

Christoffel (Stoffel) Johannes Michael Nienaber (1918–1988)

To the profound sorrow and regret of his family, friends, colleagues and a great many former students, Stoffel Nienaber died at his home in Pietermaritzburg on Sunday, 3 April 1988, after a long illness.

During his more than 30 years' service at the University of Natal, Stoffel Nienaber — first as Lecturer, then as Senior Lecturer and from 1969 to his retirement in 1983, Professor and Head of Afrikaans and Nederlands in Pietermaritzburg and then Professor Emeritus — was the driving force behind a very efficient and happy department. His enthusiasm, dedication and benign despotism will be long remembered by his former colleagues and students.

As a mercurial and spell-binding lecturer, Professor Nienaber never bored his students. His belief that a lecturer should never think for his students, but rather should stimulate them to think, made him the inspiring lecturer he was.

The fact that all his students called him 'Oom Stoffel', is an indication of his humane and personal way of relating to them. He earned their respect and love by never judging them only abstractly in terms of marks and other 'academic' measures, but also according to their circumstances and personal abilities. He had great sympathy for the underprivileged and otherwise handicapped student.

He was also highly esteemed by all his colleagues as an academic, an



Professor 'Stoffel' Nienaber.

(Photograph: Natal Witness)

administrator and as a person. His humour and tactful negotiating are remembered with affection by them.

As a community man, Stoffel Nienaber contributed enthusiastically to the furtherance of the educational and cultural development of Pietermaritzburg. In appreciation of his devotion in this regard, the Stoffel Nienaber-saal at Voortrekker Primary School and the Stoffel Nienaber-lokaal at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, were named after him.

To his friends Stoffel Nienaber was an entertaining and widely-read conversationalist. But most of all he will be remembered for his unstinting assistance and support to friends in need.

Because of his wide intellectual background, he was a stimulating mentor to his two daughters, Marianne and Chrissie. At bedrock, however, he was the typical loving and caring father who worried deeply when he thought they were adversely affected.

With his intellectual partner, his wife Professor Miep Nienaber-Luitingh (erstwhile colleague in his department) he had a mutually enriching relationship. As he once jokingly said: 'She is my mistress, my wife, my colleague, my intellectual alter-ego, my best critic and sometimes my mother too.'

To Joseph and Beauty, his gardener and housekeeper, Stoffel was an understanding and sympathetic employer who often lent a helping hand in times of need. They remember him with affection. Both are still in the service of his widow, the former having served the family for more than 20 years.

As one of the leading academics within the Afrikaans literary world, Stoffel Nienaber distinguished himself as a researcher and literary essayist. His critical exactness, complemented by his beautifully fluid and lucid prose, is reflected in his numerous books, articles and essays. He also served on the committees, councils and boards of various cultural and academic institutions. During the years 1938 to 1941 he obtained his BA, HED and MA at the University of Natal and in 1950 his Drs. Litt. at the Gemeentelijke Universiteit of Amsterdam. In 1952 he received his D.Litt. at the University of Pretoria. It is interesting to note that during the harsh depression years he attended a farm school at Koedoesrand in the district of Fauresmith, and completed his schooling at Boshof Secondary School.

In Stoffel Nienaber, Natal has lost one of her talented academic and cultural leaders. We salute him for his contribution to this province, the University of Natal and his fellow-man.

H.J. VERMEULEN

