Proctorsfontein in the Grahamstown district, the former home of our esteemed and well loved colleague, Brian Rippon, was for decades a place of warm hospitality for veterinarians from South Africa and from all over the world. Brian farmed with beef cattle, sheep and Angora goats on Proctorsfontein and it was the base for his rural veterinary practice.

When Brian and his wife Jenny, retired to Knysna and he leased Proctorsfontein to Shamwari Game Reserve, the internal fences were removed and today large game roam freely on this beautiful farm. The historic settler homestead in its beautiful setting and in its magnificent, extensive garden with well-groomed lawns has been converted into an exclusive lodge. Proctorsfontein was a special place to the veterinary fraternity and especially to those in the Eastern Cape. An era in Eastern Cape veterinary history ended with Brian’s move to Knysna.

Brian is a very special person, always humble, loved by his colleagues and his clients. He has a puckish sense of humour and is the first to tell a joke against himself, such as the following which caused him great amusement. He was seeing a sick Afghan in his surgery and commented to the long-haired, long-faced owner (a legal friend); “funny how dogs and owners look alike”, to which the quick-witted attorney parried: “have you not just acquired a bulldog?” Always a great talker and raconteur and a great character, the stories about Brian himself are numerous and legendary.

In his younger days he was renowned for the speed at which he roared up and down country roads on his rounds - farm labourers compared the sound of his passing bakkie with that of a Boeing passing overhead. He once hit an ox at night at such speed that it flew over the cab and landed up on the load body of his bakkie.

TB testing in his early days in practice involved accreditation schemes where every bovine on the farm had to be accounted for from test to test. This involved hours of office work and on one occasion Brian worked till 3am balancing the TB registers, realized that he had an early TB test near Port Alfred and drove straight there instead of going to bed. The farmer was rather surprised to find the veterinarian sleeping in his bakkie at the cattle crush in time for the test the next morning!

He would spend hours giving free advice to farmers, not a few of whom abused his kindness without making use of his professional services. This advice was given freely telephonically at all hours, in the cattle crush, and possibly most characteristically while he was seated in his bakkie, engine running and arm out of the window. The latter habit was endearing and simultaneously infuriating – endearing to those who were getting a free consultation and infuriating to those who were waiting for him to keep an appointment! Because Brian kept Eastern Cape time, not Greenwich time, he became universally known (in the Albany, Alexandria and Bathurst districts at any rate) as the late Dr Rippon. Because of this reputation, a competition developed amongst his many farmer clients as to who could delay Brian in characteristic pose with his engine running and his arm out of the window for the longest. The record is said to be 20 minutes! (Brian of course denies this - he claims it was 10 minutes!)

A colleague tells the story of visiting Brian and accompanying him on his rounds. Suddenly Brian jammed on the brakes, jumped out of his bakkie, over the fence and proceeded to inject a sick cow he had spotted next to the road. When the colleague queried the financial wisdom of such actions, he reportedly said –
“it’s old Jack’s cow and both cow and owner are poorly - I won’t charge him”. Such is the man who served his clients and local community for 46 years.

Brian graduated from Onderstepoort in 1962 and was in rural practise in the UK and Western Canada until 1965 when he returned to South Africa.

Brian has served the veterinary profession unstintingly. He served on the committee of the Eastern Cape & Karoo Branch for many years and as Chairman from 1975 to 1978. He was an elected Federal Councillor of the SAVA from 1978 to 1988. During this time he also ran his rural veterinary practice and ran his 3200ha farm.

The South African Veterinary Association Congresses were held in Grahamstown in 1977 and 1992. Brian chaired the organizing committee of the 1997 Congress and served on the organizing committee of the 1992 Congress. Brian played host on Proctorsfontein to congress attendees during both these congresses. He was awarded the Boswell Award for distinguished service to the SAVA in 1978.

Brian was not immune to personal setbacks such as experiencing a farm attack which saw him severely beaten and bound and shoved under a bed (his resourcefulness enabled him to escape and save his life), family tragedies and a vehicle accident which put an end to his veterinary practice. Through all of this he has retained his sense of humour and good natured approach to people and life.

He is a talented artist. His beautiful paintings of South Africa and Namibia which adorn many homes attest to this. He was also known to write the odd poem such as Ode to the Angora goat (which was inspired by his exasperation at their propensity to die!)

Dr FA Van Niekerk