

Patrick Campbell George McKenzie (1931–2019)

IMET Pat McKenzie in unusual circumstances. It was in the two-bed pre-delivery ward of the maternity section of the old Grey's Hospital and we were timing the labour contractions of our respective wives. The date was Sunday 2 June 1968. Our child, Sally, was a third baby and arrived mid-afternoon. The McKenzie baby, Katharine, was a first delivery and so took some hours longer, not being born until the early hours of the following morning. And the two girls, having started off life together thus, have remained the closest of friends throughout the ensuing 50-plus years.

Pat was descended from Scottish and Irish immigrants to South Africa. His great-grandparents had left the Scottish Highlands in 1850, arriving in Durban and settling a few years later in the Nottingham Road district on the farm Lions Bush. Born in 1931, Pat described himself as a Depression baby and remembered both it and the crippling drought of 1933, which forced his family to take in paying guests and his father to teach horse riding to supplement his income as a farmer. Theirs was a Spartan existence without electricity, their home lit by candles and lamps. In a diet dominated by meat, a mid-winter treat was ice cream, made in the evening with pure cream and left outside overnight to be consumed for breakfast! The one modern convenience his mother insisted on was piped water and water-borne sewerage.

In 1938, aged seven, he was sent as a boarder to King's School in Nottingham Road, an even more Spartan establishment than home, with pit latrines and only three bathrooms, two of which had no hot water laid on. It was owned



by Sidney (Fundy) Edminson, former headmaster of Merchiston, who at about the time Pat became a pupil sold to the Carlyle-Mitchells who run it still. He was allowed to keep a horse, probably one of the last pupils in South Africa with such a claim to fame. Subsequently at Hilton College, to which he progressed in 1946, he was again subjected to a Spartan regime with cold showers morning and evening and a hot bath only once a week. As at King's, he also had a horse at one time, and rode it home to Nottingham Road.

After school Pat studied to be a lawyer and worked as an articled clerk in Durban. At that time he became increasingly involved in the Liberal Party, the Institute of Race Relations and social clubs that actively promoted non-racialism at a time when the State was constructing the legal structure of apartheid. However, after some of his clients in criminal trials had to advise

him how to conduct their defences, he decided that he was not cut out to be a lawyer.

In 1963 he gave up the law and moved to Johannesburg to live in a non-racial community in Sophiatown, which by then was a desert with church buildings the only structures still standing. He was employed by the Ekuthuleni Mission of the Anglican Church to run a community centre in the deserted school buildings owned by the Community of the Resurrection, the order to which Trevor Huddleston belonged. He soon realised that the centre had no future and, while continuing to live in the community, got a job with the Institute of Race Relations as secretary of the Southern Transvaal region.

In July 1964 he was phoned by his cousin Peter Brown, suggesting that he consider moving to Pietermaritzburg to run the Liberal Party office should he (Brown) be banned – as seemed likely because some Liberal Party members had turned out to belong to the Armed Resistance Movement, which had carried out acts of sabotage. This expectation duly came to pass and in September 1964 Pat found himself in Pietermaritzburg as national secretary of the Liberal Party.

One of his first tasks was to organise the national conference, due to take place in Sophiatown. He noticed, amid the transport arrangements that a Miss Lundie and a Dr Hugo were travelling by train and would need to be met at the station. Then in his thirties, he remembered wondering who these two ‘old bags’ might be. He ended up becoming a lifelong friend of Ruth Lundie and marrying Jennifer Hugo!

In 1968 the government passed the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act that banned multiracial membership

in political parties. Rather than limiting itself on racial grounds, the Liberal Party chose to disband. This left Pat unemployed. He solved his problem by joining the Natal Society Library in an administrative capacity. By the time he retired 28 years later, he was chief administrator and deputy director. The library provided him with an unbeatable combination of books and reading matter on the one hand and people on the other. He loved his job, the people he worked alongside, the public he interacted with, and providing a public service. The Natal Society Library of Pat’s day was a model of institutional excellence, defied apartheid and offered a splendid service to all the citizens of Pietermaritzburg, irrespective of colour.

Shona Wallis, former director of the Natal Society Library, said of him: ‘Pat was not only my deputy in the Natal Society Library, but he was also my friend. His knowledge, his humour and his stories were a source of great delight to me. When he retired, he left a great void in the library staff, which was felt by all as he knew us all intimately. I especially missed his advice, his help, and his calm in times of crisis.’

Katharine was followed by two younger siblings, Peter and Margaret, in quick succession. At one stage there were three McKenzie children under the age of four and Pat claimed that he was so sleep-deprived that he could not remember anything that happened for two years. A fourth child, Jean was born six-and-a-half years after Margaret and Pat, by then approaching 50, concerned that he might be thought to be the new baby’s grandfather, purchased a new set of shirts.

Pat retired at 65 in 1996. He immediately took over the cooking duties at home from Jennifer, who continued

to work in the University of Natal's Department of Chemistry. He also undertook all the administration in connection with *Natalia*, the journal of the Natal Society. This involved keeping the entire stock of unsold past editions, taking the minutes of editorial committee meetings, and promoting sales – which he did with great success. In the late 1980s and 1990s as the McKenzie children left home, Pat and Jennifer started to host other young people. One or two were hiding from the police, some were studying, while yet others were simply trying to escape the violence taking place in their own communities.

Pat reached his 80th birthday in 2011 with a flourish and a smart lunch for a wide circle of friends. But a year later he was struck down by a serious bout of depression, an affliction to which he had not previously been prone. Staying on in the old family home in French Road was clearly not an option. In

this situation the McKenzie offspring swooped in, packed up and sold the house, and moved their parents into a retirement home in Durban, Ocean View in Musgrave Road. Notwithstanding Pat's previous claims that he would never live in such a place, it turned out to be an admirable last home for him. It catered for his sociable nature, and giving up his car and driving proved no great hardship as he and Jennifer could easily walk down Musgrave Road to shops, cinemas, restaurants and, most importantly, their respective churches.

Pat died peacefully in his sleep in the early hours of 4 March 2019. His funeral took place a few days later in St Thomas's Church where he had been an active parishioner in his final years, with a large and appropriately multiracial congregation. He leaves his wife Jennifer, children Katharine, Peter, Margaret and Jean, and seven grandchildren, the offspring of Katharine and Peter.

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