Jacques Grobbelaar

Jacques Grobbelaar was a Medical Officer at Nelspruit Hospital when he died tragically in a road accident on 22 August - 20 years ago - in 1992. On 28 June 2012 he would have been 45 years old. I write this obituary on behalf of those who lived and worked closely with Jacques.

I knew Jacques during our medical student years at the University of Pretoria from 1985 to 1990. We shared a commune with fellow-medical students and friends during our fourth to final years. Our group discovered the harsh realities of human suffering in South Africa and the excitement of learning medicine in the wards of H F Verwoerd Hospital (now Steve Biko Hospital), Kalafong Hospital and Tembisa Hospital.

Everyone who worked with Jacques, whether as a medical student or as a junior doctor in Nelspruit, would agree that he was a highly dedicated and talented young doctor who loved what he was doing and who wanted to make a difference. He did make a difference. I witnessed Jacques' great compassion and love as we worked together closely in the children's and obstetric wards where he brought smiles to people’s faces.

Jacques was energetic and he loved life, sports, the outdoors and adventure. He built up a Land Cruiser 4x4 - his pride - and travelled off the beaten track whenever he got the chance. In our fourth year as students we shared a memorable trip to Cape Vidal near St Lucia as a group of friends.

I met Jacques only once after we had graduated, as our group was scattered over southern Africa. He enthusiastically told me how he had saved the life of a critically injured trauma victim at Nelspruit Hospital with his newly acquired ATLS trauma skills.

Jacques was on an adventure holiday in Botswana when his Land Cruiser overturned on a remote road. He suffered severe internal injuries and was taken to Francistown Hospital. His late great friend and colleague, Sakkie Zaayman, who had been in the car with him, tried in vain to save his life. Sakkie provided comfort and spiritual guidance to Jacques during his final moments. Family and friends were eternally grateful for what Sakkie had done for Jacques. Sakkie, who became an emergency physician at Unitas Hospital, also died tragically in a car accident in 2002.

Jacques will always be remembered for his passion and for the difference he made to the lives of the suffering during his short career, and for his smile.

Jacques was survived by his parents, Koos and Cathy, and by siblings Leoni, Werner and Charmain. His father died in July 2012.

May he rest in peace.

Martin Scholtz