him with a highly prized and coveted "Golden Cowrie" or as Tony would know it "Cypraea Aurantium".

Many of us here tonight have had the honour of working with Tony.  
We have all been enriched by his knowledge, skill and integrity.  
But, best of all working with Tony has always been great fun.  
And to Margaret, thank you so much for sharing this wonderful man with all of us.