

# *Obituaries*

## *Kenneth Paul Elliott (1951–2014)*

**P**ROMINENT KwaZulu-Natal school principal, Ken Elliott, died on October 1, 2014, after a nearly two-year battle with cancer. He was 63 at the time of his death.

Elliott grew up on his parents' farm near Lowlands station on the main line between Mooi River and Estcourt. He attended Clifton Preparatory School in Nottingham Road, followed by Maritzburg College. At school he was very much an all-rounder being both academically gifted and an accomplished sportsman. In 1968, his matric year, he was deputy head boy and head of Clark House, one of the school's boarding houses. In addition, he played both first team tennis and cricket and was selected for the U18 Natal Schools' XI as a wicketkeeper / batsman.

After qualifying as a teacher at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, he returned to his alma mater where he was soon recognised as an especially able teacher of mathematics, at home with both the high flyers and those



*Ken Elliott*

who battled with the subject. He rose rapidly through the ranks and by his mid-30s was promoted as principal of Wartburg-Kirchdorf High School. This was followed by several years at the helm of Kingsway High School in

Amanzimtoti, where he had previously served as deputy principal. From Kingsway he moved to Westville Boys' High School where he served as headmaster for a year. A brief change in direction saw him move into the registrar's department at the University of Natal before returning to departmental service as a temporary mathematics lecturer at Edgewood College of Education. His return to the service of the Natal Education Department meant that he was able to apply for the Maritzburg College post and he duly took up the position of headmaster of the province's oldest high school in mid-1992 at the age of 42. He served the school with considerable skill and dedication for the next ten-and-a-half years until the end of 2002. He saw out the remainder of his distinguished career as the popular head of Durban Girls' College, an old and highly respected private primary and high school for girls. His retirement at the end of 2012 was marred by the death of his beloved wife Joan in September of that year. A few months later he was diagnosed with the cancer which led to his death in 2014.

So much for Ken's career, but what of the man himself? As a principal, he was a highly skilled manager and charismatic leader rather than an educational innovator. Nevertheless, his term as headmaster of Maritzburg College spanned a period in the history of South Africa and of education of almost constant change and he proved adept at keeping the school functioning at a high level for a decade.

An accomplished orator with an ebullient nature, Ken had something of the thespian in him. His sons remember that he would go into "school mode" on walking out of the door of the headmaster's house at Maritzburg College.

To the boys of the school he projected the image of a stern and forbidding man of action. They remember him striding down the corridors at the school in his academic gown – or in their words "Batman outfit" – holding up his hand like "a shark's fin", causing the boys in his path to part before him like the waters of the Red Sea. This same "Batman outfit" features in the memory of a past pupil of Durban Girls' College who, as a little girl, remembers stopping the headmaster in the corridor and asking him why he was wearing "a Harry Potter cloak".

In marked contrast to the stern headmaster, whose "pulsating vein" was apt to strike terror into schoolboys, his relationship with his management team, senior staff and old scholars was exceptionally genial. An engaging raconteur with a ready ability to see the funny side of things, his coffee sessions with his management team at Maritzburg College seem to have been more of a pleasure for those in attendance than a necessary duty.

Evidence suggests that this geniality was more universally apparent at Durban Girls' College, where the need to maintain a somewhat intimidating demeanour was not called for to the same degree as with College boys. Both he and his wife Joan became greatly loved figures on the staff of the Durban school.

When he left Maritzburg College at the end of 2002, senior staff member Tony Wiblin paid tribute to him thus:

"[Ken's] ... ebullient nature, decisiveness, willingness to make tough decisions and follow through with them, tirelessness, shrewdness, intellect and essential optimism stood him in good stead. Throughout his ten and a half years at the helm, he remained good-natured, sympathetic where

sympathy was due, approachable and deeply sensitive to the difficulties that teenagers endure ... His public image – assured, urbane, witty – made him a wonderful figurehead. He could interact socially with our whole community and intellectually with the judges, lawyers, accountants, doctors and others who

play such a vital role in determining the school's direction. His devotion to College took him to nearly every College or Old Boys' function held during his period of office and he was a tireless supporter of College sports teams."

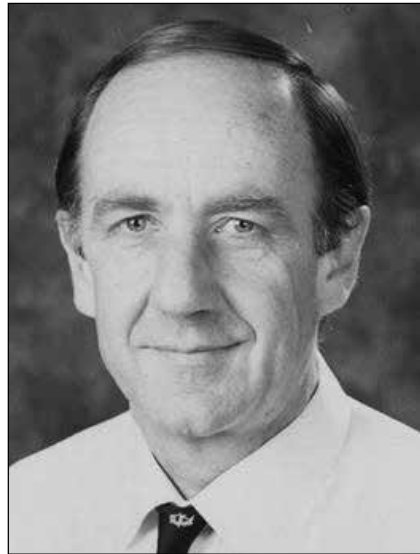
SIMON HAW

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## *John D'Urban Godlonton (1938–2015)*

**D**OCTOR John Godlonton died in June 2015. He was 76 years old. Born in Cape Town, he was educated in Queenstown at Queens College. He did his medical training at UCT before practising as a GP in Kokstad. Thereafter he moved to Durban to study neurosurgery at Wentworth Hospital. This he did not enjoy and so switched to Addington Hospital for paediatrics which he found of greater appeal. For most of his professional life he worked as a specialist paediatrician at Edendale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. Retirement took him to Leisure Bay where he remained for a decade, continuing to work at Port Shepstone hospital, now mainly in a teaching role. When his health started to deteriorate he and his wife moved to Grahamstown, because his son lived there, for what proved to be the last three years of his life.

John Godlonton has been described as a phenomenal person who was active in various roles in the Comrades Marathon Association and the KZN Rugby Sub-Union from the 1970s. He was a member of the CMA Executive Committee from 1980 to 1988, and its Vice-Chair for two years. He headed the Comrades Medical Portfolio for nearly



*John Godlonton*

two decades from 1977. And besides his role as an administrator, he completed the Comrades Marathon himself four times and was awarded his CMA Life Membership with Honours in 1988.

I first met Dr John Godlonton when I was an intern at Edendale Hospital. He was an amazing teacher, with a fantastic ability to impart knowledge in a practical, easily understandable manner. He was a legend at Edendale Hospital and was a founder of the infamous doctor's pub, "Easy Riders". John