

OBITUARY

Gjalt Boerrigter

Gjalt Boerrigter was born on 11th September 1931 and died on 24th August 1999. To those who knew him his death did not come as a surprise; although we had hoped he would live for another couple of months, for another year.

Gjalt grew up in Bergen near the sea in Holland. He studied medicine in Amsterdam, from where he would go home ice skating across frozen canals on cold winter weekends. While doing military service he was posted to Indonesia, which was still a Dutch colony at that time. From Indonesia, Gjalt went to Ghana and from Ghana to Malawi, where he joined the British Leprosy Relief Association in the late 1960s.

I shall miss Gjalt greatly. Much of my clinical skills with regard to leprosy I learnt from him and I owe him many stimulating discussions. We did several studies together, mostly related to the evaluation of reaction and relapse rates during and after MDT. And it was fun to do them together with Gjalt, which is why we did them.

However, more than anything else I shall miss Gjalt as a friend. Gjalt was one of the most honest and reliable men I ever met; he always said exactly what he meant. He had his convictions but he would not fight for them. He would say: 'I have heard your opinion and you know mine. Let's leave it at that'.

Gjalt spent nearly half his life building up a splendid leprosy control service in Malawi for which he was awarded 'Officer in the Order of Oranje Nassau'. Nevertheless, he was always very modest and quiet about his achievements. He simply loved his work. He hoped that he had never done any harm to anyone and was pleased about every leprosy patient whom he had saved from developing disabilities.

Gjalt only left Malawi and returned to his native Bergen in Holland in 1998 when he knew he was approaching the curtain that separates the living from the dead.

Gjalt was very much loved and appreciated by his brother and his sister and their families, who spent many holidays with him in Malawi. Family and friends alike, we will always remember him and I think Gjalt would agree that your soul will exist as long as someone puts flowers on your grave. This, I am sure, will happen for many years to come.

J. M. Pönnighause