

## **DAVID ANTHONY WAITE**

David Anthony Waite, splendid general medical practitioner, skilled physician, clinical senior lecturer, greatly valued consultant, medical adviser to some of New Zealand's largest companies, highly regarded expert on asthma, neurology, and occupational health, medical researcher, patient guardian, supporter and carer extraordinaire, charitable trust trustee, music lover, adviser to government agencies, amateur businessman and share investor, natural and dedicated environmentalist, tree lover, bird devotee, dog breeder, walker and biker, wonderful husband, father and grandfather, egalitarian democrat, an amazing friend to all of us.

A few days ago, just hours before David left us, I was sitting with him when Hugh Rennie QC and Chris Hodson QC arrived to visit David. We were at the Mary Potter Hospice, that amazing Wellington institution which took such good care of David in his final days

Hugh and Chris were both wistfully reflecting on how clients typically do not love their lawyers yet invariably they do love their doctors. My suggestion that this was perhaps partly associated with different charge out regimes was not welcomed.

The reason they were recounting this story was of course because David was the epitome of their hypothesis. They both spoke with warmth and admiration about him, as have so many people not just in recent weeks but also over all the many years it was my privilege to know him so well.

In the very best sense of the phrase, David was a man of many parts. He had a great fascination with life and people, a wide-reaching intellectual curiosity, an enviable ability to learn and build on knowledge, and a gift for imparting in the most generous way his own deep well of knowledge. He was dynamic yet forever kind and generous, albeit conveyed at times with a bluntness that ensured no scope for misunderstanding. He was nothing if not open and straightforward.

For many of us David was a very special friend, always there, always interested, always stimulating, empathetic when needed.

In writing to him a few days ago one family wanted him to know, and I quote, “how much we respect you David, both as our family doctor and as such a valued member of our community. In a strange way, being unwell was often not as unpleasant as we had feared given that we had the benefit of your wise diagnoses and many interesting discussions on such a wide array of subjects.”

I first met David many years ago when he walked up to me at a cocktail function and said to me, in that disarmingly frank way of his, you’re Roderick Deane and you’re my cousin. And so I was. We were both Waites. He was Catholic and I was Methodist and our families had never intermingled. Well, we soon fixed that, helped hugely of course by us both having the benefit of gorgeous wives, Janet and Gillian, both great cooks and socially at ease with the world. We all became the closet of friends.

David prowled endlessly around Gillian’s wetlands and forests. He loved the land, our trees, gifted us stoat traps, identified all the birds, while all the time telling what to do next. He was of course an owner and expert on many trees.

David and I planned the mating of our dogs, however, we both were busy so our dear wives came to the rescue, aided by a bit of instant iPad research. They mated his Daisy with our Onny in our garage and we now have two of their sons Mangu and Nero, both of whom adored David and Janet. Our three big black Labradors will miss him every bit as much as we will.

David was brainy, very brainy, strong and determined, resourceful and demanding, fearlessly honest and frank, a great conversationalist, personable and charismatic, a born achiever and workaholic, and an utterly devoted and loving husband and family man. He adored Janet and loved his children, of each of whom he was immeasurably proud.

But for many of those here today, above all he was one of the finest medical practitioners one could encounter. He was ever discreet about who his patients were but many of them have happily told me over the years about the way in which David cared for them.

So it came to pass that perhaps like others I became aware that David was the medical adviser and supporter to Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, Chairmen and CEO's of many companies, top QC's and CA's, Government Departmental Heads, Ambassadors and it turned out, when we dined together at the Wellington Club, probably the majority of the Club members.

But that is not the real story.

For although many important people sought David's help, they were treated no differently to all the rest of his patients. He was forever and utterly a man for ordinary people, for people who needed his wise help and counsel, regardless of race or creed, age or affluence, position or politics, status or workplace.

He was a doctor for all of us. Many of his patients have spoken of his fine qualities. He was a professional to his fingertips yet he had the common touch. The tone of these tributes is captured by comments that have been flowing in.

As Paul Baines exemplified it:

"We are truly saddened. David was such a good man; he will be missed by many people who, like us, have fond memories of his help and kindness in times of need."

And as Hugh Rennie recounted:

"David has been a major influence for the good on the life of my family, and was fantastic in his care of all of us. He always had all the time needed for every patient. How he did it I do not know, but he was always there and able to engage with us about our needs - ranging beyond our health to all the details of our lives."

In the days before the Euro, Hugh remembers an appointment where he mentioned that the family was about to holiday in Italy. David's sage advice on all sorts of details was followed by home delivery of a prescription which simply said the family would need "these" - attached to the prescription were some small denomination lira notes!

Hugh's first wife Caroline greatly enjoyed the way in which David would start any conversation with an inquiry as to the latest developments at Parliament, but she did say that you would have to work the conversation to bring it around to why you had come – for example, “Yes, such and such a politician has been a real pain - rather like the pain in my back that I have come to see you about”.

As Hugh said, “If one were seriously ill, David would arrive at one's home at the end of his day just to check that everything was OK. The reassurance this gave to other family members was brilliant and yet one always thought that David just did it because he never thought anything else would be appropriate.”

And as several patients reminded me, “Then there were and are the formidable team of amazing, loyal, long serving nurses with whom he worked”.

David was highly skilled as a physician and commanded a great knowledge of matters neurological and occupational. In this respect he was the Chief Medical Adviser to some large and important companies. For example, he worked with BP from 1978 and their message of “heartfelt condolences” and having the “warmest memories”, to use the words conveyed from London and Melbourne, were very moving.

On the research front, Professor Richard Faull, head of the Centre for Brain Research at the University of Auckland observed, and I quote, “what a fantastic role model David was for all our doctors and how his generosity, enthusiasm and passion for life had impacted our research in ways that would ensure that he would live on in our hearts forever”.

A close colleague, Simon Ryder-Lewis told me, and again I quote, how “David was the only doctor I have ever known to list his home phone number in the telephone directory – and be happy to receive calls. David had an amazing memory and could recall fantastic detail about individual cases, often going back many years. David's Practice was more of the general physician / specialist / GP practice than “just a GP”. Many of his cases were complicated and the type of thing you'd find in a hospital outpatients clinic. That was a reflection of his level of skill.”

David's huge contribution to his numerous patients, to the health and safety of many employees in major companies, to a number of specialist areas, to the world of medical research, and to the medical profession more broadly, will be his everlasting legacy.

In all this David was endlessly, indeed brilliantly, assisted by a special partner. Janet was his constant companion and greatest supporter. They loved each other unwaveringly from the day they met.

Over the past year, despite all odds, Janet was superbly good humoured and strong spirited, a splendid example to us all of how to cope with demanding times and make the most of every day of our lives. The combined courage of Janet and David was unequalled, forever welcoming of friends and guests, traveling the length and breadth of New Zealand and Australia to do his final round of visits.

David was a towering figure in the medical world, an outstanding and devoted doctor to his patients, and a wonderful family man. He loved people and he loved New Zealand.

Janet and Julia and William and Alex and James and his grandchildren will miss him terribly but the memories they have of him, his life and vibrancy, his enthusiasm and strength, his larger than life personality, his gift of friendship, his warmth and his caring for others, will be with them forever.

He added so much to the lives of so many. He was a wonderful New Zealander. Rest in peace David.

Roderick Deane

Wellington

27 November 2014