

A paediatrician ahead of her time

Dilys Mary Craven
MB BCH, DCH RCP&S, MD
1919 – 2008

Dilys Craven and her sister Winifred were the daughters of David and Sara Rees, a well known family in the farming community in Carmarthenshire, South Wales.

She was educated at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School for Girls where, after matriculation at 15 years of age, she entered The Welsh National School of Medicine on a scholarship. After obtaining the qualifying degree MB BCH in 1942, she was fortunate to be appointed house physician to AM Kennedy – Professor of Medicine.

In 1944 she volunteered for service in the armed forces. On the afternoon before reporting to the RAMC training department, the house where she was staying in London was totally destroyed by a V2. Our grandmother was out at the time and lost all her possessions, and her newly-delivered uniform, consequently reporting for service in civilian clothes. Her first posting was in the New Forest area, where she was in charge of a sick bay and travelled among the many units assembled in the area prior to D Day. During 1944

she sailed into Ostende as the regimental medical officer to 183 HAA Regiment, stationed in Antwerp, where she saw active service until the crossing of the Rhine by the allies in 1945.

After the war Dilys joined the staff of the British Army of the Rhine in Germany, where her duties were mainly concerned with Womens' Services. It was at this time that she decided to specialize in paediatrics. On demobilization, she was appointed registrar in paediatrics to the new neonatal department of the West Middlesex Hospital, London. It was here she met her future husband, David Craven, whom she married in 1950. After honeymooning on the Stratheden, they arrived in Adelaide in 1951 to set up their home. They had a happy and enduring marriage, bringing together many interests and skills, one complementing the other.

A few months after their arrival, she was invited to join the Adelaide Children's Hospital as honorary clinical assistant to the medical outpatients department, and this began a long and happy association with the hospital. Dilys was proud of having been a member of the foundation staff of The Queen Elizabeth Hospital as honorary paediatrician, and later was appointed senior visiting specialist

and head of unit. She was elected as a member of the Australian College of Paediatricians, and was the author of several revolutionary papers.

Dilys was twice president of the South Australian Medical Women's Society, was president of the Australian Federation of Medical Women, and was made an honorary life member of the South Australian Medical Women's Society in 1988. She was a remarkable woman who was well ahead of her time and a pioneer in the field of paediatrics. On retirement in 1984 she was made an honorary life member of the Medical Staff Society, consultant to the Adelaide Children's Hospital and emeritus physician, at the same time.

Her name appeared in the Queen's New Year Honours List in 1982, when she was awarded an OBE for services to women in medicine and paediatrics.

A sense of family was all-important to Dilys, and Sara and Gwynne, her daughters, grew up in a close-knit family. She was a proud grandparent of Madeline and myself and always considered her life in Adelaide, where she made many lifelong friends, most privileged. She was an avid reader with a passion for learning which she maintained throughout her life. Her Welsh heritage was never forgotten, and she remained very close to her sister Winnie and extended family in Wales.

A love of racing was shared with her husband David and many friends. Weekends were spent whenever possible at the 'farm' in the Hindmarsh Valley. Having spent her formative years on a farm in Wales she found her involvement with farming once again in Australia rather unexpected. In particular, she was always very proud of her involvement with the re-emergence of 'Wiltipol' sheep in South Australia.

Dilys Craven led a most extraordinary and fulfilling life. She was never idle. A woman with a strong opinion, not readily influenced by others, who encouraged individualism. A woman who understood social issues and made most significant contributions to her chosen career of medicine. Family and friends were of great importance, and we loved her very much.

Jordan Brown

Jordan Brown is Dr Dilys Craven's grandson.

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