

**PROFESSOR G.J. FRAENKEL**  
**AM BM MCh (Oxon) FRCS FRACS FACMA**  
**(1919–1998)**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:** We are most grateful to Jessica Tyndall, the Gus Fraenkel Medical Librarian, who kindly allowed us to photograph some of Gus Fraenkel's personal possessions and other medical heritage items stored and displayed in the library. We also thank Dr Gillian Dooley, Special Collections Librarian at Flinders University, who helped us to view Professor Fraenkel's personal documents and his oral history interview with Averil Holt. The State Library of South Australia allowed us access to the J.D. Somerville oral history collection and the oral history interview, (OH575/2) of Gus Fraenkel by Rob Linn. Professor Donald Simpson provided important information and editing. Matt Polasek and Graham Fraenkel, his son, gave us their personal recollections.

Professor Gus Fraenkel was eldest of five children born in Berlin to Eduard Fraenkel, and Ruth von Velsen, a Lutheran of German (Westphalian) ancestry. His father was a Professor in Classics, well recognised by the international community. He held teaching posts in Berlin Kiel, Gottingen and finally Freiburg (1931). In 1933, with the advent of the Hitler regime, Eduard Fraenkel was stripped from his academic appointment as a non-Aryan, although he was not a member of the Jewish faith. The threat of Jewish persecution finally convinced him to leave Germany. Nevertheless, at this stage, he was able to take two railway wagons of possessions, books and papers with him. Some are now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He had offers of appointments in the USA and UK but chose Cambridge and later Oxford where he was appointed the Corpus Christi Professor in Latin.

His son Gus Fraenkel's early education was in Germany. In Kiel he became interested in sailing and the navy but his myopia was a handicap. After his father moved to Freiburg and later to the UK, his motivations changed to medicine. His secondary education was completed at Perse School, Cambridge. He started his medical studies in Oxford and on graduation was awarded the Radcliffe Prize in Obstetrics. As a postgraduate he had appointments in Oxford, initially, as Junior House Surgeon at the Royal Infirmary, but later he worked in hospitals at Harefield, Worcester, Nottingham and St Paul's in London.

He returned to Oxford in 1951 as surgical tutor at the Radcliffe. Later he was involved in the management of haemophilia with Professor R.G. MacFarlane. Here he met Ruth Anderson whom he later married. He operated on several haemophiliac patients but in several there was a problem with sensitivity to bovine proteins. This led to a rapid development of porcine AHG (anti-haemophilic globulin as given by Biggs and MacFarlane) by Ruth. His patient survived. The results of his experience with surgery in haemophilia resulted in three publications, *Lancet* 1955, 1957, *British Journal of Surgery* 1959. (His first publication was in 1948, in the *Lancet*, and dealt with carcinoid tumours.)

Later, Fraenkel was attached to the Department of Neurological Surgery at the Radcliffe where he was involved in the treatment of head injuries and where he met Hugh Cairns. He admired Cairns, was an usher at his funeral (1952), and wrote a precise, detailed and insightful biography of Cairns at a later date, whilst in Adelaide. It was published in 1991 by OUP. The demand was so great that it had to be reprinted.

At the age of 37, his chances of getting an Oxford Surgical Chair were not very high but he received several other offers from elsewhere. One was from Sir Gordon Bell, a great figure in New Zealand surgery and for many years holder of Dunedin Chair of Surgery. This Chair became vacant after Michael Woodruff left in 1956 to become the Professor of Surgical Science in Edinburgh. Fraenkel accepted the appointment and in 1958 became the Ralph Barnett Professor of Surgery at the University of Otago.

At that time it was a custom that the Professor of Surgery at the University of Otago should have some exposure to surgery in the United States. Therefore Fraenkel visited centres in Boston, Washington DC, Baltimore, Chicago, and New York before his arrival in Dunedin. He also knew that vascular surgery was absent in Dunedin and therefore spent time with Sir Charles Rob at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington.

A year after his arrival in Dunedin, on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1959, a patient was admitted to the hospital with a leaking abdominal aortic aneurism. Professor Fraenkel performed the surgery, the patient survived and was well 11 years later, when the Fraenkels left New Zealand for Adelaide in 1970.

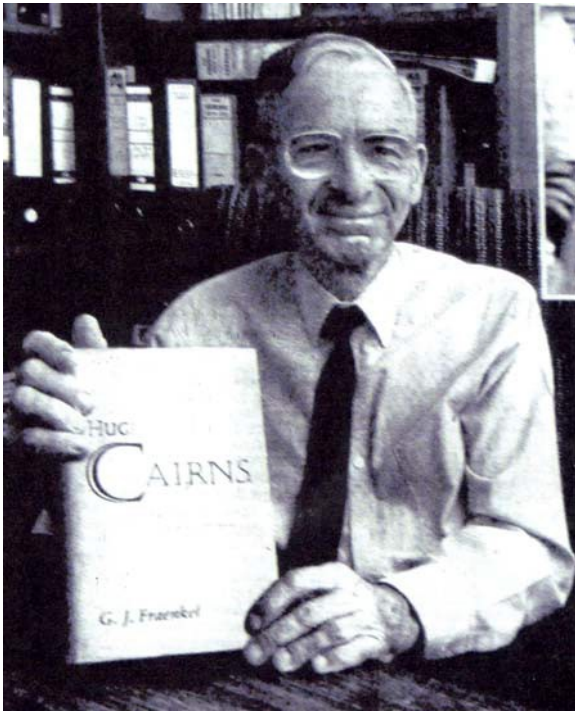
In Dunedin he was a founding member of the Surgical Research Society. The first meeting was held at his house. He published several papers on Medical Education including a popular booklet with John Ludbrook, *Guide to House Surgeons in a Surgical Unit*. His interest in medical education continued and in 1962, as a Travelling Fellow, in Medical Education he visited important and productive units in USA, Canada and UK. In 1965, on study leave, he was the Visiting Professor in Surgery at the Harvard Medical School and took the opportunity to visit other North American medical centres. Again, the major theme was teaching, research and surgical innovation. His experience and friendship with Professors Jepson, Bennett and Cox from Adelaide and overseas friends made him an excellent candidate to become the Foundation Dean and Chairman of the new Medical School established at the Flinders University in Adelaide. He accepted the appointment and moved to Adelaide in 1970.

In Adelaide he had an opportunity to help in the design of the new Medical School buildings and implement his ideas in the formation and course structure of the then unique Medical School. His influence was major and even involved nursing education. In his oral history by Rob Linn he recollects the formation of the Sturt College of Nursing at Bedford Park near the Medical School, which provided a course of lectures for nurses separate from hospitals. His influence also led to unique appointments and formation of then Foundation Chairs in Radiology and Anaesthetics. He was strongly supported by the Professor of Medicine, John Blandford and the University Vice-Chancellor, Peter Karmel. One of his projects was the medical library which bears his name, "*The Gus Fraenkel Medical Library*". It was completed in 1975 and occupied in 1976. In addition to excellent collection of journals, references and books, the library has a unique collection of old medical instruments and other medical heritage items. Some of these are displayed in the library in five vitrines.

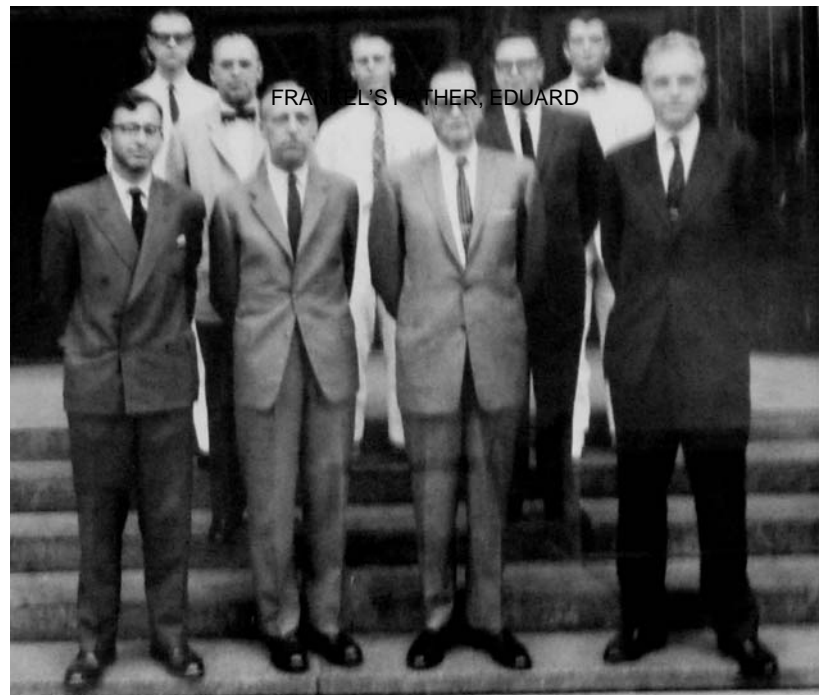
His other appointments were as a Member and later President of The Medical Board of South Australia, Consultant to Universiti Sains Malasia and Commonwealth Senior Medical Fellow. He retired in 1984 aged 65. Some of the personal items from his desk are on view in the Medical Library.

Gus Fraenkel was a fine surgeon and a great medical educator and in his retirement he wrote a great medical biography. Like other refugees from persecution he made an enduring contribution to his adoptive countries, Britain, New Zealand and Australia.

## PROFESSOR FRAENKEL'S PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEMORABILIA



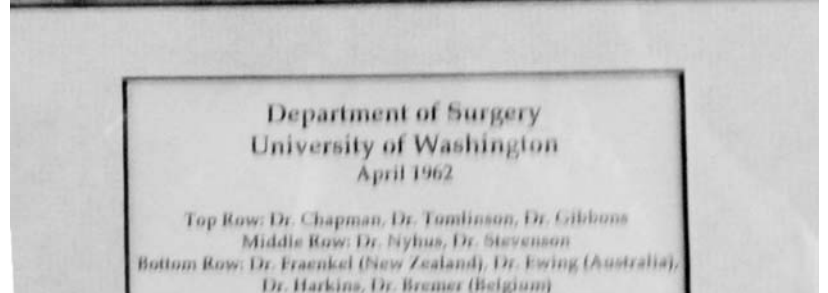
PHOTOGRAPH FROM HIS OBITUARY  
BY JOHN CHALMERS IN 'THE AUSTRALIAN',  
SEPTEMBER 1998



FRAENKEL'S FATHER, EDUARD



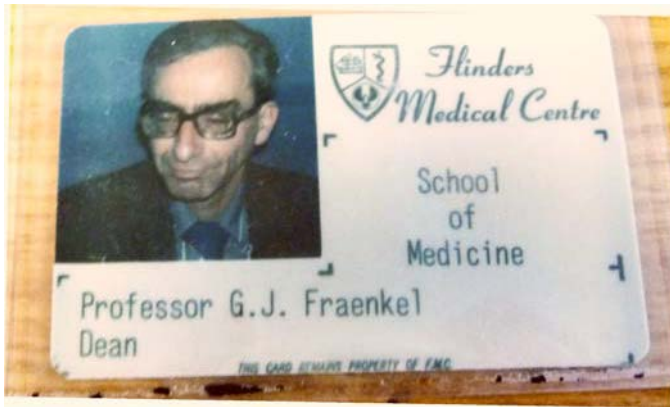
FRAENKEL'S ACADEMIC GOWNS AT THE  
ENTRANCE TO THE GUS FRAENKEL  
MEDICAL LIBRARY



Department of Surgery  
University of Washington  
April 1962

Top Row: Dr. Chapman, Dr. Tomlinson, Dr. Gibbons  
Middle Row: Dr. Nyhus, Dr. Stevenson  
Bottom Row: Dr. Fraenkel (New Zealand), Dr. Ewing (Australia),  
Dr. Harkins, Dr. Bremer (Belgium)

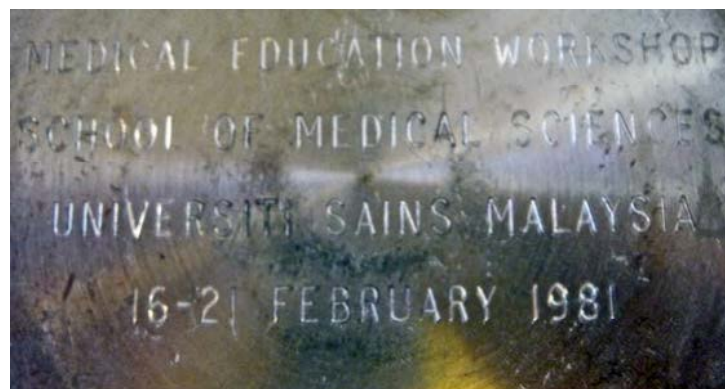
FRAENKEL IN SEATTLE IN 1962 (FRONT ROW LEFT),  
NEXT TO HIM IS PROFESSOR MAURICE EWING FROM MELBOURNE



FLINDER'S MEDICAL CENTRE NAME TAG



CARTOON BY BEATTY OF FRAENKEL  
"BUILDING THE HOSPITAL"



PEWTER PLATE AND THE INSCRIPTION FOLLOWING A VISIT  
AS A CONSULTANT ON THE NEW MEDICAL SCHOOL  
TO THE UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA IN PENANG



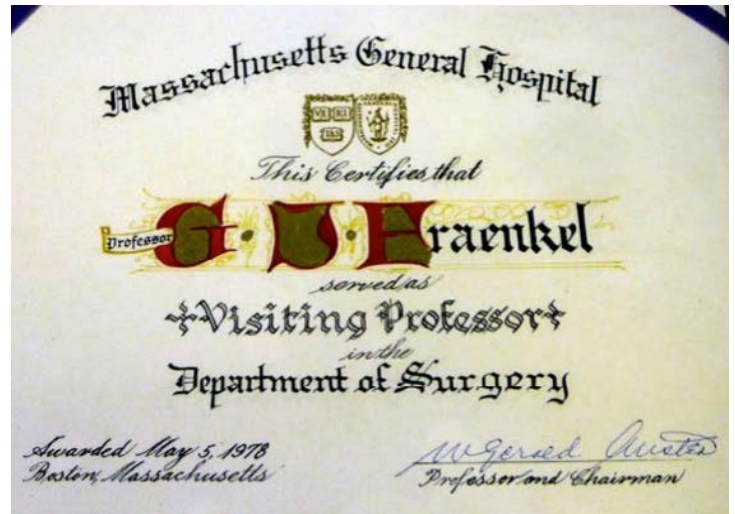
A TURTLE LIKELY USED AS A MAGNIFYING GLASS



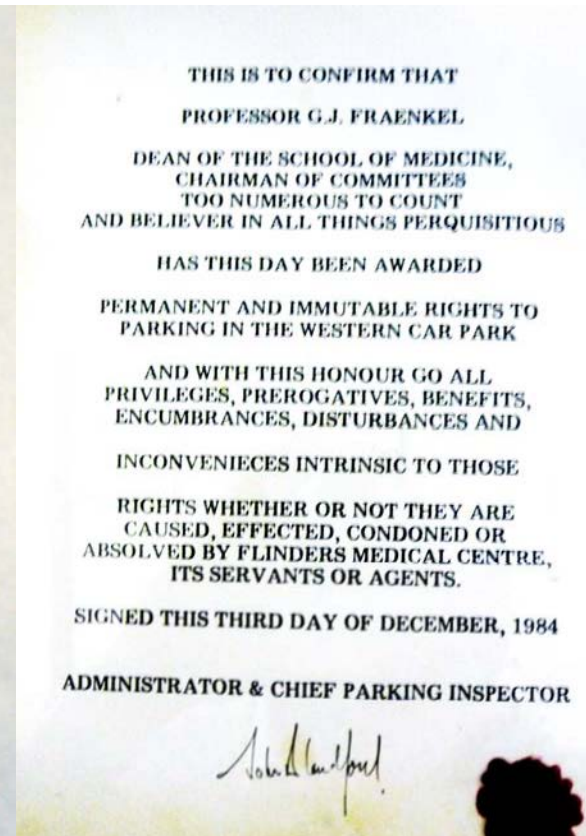
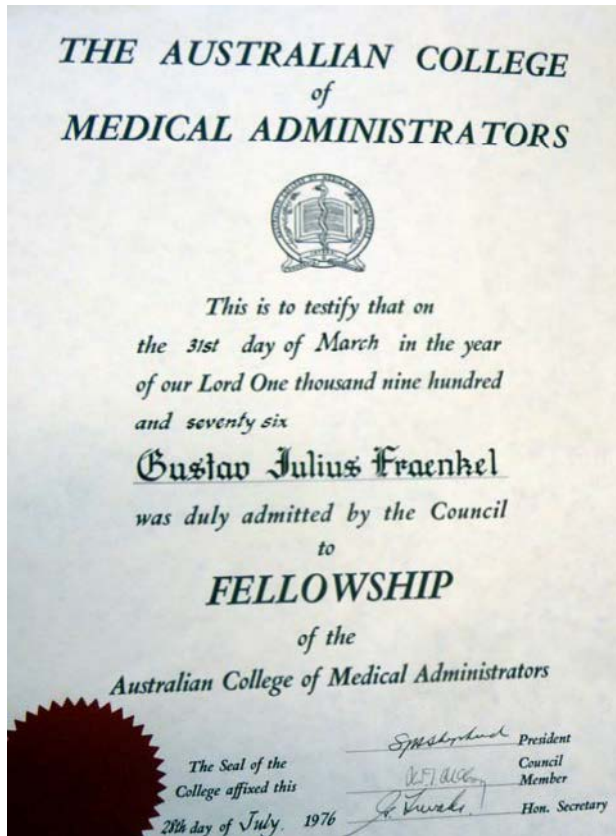
CACHET OF PAPER CLIPS AND TEAPOT



FRAENKEL'S CLINICAL TORCH



FRAENKEL'S CERTIFICATE FROM HIS STUDY LEAVE 1978



DEGREE IN MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION 1976 (LEFT).  
A "PARKING PERMIT" 1984 INDICATING FRAENKEL'S POPULARITY (RIGHT).

## APPENDIX

Emeritus Professor Donald Simpson was a friend and supporter of Gus Fraenkel. In Hugh Cairn's biography Fraenkel wrote: "*Professor Donald Simpson assisted me in innumerable ways with information about neurosurgery and neurosurgeons until I believed him to be almost omniscient*". Matt Polasek met him whilst writing a book with Peter Karmel about economic statistics. Professors Simpson's recollections are noted below, together with those of Professor Matt Polasek and his son, Graham Fraenkel.

### **GUSTAV JULIUS FRAENKEL, AM, BM, MCh (Oxon), FRCS(Eng), FRACS**

Gus Fraenkel's death on 11 September 1998 deprived us of a delightful, very scholarly surgeon, who made important contributions in three related fields: academic surgery, medical education and medical history.

Gus was born in 1919, in Berlin, the son of Eduard Fraenkel and his wife Ruth, nee von Velsen. Both his parents were classicists in the grand German tradition, and his father had a distinguished academic career in Berlin, Kiel, Gottingen and Freiburg. But he was sacked in the first year of Nazi racist persecution and took refuge in England, where he held first a Fellowship in Cambridge, and then a Chair of Latin in Oxford. Thus, Gus was transplanted, first to school in Cambridge, and then a Chair of Latin in Oxford where he studied medicine. As a student, he met and came to admire Sir Hugh Cairns, who was then beginning his great career as neurosurgeon and teacher at Oxford. Gus graduated in 1943, and took his FRCS (Eng) in 1946. He followed this with an Oxford MCh in 1949, one of his examiners being Cairns himself. After various surgical jobs, in 1951 he became a Surgical Tutor under Cairns in the Radcliffe Infirmary. He later became a Surgical Research Assistant in the Nuffield Medical Research Institute. I first knew him then, when he was already a very impressive person, working on the intractable surgical problems of haemophilia, and a member of a brilliant group that included the haematologists R.G. Macfarlane and Rosemary Biggs. It was at this time that he married Ruth Anderson, also working in the Radcliffe Department of Haematology. They were to have two sons and one daughter, all of whom have distinguished medical careers.

Years later, Gus told me that his hopes of an Oxford career had been blocked by Cairns' early death in 1952. This may have been so; if it was, New Zealand and Australia gained a brilliant immigrant. In 1958, Gus took the Ralph Barnett's Chair of Surgery in Dunedin, where he worked for twelve years. He is remembered there with great respect, as a pioneer in vascular surgery and a fine teacher. Professor Graham Hill of Auckland tells me that Gus practiced evidence-based surgery before that concept became modish, and his work with aortic aneurysms was backed by productive animal experimentation. I never saw Gus operate, but Professor Hill's memories are what I would have expected: he says that in the theatre Gus was slow, methodical and always safe. With John Ludbrook, he wrote a classic, 'Guide for House Surgeons in the Surgical Unit', which has gone into many editions, and seems certain to outlive him.

After Dunedin, Gus embarked in 1970 on his second career. He was appointed Foundation Chairman and Dean of Adelaide's new Medical School in Flinders University. He is agreed to have been the chief architect of that innovative and very successful Medical School. I saw little of him at this time, but could see that he was a fine administrator and good at picking outstanding staff. One of his colleagues from that period, John Chalmers, has written a perceptive obituary, stressing Gus's concept of a medical curriculum that integrated teaching with patient care and research [Australian, Sept 25, 1998]. His experience at Flinders University made him a creative consultant in setting up the new Medical School in the Universiti Sains

Malasia (Penang). He also served for some years as part-time Coordinator of Research in the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

Late in life, Gus entered a third career in medical history. For reasons which he has himself told, he decided to write a biography of Hugh Cairns, based on an intimidating mass of archival material. As far as I know, he had no training in archival research but his book "Hugh Cairns – First Nuffield Professor of Surgery, University of Oxford" is a model of narrative and analytical history. Unusually for such a book, the first printing sold so well that Oxford University Press, red in face, had to reprint it. He also helped to write a little book on the history of the South Australian Medical Board: not perhaps an inspiring subject, but in his hands entertaining as well as useful to local historians.

My memories of Gus are uniformly pleasant; I knew him as a helpful colleague and warm friend. Although he must have been lonely when his wife Ruth died in 1990, he never complained of this or of the miseries of age. I remember him as always rather detached, especially over national and regional issues. His career spanned Germany, England, New Zealand and Australia, but I never thought of him as German or English, still less as Australian. I am told that he gave the same impression to at least one New Zealander. Once when we were discussing the career of Cairns, born in Australia and working in England, I asked him whether Cairns saw himself as Australian or British. He gave me a good answer, but it was clear that he saw my question as rather strange. Looking back, I can best describe him as supernational, moving in an intellectual world in which national issues are not of great interest. I miss him and so do many others.

## MATT POLASEK'S RECOLLECTIONS

*Dr Matt Polasek, a Fullbright Scholar who obtained his PhD in economics from Duke University, was a Senior Lecturer in Economics in the early days of the Flinders University. The campus (late 1960s) was then still affiliated with the University of Adelaide.*

The Flinders Medical Centre was being built and Fraenkel was involved in its design and the curriculum of the new Medical School.

Polasek and the then Vice-chancellor, P.H. Karmel, were at that time writing a book on economic statistics. ("Applied Statistics for Economists", four editions by Pitman, three reprints including one in Spanish). They sometimes had working lunches together and Fraenkel often joined them. Sometimes the conversation involved the new Medical School.

Polasek recalls Fraenkel's determination to create a unique and modern curriculum, not only for the medical students but also for nurses. He found him a little reticent, with a ready smile, but absolutely convinced about the proposed changes.

Fraenkel's degree in medical administration made him a powerful negotiator and he was able to gather considerable financial support for his projects. Members of other faculties were occasionally disappointed and perhaps a little envious. His negotiations to provide a bridging courses for a small group of mature students, a new initiative of his, are still remembered

Polasek also recalls his dedication. Even after his retirement, Fraenkel was a frequent visitor to the campus. He often came by the university bus, perhaps because of his myopia. Polasek thought him to be a great unique man and admired his persistence and determination.



## GRAHAM FRAENKEL'S RECOLLECTIONS

*Ruth and Gus Fraenkel had three children, all became medical specialists. Graham is a well known ophthalmologist in Adelaide.*

Some of my earliest childhood recollections of my father involve, not surprisingly, travel with him at Christmas to the main public hospital in Dunedin, New Zealand, the city where my two siblings and I were born.

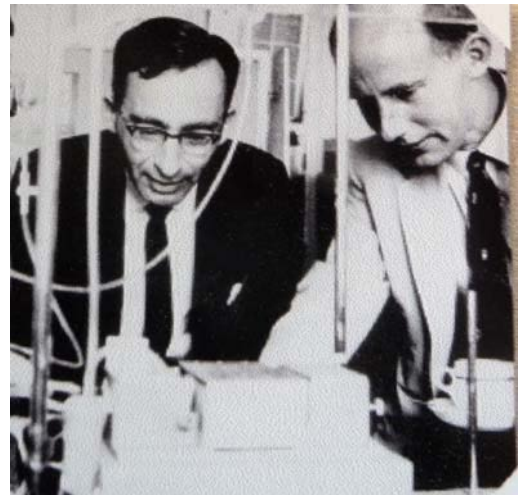
Leaving a fortunate life in Dunedin involved an exciting challenge for dad, and some trepidation for the family. However, there was no question in that era that the family followed the father's best career opportunities as they arose.

Many early memories of life in Adelaide continued to include my father's work location from planning huts, turning the first sod for Flinders Medical Centre foundations and, of course, wine bottling parties with his colleagues and their families. Between these activities as Founding Chairman and Dean of the School of Medicine he assisted in the physical design and progressive curriculum development of the first fully integrated Medical School and teaching hospital in the southern hemisphere.

Simultaneously my mother Ruth was involved in making visiting professional candidates and those who were successful at home in Adelaide. Ruth also assisted in founding the volunteer organisation for the Flinders Medical Centre despite an early resignation from the volunteers believing, against the majority, on principle that the volunteer shop should not sell cigarettes. Such a possibility is hard to imagine now.

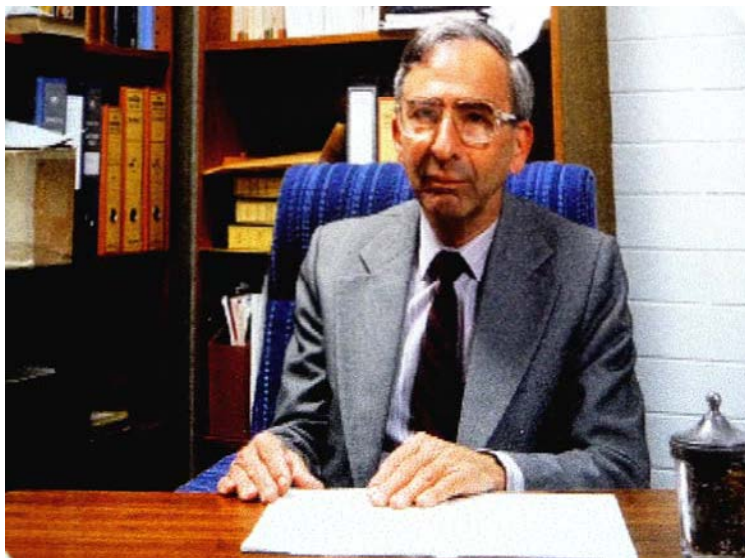
The Flinders School of Medicine and Medical Centre, and the principles of medical education and people enshrined there, became such a central focus of my father's life that he found it hard to leave on his retirement. An office was therefore provided for him near the library now named in his honour. He continued to attend medical grand rounds at FMC and conduct surgical tutorials to senior medical students at the Repatriation General Hospital affiliated with the School of Medicine. During one such tutorial I attended as a medical student I was surprised to learn that my father could talk so much! He was not gregarious in the great Australian way, being more quietly spoken.

His intellectual interests continued in his retirement to be medical education, research and history. However, he was persuaded by his children and others that his autobiography would be of sufficient interest that he began his autobiography which was, at the time of his death and remains, incomplete.



FRAENKEL AND JOHN LUBBROOK

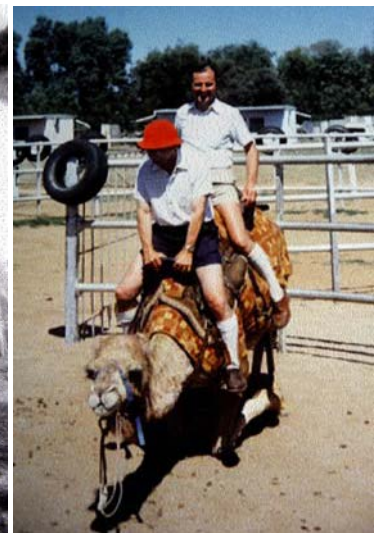
FRAENKEL AS A CHILD IN GERMANY (LEFT)  
AND IN OXFORD BEFORE DOLL



FRAENKEL IN HIS OFFICE



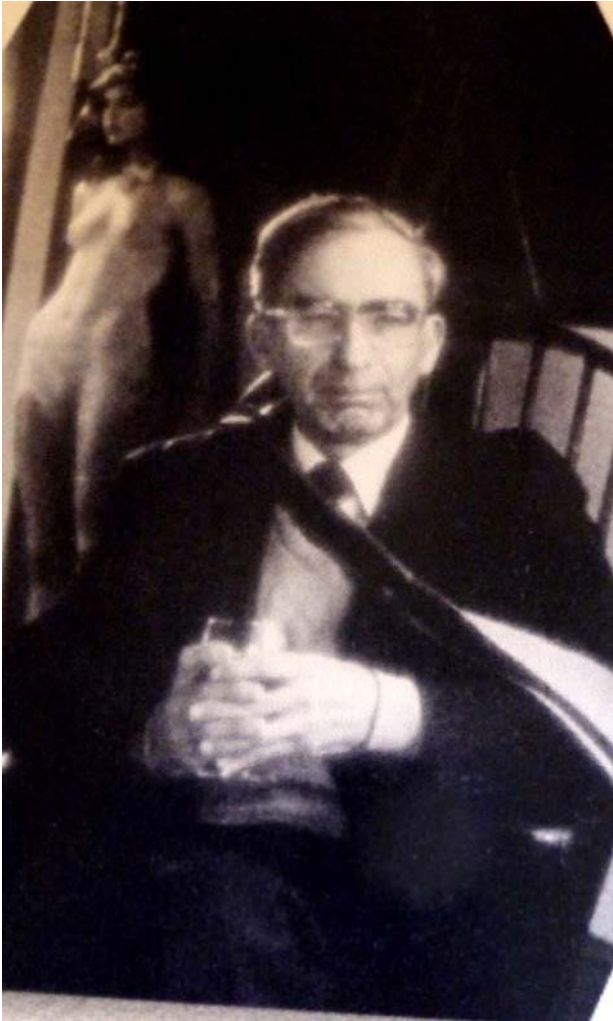
RELAXING IN NEW ZEALAND



RIDING A CAMEL  
WEARING A RED HAT



FIRST MEDICAL GRADUATES FROM THE FLIDERS UNIVERSITY MEDICAL SCHOOL



GUS FRAENKEL SITTING IN CLIFTON PUGH'S STUDIO



FINISHED PORTRAIT, NOW IN THE GUS FRAENKEL LIBRARY