OBITUARY

James Blaul Kriechbaum
(10 June 1918 – 26 October 2014)

Jim Kriechbaum was born and raised in Burlington, Iowa. Both his parents were of German descent, and his father was a general surgeon. Jim graduated BA in 1940, and MD from the University of Iowa in 1943.

In the Second World War Jim served as a captain in the United States Medical Corp. After the war, Jim trained in ophthalmology at St Luke’s Hospital in Chicago, and subsequently passed the American Boards in Ophthalmology.

During his ophthalmology training, Jim had the good fortune to meet Dr June Reid, an Otago medical graduate who was gaining overseas experience in cardiology. Jim and June were married in 1949.

They lived and practised in Chicago, but June persuaded Jim that they would enjoy a better life in New Zealand. However Jim’s American Board Certification in Ophthalmology was not accepted by the New Zealand Medical Council for specialist registration.

They lived in England for a year in order for Jim to pass the Diploma in Ophthalmology which was acceptable, despite being a lesser qualification. They finally settled in New Zealand in 1954.

Jim was highly regarded and consequently was invited to join the practice of Dr Cecil Pittar, who at the time was New Zealand’s leading ophthalmic surgeon. Later they were joined by Lindsay Poole, and in 1978 by Bruce Hadden. Jim was also appointed as a part-time visiting ophthalmologist at Auckland Hospital, with his special interest and expertise in glaucoma.

Jim was of the old school, in that he did not delegate the routine tasks to technicians. He did everything himself for his patients, from prescribing glasses through to surgery. Jim’s patients were in knowledgeable, intelligent, and competent hands. He freely sought opinions from colleagues with difficult cases. “The patients’ interests are paramount” was Jim’s modus operandi, long before this maxim came to be written into a code of conduct.

The three of us practised together in Symonds Street, until the people renting the floor below us were arrested for growing marijuana plants under fluorescent light tubes. We figured it was not a good look for our professional practice, and purchased a building in nearby Mount Street, where we worked happily for many years.

In all our years together, there was never a cross word between us. Jim was a gentleman. He had great integrity, and he was frank. He had a sense of fun with an extraordinary supply of jokes. He was the ideal business partner- communicative, trustworthy, and no hidden agenda.
Jim and June were happily married for 65 years. They were caring and intellectually stimulating parents to their five children. Anthony and Jim were both dux of Auckland Grammar, a record almost unique to the Kriechbaum family. Both are general practitioners, Anthony in Palmerston North and Jim in Auckland. Caroline is a veterinary surgeon, Christopher an Air New Zealand pilot, and Sara is with the St Johns Ambulance. Together they have provided Jim and June with the joys of fifteen grandchildren.

New Zealand has lost an ophthalmologist who was greatly liked and respected by both his colleagues and his patients. On their behalf, our sincere sympathy to June, and to their children and grandchildren.

Bruce Hadden (Associate Professor, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Auckland) wrote this obituary.