David Cranleigh Thomson Bush

MBChB, DA(Eng), FANZCA

David Bush died in Christchurch on 5 July 2011 aged 84 years.

David was born in Wellington and grew up on a farm in the Awatere valley—an isolated area in the upper South Island, and as a boy always wanted to be a farmer.

However his father had other ambitions for him and sent him to secondary school at Christ’s College Christchurch where he was a Prefect and gained his school colours for shooting.

He also did well enough academically to obtain a place at Otago University and then onto the medical school, graduating with his MBChB in 1952.

Following graduation he did his house-surgeon years at Christchurch Hospital and then took the 6-week boat trip to England as the ship’s doctor. In the UK he continued his anaesthesia training, obtaining the D.A. while working in Whittington Hospital.

He returned to Christchurch to finish his anaesthesia training and having obtained his FFARACS took up a post as a consultant anaesthetist. At this time he also met, and after a 3-week courtship proposed to, his wonderful wife Nan.

David’s initial interests included paediatric anaesthesia and he anaesthetised a lot of children with great skill in his early career.

He eventually dropped some sessions at Christchurch Hospital and developed a very busy private practice. His surgeons recall him as being very meticulous in his work—a great attribute for an anaesthetist—and very caring to his patients. He was also very willing to come in at all hours for emergencies.

David was also very highly regarded by the nursing staff at all the hospitals he worked in. He was forever the polite gentleman, always calling the nurses “Sister” never by their Christian name, and was known for his impeccable manners. He was also much liked for his habit of calling into the wards at the end of a busy day in theatre to check that all was well and offer to reinsert any IVs.

Although quite conservative by nature he did have quite an innovative side. When theIRD (tax department) decreed that only vans could be claimed as work vehicles he took the back seats out of his racey yellow Mitsubishi and turned it into a van! Early on in his private career he recognised that the backless theatre stools, which were the only seating provided in theatre at that time, were not good for the anaesthetist’s
posture during long cases. To solve this problem, he installed the “Bush Chair of Anaesthesia” in the theatre he used most. This was a padded swivel chair with arms which made extended plastic surgery cases a lot more comfortable. On the clinical side the PACU nurses recall that he was one of the first Christchurch anaesthetists to prescribe IV rather than IM analgesia for his patients in the recovery unit. This was unusual at the time.

Another of David’s contributions to anaesthesia in Christchurch was the encouragement of younger anaesthetists starting out in private practice. He was a great mentor and even arranged with his surgeons to hand over some of his lists to help them get started. He would also very generously put on a luncheon at his local restaurant for our annual meeting.

Away from the operating theatre, David had a wide range of interests. Encouraged by his school friend, radiologist Shailor Weston, he joined the Royal Naval Reserve where he served as a Medical officer for over 15 years, reaching the rank of Surgeon Lieutenant Commander and receiving the Volunteer Reserve Decoration for his work. His interest in things nautical also extended to his owning various boats which were used for family holidays on the Southern Lakes where he also headed for winter skiing. He was a keen golfer and bridge player as well as a model train enthusiast—using left over orthopaedic plaster-of-paris for his scenery.

Along with his all his hobbies and very busy work schedule David, in conjunction with his colleague Bill Pryor somehow managed to co-author the third and fourth editions of Bill’s book “A Manual of Anaesthetic Techniques”. These were published in the late sixties and early seventies and being a very practical tome, proved popular with the junior anaesthetic staff at that time. The fourth edition even managed a Spanish translation! David also contributed the chapter “Anaesthesia for Major Oral surgery “ in Bill’s other book on anaesthesia for dentistry.

Having worked incredibly hard over the years David retired in his early sixties determined to leave anaesthesia practice while still “on top of his game”. This he certainly achieved. He had several years of very happy retirement with Nan who had not only looked after the family during David’s very busy career but had also been his secretary-making herself constantly available to answer the phone to surgeons and patients. There were no practice rooms or cell phones in those times!

He was absolutely devastated when Nan was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and when she predeceased him his health unfortunately deteriorated rather rapidly. However even in the rest-home, afflicted with the cruel symptoms of Alzheimer’s, his hallmark impeccable manners never deserted him. He continued to greet family and friends, whom he no longer recognised, with a wonderful smile and ever polite greeting. Unfortunately his good manners did cause occasional problems. When David was moving around the home Zimmer frame pile-ups were a common problem with David always insisting that the ladies went through the doorways first!

David will always be remembered as a very principled man, a true gentleman, a skilled anaesthetist who gave great care to a huge number of patients and great service to his surgeons, a very generous colleague and a very devoted husband, father and grandfather—greatly missed.

Dr Peter Pryor of Christchurch provided this obituary.