

## *Halley H Stott (1910–2004)*

Halley H Stott, founder of the Valley Trust, died peacefully at home on 13 June 2004.

He will be remembered as a man with the vision and energy to establish a socio-medical project for the promotion of health which combined practical approaches to nutrition and medical care. The wider development of Primary Health Care in the international community has been influenced by his work.

The breadth of the Halley Stott approach to health, nutrition and disease was quite exceptional. Indeed his policies relating to community participation in health care, self-help, protection of environment, use of local resources, organic horticulture, agriculture, and stimulation of local markets were so radical and innovative in the late 1940s that he had difficulty in persuading others in the medical profession to support the proposals. Unperturbed he used his own resources to purchase 150 acres of mountainous land in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. There he built a health centre with a protected fresh water spring. This provided the spearhead to the wider project. It was a lonely path in those post-war days because most medical care tended to be curative; in contrast to his preferred approach which was to promote



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health. He was convinced that malnutrition should be tackled in and by the community rather than from a hospital base, also that the interplay between malnutrition and common serious infections was a neglected area of medical research and practice.

Dr Halley Stott, who qualified in medicine from Edinburgh University, pressed on to establish The Valley Trust as a registered welfare organization in 1953. He then donated the property that he had developed to the Trust and he set about raising funds to support the wider project. Meanwhile he was busy leading a clinical service to the Zulu community through the Botha's Hill Health Centre.

The Health Centre had been formally opened in January 1951 with some financial support from central government and with the blessing of local tribal leaders. Dr Stott found that there was a huge demand for local medical services. Most doctors would have been overwhelmed by the clinical demands alone but this was not his style. Instead he burnt the midnight oil and won support by speaking at fund-raising events, writing up meticulous progress reports, applying to foundations for support, and working hard to maintain communication and understanding with the local Zulu people. Study of anthropology had convinced him that an approach to ill health that struck at the root causes of malnutrition and other common diseases could be achieved if the goodwill and cooperation of the local people could be established. This meant many meetings with local people, an advisory council of Zulu leaders and serious attempts to involve traditional healers without compromising either scientific principles or their own credibility.

Leaders in the World Health Organisation were quick to recognize the importance of the Valley Trust Socio-medical Project and by 1958 they had commissioned Dr Halley Stott to produce a report for them on the work in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. This commission was part of a worldwide search for innovative but practical approaches to rural health care. The WHO report was widely circulated but The Valley Trust did not receive full recognition from the international community for many years because other forces were at work in South Africa. The country was rapidly entering the phase of apartheid and international isolation. The Valley Trust thus had to develop and operate with limited support from officialdom during the early decades.

However the Trust was founded on humanitarian and scientific principles that stood firm despite the political dogma that was splitting the nation. Suspicion from many quarters could be dealt with in an open and principled way. This was a problematic phase and all those who worked for The Valley Trust needed to be people of integrity with a clear understanding of the principles upon which the organisation was founded and a realistic view of the social and political structures in South Africa.

From the earliest days the work of the Health Centre and Valley Trust were closely integrated and day-to-day success depended of key members of staff being willing to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Nurses and health assistants and doctors would try to help patients with nutrition related problems to understand that their illnesses were the result of lifestyle choices. They were then helped by others to consider changes through the use of practical demonstrations of food choices, food preparation to protect nutrient content and simple methods of home food production. The methods promoted in the Nutrition Demonstration Unit were always within easy reach of those on low incomes and based on research into how to grow good quality food in poor soil conditions.

A broad approach to health involves almost every aspect of life in a community. The Valley Trust thus became involved in enabling recreation facilities, strengthening school teaching and equipment, cultural activities, development of basic infrastructure, employment and environmental protection. These activities depended on the active participation of the local Zulu people as well as the benefactors who supported the Valley Trust programs. Success also depended on the maintenance of constructive relationships with local and national government and a willingness to work with sensitivity in a rapidly changing society.

Halley Stott and his advisors realised early on that wider acceptance and spread of the promotive approach to health would be best served by The Valley Trust becoming a teaching and learning organisation. Hence trainees began to attend the Trust for training. Students of medicine, nursing, dietetics and agriculture were sent to the Trust for short attachments or day visits, and a range of scientists from local universities began to take an interest in the social and clinical impact of the broad approach to health. A key feature of the work was a continuing programme of research and investigation to inform policy and practice. This was documented carefully in annual reports from 1953 onwards and some was published in scientific papers.

In his later years many awards were bestowed on Halley Stott for the work of the Valley Trust but he was always so aware that these tributes were not for him alone. They represented recognition of the whole Valley Trust team and the work done over many years.

Public recognition came to The Valley Trust as trainees and students carried the ideas elsewhere and as the annual reports and publications arising from the Trust's work became widely available.

Halley Stott was always so grateful for the early support that the Trust received from Rotary, Round Table, Oxfam, SA Sugar Association, many churches and individual bequests and donations. He also received honours from a number of bodies in his later years:

- 1970 Rosicrucian Order title 'Humanitarian', USA
- 1980 Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
- 1980 Honorary DSc University of Natal
- 1981 Jubilee Award, College of Medicine of South Africa
- 1982 Paul Harris Fellowship, Rotary International
- 2000 Michaelhouse Centenary Award.

However, the greatest public recognition is the fact that the work of The Valley Trust has continued to grow and develop in the decades since Halley Stott relinquished his role as a trustee.

Halley Stott was the fourth generation of Stotts to work in Natal. His grandfather and great-grandfather had been Methodist missionaries in Natal and his father was an architect and land surveyor who was a lay preacher and member of Natal Provincial Council and Durban City Council. Halley was married to Joyce (nee Greathead) for 65 years. She was always his strongest supporter and helper. She predeceased him by four years. They were both strongly family orientated and they enjoyed five children and 17 grandchildren.

He will be greatly missed in many circles.

KEITH WIMBLE