ORBITUARIES

Imre Joseph Pál Loefler


The death of Imre Loefler, at the age of 77 will be mourned in many quarters. He was a polymath, well versed in philosophy, history, ecology and wildlife conservation as well as medical education and surgery. His memory was prodigious. In his heavily-accented speeches and in over 1,000 precisely argued articles and scientific papers, he challenged the status quo in many differing fields. His audiences and his influence extended far from his home in suburban Nairobi.

Imre Joseph Pál Loefler was born in Budapest in 1929. His father was a civil servant. One grandfather was a classics teacher, the other a publisher and book collector whose library became an important factor in Imre’s development. His grandmothers were Austrian and Bavarian so the home was bilingual. Within the ranks of the extended family were uncle Joseph, an Archbishop (later the Primate of the Catholic Church in Hungary), uncle Victor, a General, and aunt Paula, an Ursuline nun, who was the first woman to hold a PhD from a Hungarian university and tutor to the children of the Duke of Eszerhazy. The General, but even more so, the nun, had great influence on the boy.

His early schooldays were unremarkable; his only enthusiasm, scouting, he attributed to his desire to escape from home and his mother’s religious moralising. In 1944 he was enrolled in an Army cadet school. Unfortunately, with the Russians no more than a few kilometres from Budapest, all the cadets were soon taken by the German Army, put into German uniforms and sent to the Polish war front. After six months he escaped and made his way to Germany where the Americans captured him in May 1945. In the prisoner-of-war camp he helped in a modest ‘clinic’ and there performed his first operation, the incision of a buttock abscess. On discharge from prison in Regensburg he found work in a US Army hospital preparing histological slides. He cultivated contacts in the officer’s mess and became a successful black marketeer dealing in cigarettes, spirits and chocolate. Those idyllic months ended when his parents found him through the Red Cross and took him back to school in Budapest. Although he matriculated well in 1948, he was refused entry to medical school by the communist government because of his ‘bourgeois’ background. Within a month, he escaped from Hungary, on foot across the Austrian border, and returned to Regensburg. There he worked as a coal miner until he could afford to enrol in its medical school. Soon after entry he won the prestigious national scholarship, ‘Die Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes’ with free tuition, a salary and the chance to study philosophy and history alongside medicine. It was here that he gained his grounding in Aristotelian and Socratic philosophy sitting at the feet of, amongst others, Erwin Schrodinger, Karl Popper and Pablo Casals.

At the age of 22 years, he married Edith, a dental student. Three children quickly followed and with them, penury once again. Taxi-driving at night provided money and the chance to read his textbooks by the strong light that he rigged in the cab. He graduated in 1954 and entered
surgical training in Düsseldorf two years later. He gained his Speciality Diploma in 1961. Reading British and American journals, he thought that German surgery had been left behind, mainly because of the way the profession was organised. He decided to re-train in the USA. Having passed the ECFMG examination, he became an intern at the Good Samaritan Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio and completed his surgical residency there.

Inspired by the reputation of Makerere University in Uganda, he tried to arrange an African assignment but found that neither his German nor American diplomas were registerable by the colonial government. Eventually, in 1964, he and Edith gained work, he as surgeon and she as dentist, to Virika Mission Hospital, Fort Portal, Uganda. Here he matured as a surgeon and, in the mountains, hills and plains of Western Uganda acquired what was to become a life long interest in wildlife.

In 1967 he was invited to join Prof Sir Ian McAdam’s department of surgery in Mulago, Uganda’s teaching hospital, as a senior lecturer and he threw himself whole-heartedly into the teaching and clinical work. His ward rounds were quickly established as a great teaching vehicle, especially his evening rounds on emergency day. His habit of checking the admissions later in the evening was a cause of frequent embarrassment to the interns when, the next morning, the ward round revealed that Imre knew more about the admissions than did they. In 1969, he and Edith separated.

In 1970 he was appointed the Foundation Professor of Surgery to Zambia’s new medical school in Lusaka. In Zambia he married Valli. They bought a hundred acres of land, built a house and developed a farm around it. They were happy years. Valli provided a comfortable home and acted as secretary for his increasing literary output. They shared a love of bird-watching safaris and Imre learned to fly. He became an honorary game warden and was involved in anti-poaching activities.

Work-wise, these were the most challenging years of his career. The University Teaching Hospital, lavishly built with many medical specialities, was not well suited to the needs of a developing nation and its polyglot staff, recruited from many countries, did not coalesce into efficient teams. Never the less, Imre founded an efficient department of surgery firmly based upon the Mulago principles of service, teaching and research. He was a lucid and stimulating teacher in the wards, lecture and operating theatres and on emergency days his students had to be driven off at 1am to get a little sleep before the 7am intake rounds. Many students enthusiastically accompanied him to up-country hospitals where he was able to demonstrate the practical applications of their acquired knowledge. His logical mind gained him an enviable reputation for sorting out difficult clinical problems but he was outspoken critic of inefficiency and incompetence. Zambia at that time was a “front-line state”. There were tensions and jealousies within the medical school and his peregrinations, always with his birding binoculars, were “suspect”. Imre was expelled from the country in 1975.

Gerald Neville, Nairobi hospital’s senior surgeon, invited Imre to join him there. He was to spend 31 years there until he retired in 2006. He soon became a very busy surgeon but for many years would spend every Monday flying to remote hospitals to operate and teach. Dogged by continuing aspersions about his qualifications, he travelled to Scotland to sit and pass the Fellowship examination of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. The Nairobi hospital, a private institution, gave Imre very few teaching opportunities but he established the library and founded the hospital journal, The Proceedings of Nairobi Hospital, which he edited for nine years.

As a council member of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa (ASEA), he was responsible for Zambia becoming the first additional member country in 1974. Later, as Chairman he played a large role in developing and monitoring surgical training throughout the region and remained a very active in the work and development of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa up to the very end. He was the one, last year, who moved the motion for the ASEA to transform into the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa. He devoted personal resources to the work of the ASEA flying his plane to all corners of the region and provided tremendous support to the Ngora hospital project of ASEA which he visited frequently and sometimes gave joy-ride flights to village people in the area.
He and Val divorced in 1983 and he married Martha Okanga a few years later. This was to become the most productive period of his life. Together Martha and he explored their passion for birding, conservation and flying; with he as pilot and she as navigator they competed in many air rallies and safaris. When chairman of the Aero Club of East Africa he invented the, now very popular Kenya Navex and the ‘Preston’ rally which followed the pioneering routes of Chevalier Preston between Nairobi and Salisbury (Harare). From 1998 – 2005 he was chairman of the East African Wildlife Society and, during this time tried to give a new direction to conservation believing that people would conserve wildlife only when they received direct benefits from so doing. His advocacy of consumptive utilisation of wildlife by, for example, sport hunting, farming, trophies etc threw him into conflict with the many NGOs concerned with ‘animal welfare’. It was an argument he was close to winning at the time of his death.

He was now publishing more. He had a weekly column in the East African Standard, which was usually polemical and disturbing, engaging always with topics affecting his fellow Kenyans (he had acquired Kenyan citizenship in the ‘80s) such as Governmental inefficiency and corruption, deforestation, land erosion, the declining water supply. He crossed swords with the Catholic Church for its views on abortion, birth control and AIDs and weighed frequently into Africa’s root cause for its under-development, namely its burgeoning birth rates. In his popular ‘Soundings’ column for the British Medical Journal he consistently stuck to his editor’s brief – ‘to be as splenetic as possible’. His essay was the first winner of the Wakeley prize, established by the British medical publication, The Lancet, in honour of its founder. He produced many book reviews; those of surgery were always from the viewpoint of a surgeon working in a poor environment and one who believed all surgical practice should be based on the basic principles underlying wound healing, management of infection and repair of tissues. He decried the advent of the superspecialist and of new procedures that depended on technically complex bases that were not attainable, or appropriate, outside of the metropolitan hospitals of the West. This viewpoint was repeatedly and forcefully made in many articles and contributions to surgical meetings. Quite deservedly he gained recognition by his peers and he was invited to lecture throughout Africa, Europe, USA and Australia. In 2005, in recognition of his speaking and writing the Satima Foundation was established in Kenya to promote essay writing and rhetoric amongst his fellow Kenyans.

Prostate cancer was diagnosed in 2000. He had surgery and later, when secondaries appeared, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. He faced his fate with the rational view of the agnostic he was, continuing to work, fly, write and travel extensively almost to the end. Imre has left a memorable and important mark on surgery, wildlife conservation and, through his articles in the Kenyan press, on the growth of participative democracy in that country. Imre Joseph Pal Loefler was born in Budapest 26th March 1929 and died in Nairobi 11th March 2007. He is survived by his wife Martha, his son Andreas, an orthopaedic surgeon in Sydney, Nelly, a potter in South Africa, Dorothea, a language teacher in Stuttgart and Andrea-Claudia, a teacher of political science in Cottbus, Germany.

John Craven, John Jellis and F. G. Omaswa.
William was born exactly at 12 midnight on the 9th October 1962 to the late Mzee Amnon Ewoi and late Imat Margaret Ewoi. Because his birth coincided with the day Uganda got her independence from the British Government, William was automatically named Obet Lokken, the Luo variant of independence, in reference to the late Dr Apollo Milton Obote, Uganda’s first post-independence prime minister. William started his primary school in 1969 at Anyeke Primary School, Oyam District. When his late dad was transferred to Erute in Lira, William completed his primary education at Adyel P.7 in Lira where he sat for his PLE in 1976 and passed in 1st grade.

He was at Dr Obote College Boroboro where he sat for his U.C.E. in 1980 and passed with flying colours. He was retained in the same school for his Advance A level. He once again excelled in the final examinations and was admitted for medical degree at Makerere University. He was awarded a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degree on 23rd March 1990. Thereafter he did his internship at Nsambya Hospital where he was later, in 1992, appointed as a Medical Officer.

In 1992 he was admitted for a postgraduate course in radiology. He however felt that surgery was his calling. This was despite his physical disability of one of his lower limbs. He thus was allowed to change from radiology to surgery. In March 1996, he qualified as a surgeon. The then head of Department of Surgery, Professor Kakande could not let him go anywhere else. He persuaded him to join the academic staff of the Department and specifically on his Surgical Firm. He was therefore immediately appointed as a Lecturer in Surgery at Makerere in March 1996. Thereafter William became a star in the Department of Surgery, in the Association of Surgeons of Uganda and in ASEA. He attended many scientific conferences at which he presented scientific papers. He has supervised many postgraduate dissertations. He was a Founding Fellow of the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa. As a lecturer, he was the darling of the medical students, always available for them. He was ready to take them even after working hours.

William will be best remembered for having initiated the idea of surgical camps, a practice that has been copied in other countries. He was a co-author of the paper which first described the concept and experience of surgical camps in Uganda. His unexpected death was a big blow to the Department of Surgery, Mulago Hospital, the surgical fraternity and the nation as a whole. He died in London on 12th February 2007 soon after the death of his mother. He is survived by one son who is in a secondary school.

William, you are so much missed by your colleagues and your students. May the almighty God rest your soul in eternal peace.

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Laurence Fraser Levy was born on 16th November 1921 in London and died on 29th May /2007 in London leaving two sons Bruce and Malcolm. Laurence studied at Peter Symonds School and Winchester, HANTS, ENGLAND. He had his university education at University College and Hospital, London where he participated in Medical Student Union Affairs in various capacities. He had many qualifications added to his name. These were

1) M.B.B.S (London)
2) M.R.C.P.S. L.R.C.P.
3) M.SC. (N.Y.U.) in NEUROSURGERY
4) F.R.C.S. (ENG)
5) DIPLOMA OF AMERICAN BOARD OF NEUROLOGICAL SURGERY
6) F.A.C.S.
7) F.R.C.S.(EDIN)
8) F.C.O.

Levy Practiced surgery in various disciplines in Canada and the USA from 1950 to 1956. He worked as F/Lt/R/A/F/V/R/ station Medical officer in Germany for 2 ½ years.

His Professional Appointments included:

2. Part time Lecturer in Neurosurgery, The University College of Rhodesia 1968 –1971
3. Professor of Surgery and Chairman of the Department, University of Rhodesia 1972 – 1987
4. Professor of Neurosurgery, The University of Zimbabwe 1987 – 1999
6. Honorary Lecturer, Department of Anatomy 1999 – 2006

In the University, He held numerous positions either as Chairman or ordinary member in University and department committees. He was invited as external examiner to several Universities in East and Central Africa on a number of occasions. He was involved Doyen of Neurosurgery training in East and Central Africa and in the rest of the world.

His Research Activities mainly centered on the problems of surgery in the Third World – the diseases encountered the methods of dealing with them with minimal equipment. The Harare shunt he developed is one such example. Because of his fame and experience, Laurence gave many International Guest Lectures. He addressed distinguished audiences throughout the world on various Neurosurgical topics. Notably he was invited to France, Nigeria, South Africa, Florida, USA, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and N. Ireland. He was a Rahima Dawood Traveling Fellow.

Extramural Activities

He was either founding member or ordinary member of both present and past numerous organizations related to health care provision or support including Epilepsy Support Foundation, Multiple sclerosis Society, Cerebral palsy Association, Paraplegic Association and various charitable organizations dealing with physically and mentally disabled people.

Laurence played leadership rolls in various organizations dealing in Health which included Pan African Associations of Neurological Surgeons, Association of Surgeons of East Africa, International Federation of Surgical College, and Member

to various Academic Editorial boards, Central Africa Journal of Medicine and South African Journal of Surgery

His Membership of Scientific and Medical Societies included:

1. Member of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons U.S.A.
2. Member of the Pan African Association of Surgeons
3. Member of the Royal Society of Medicine
4. Member of the British Medical Association
5. Member of the Zimbabwe Medical Association
6. Member of the International League against Epilepsy
7. Corresponding member of the Society of British Neurological Surgeons.

Among the Honours and Awards he received were the following:-

1. Merit of the Zimbabwe Medical Association 1991
2. President’s award for research – 1992
3. Rotary Foundation of Rotary International
4. Patron – Epilepsy support foundation
5. Hopelands Association award
6. Medal of Honour awarded by the World Federation of Neurological Surgeons
7. Fellow of the Spinal Cord Association
8. National Colours for Equitation in 1965
9. Honorary Fellowship of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa

He published a total of 127 papers in referenced journals. The journals included among the many BMJ, British Journal of Surgery, CAJN, East African Medical Journal, Journal of Neurosurgery, Medical journal of Zambia etc. etc. etc.

Laurence Fraser Levy died on 29th May 2007 in London.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.


CONDOLENCES

On behalf of The East and Central African Journal of Surgery, The Editor in Chief and the entire Editorial Board extend their deepest condolences to the families and friends of the late Professor Loefler, Professor Levy and William Obote.

There are other professional colleagues who lost their dear ones including Dr. Stephen Tunde, a Senior Consultant surgeon at Mbale Hospital in Uganda and a Fellow of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa (ASEA) and a Foundation fellow of the East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA), who lost his wife and Dr. Edward Kigonya a Senior Consultant Physician at Mulago Hospital and a contributor to this journal, who also lost his wife who was a senior Consultant haematologist at Mulago hospital. To these and other who lost their dear ones, we extend our most heartfelt condolences.

May the souls of the departed rest in eternal peace.

I. Kakande
Editor in Chief, ECAJS