

Obituaries

Michael Daly (1931–2008)

Michael Daly, who died aged 76 in Pietermaritzburg in January, was an attorney, city councillor, director of companies and president of The Natal Society.

Born in Barberton, the son of a state veterinarian, he came to Pietermaritzburg as a schoolboy when his father was transferred to the Allerton Veterinary Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg. He went to school at Michaelhouse, and then completed a BA at the University of Natal, followed by an LLB.

In 1956 he was admitted as an attorney, conveyancer and notary public of the Supreme Court of South Africa, Natal Provincial Division, and was later also admitted as a solicitor in the High Court of Swaziland.

Daly practised as an attorney for many years in Pietermaritzburg, retiring in 1985 to become the assistant general manager and legal adviser of the Central Timber Co-op. He later became general manager of the Central Timber Fire Protection Co-op Ltd, which became Safire, and retired in 1999.

He was active in public life as a city councillor between 1961 and 1968 until obliged to resign due to the pressures of his legal work. In 1975 the Administrator of Natal appointed him a member of the Town Planning Appeals Board, of which he served as chairman from 1977 to 1985.

He was a director of various companies, chairman of the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society from 1961 to 1980, and president from 1986 to 1998 of The Natal Society, which then ran the Pietermaritzburg public library on behalf of the city council.

When the Msunduzi Municipality assumed control of the library, he was instrumental in separating the accounts and holdings of the Society from those of the library and establishing the Natal Society Foundation Trust, of which he was a trustee and chairman from its inception in 1998 until his death. On his initiative the special collections of The



Michael Daly, 1970

Natal Society, comprising the libraries of William O'Brien and Alan Hattersley, were transferred to the Alan Paton Centre at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Former director of the Natal Society Library Shona Wallis spoke warmly of Daly's 'ability to turn a meeting into a lively and amusing event, his command of the English language and his quirky sense of humour'.

Former secretary of the society, Pat McKenzie, recalled him as 'an attorney of total integrity, who was very principled, which some may have mistaken for stubbornness; and a respecter of tradition, with a sense of history'.

At his funeral, warm tributes were paid by two of his former articled clerks who have gone on to have distinguished legal careers. Mr Justice Kevin Swain of the Natal Bench wrote:

'Professionally, he pursued only what was fair and reasonable for his client, without compromising his duty to advance such interests to the best of his ability. This quality of fairness also found expression in the many years he sat on the Town Planning Appeals Board, in which forum the many judgments he handed down bear testimony to his considerable ability. He was, however, a modest man which meant that he never abused his natural ability to the detriment of those who appeared before him.

'I was always grateful for the confidence he showed in me at a very early stage of my career when I was a struggling junior at the Bar. To have such confidence placed in me by a very senior and experienced attorney, did a great deal for me and was one of the vital building blocks for my future career.'

Professor Lawrence Baxter, former Professor of Law on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal and at Duke University School of Law, North Carolina, and recently retired Chief e-Commerce Officer of Wachovia Corporation in the United States, another of Daly's one-time articled clerks, wrote:

'It is sad to learn of Michael's passing. But as I recall the life Michael lived it is also a time for thanks and a time to celebrate a wonderful man. Michael was one of the best lawyers I ever knew. He was my first mentor and he taught me a standard of incisive thought, eloquence and juristic excellence that few if any ever surpass and to which I can only aspire. He also displayed courage: I remember the time when in the face of bullying by the government he refused to allow the doors of the Pietermaritzburg public library to be closed to children who were not white. Michael showed that to be a great lawyer one also has to be a truly honorable person.'

Daly is survived by his wife Marlene, four children of a previous marriage and eight grandchildren.

As a boy, he was taken by his father to St George's Garrison Church. In his retirement years its worship and welfare became the great passion of his life, and as chapel warden he was responsible for significant improvements to its fabric. His funeral service took place there in the presence of a large congregation. As he was taken from the church for the last time, the church bell, which he had made usable again after a silence of more than 40 years, was tolled possibly for the first time since the days when the British garrison occupied the nearby Fort Napier.

JACK FROST