

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE ELOFF JP

by Chris Eloff

The late Eloff JP, known to his colleagues and friends as “Frikkie” was born on 31 January 1925 in Pretoria, and he passed away on 10 December 2017, approximately one month before his 93rd birthday. He is survived by his two sons, Dr Pierre Eloff and the writer.

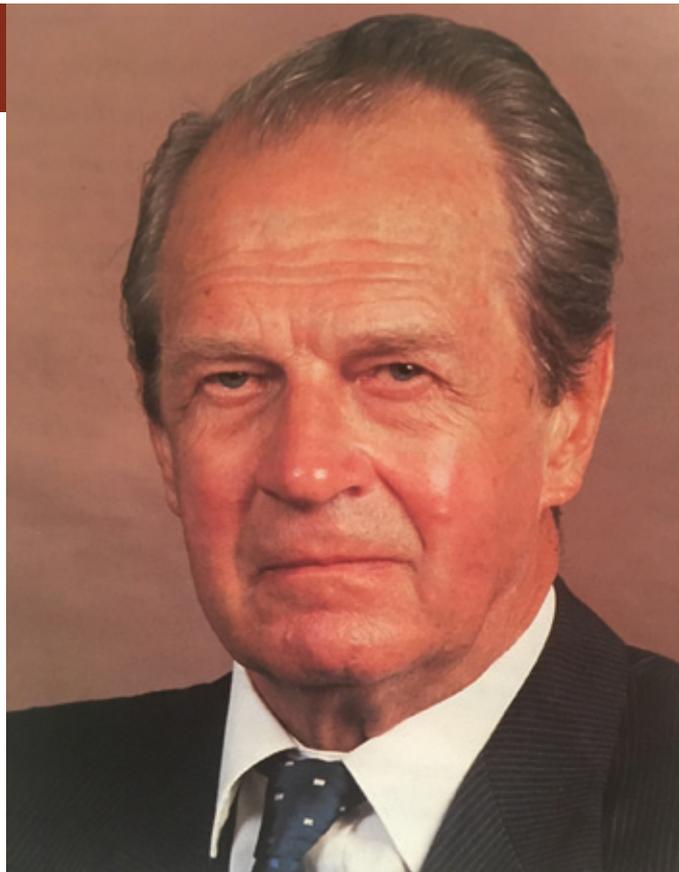
The late Frikkie Eloff came from relatively humble beginnings in Pretoria, where he grew up and lived his entire life. He was, however, in his tenth year taken by his mother to England and placed in a boarding school in a town called Bexhill, so as to enable him to improve his command of the English language and his knowledge of European history. He had no friends and no family there upon his arrival. It was not an easy phase of his life. He nonetheless made a success of his stay there, and actively participated in school activities and sport. He eventually returned to Pretoria where he matriculated in 1941. He then commenced his studies for his BA LLB degrees as a part-time student at the University of Pretoria, whilst serving articles at a Pretoria firm of attorneys. He completed his studies in 1946, but maintained close ties with his *alma mater*, which conferred an honorary LL.D. upon him in 1996. He was appointed as the President of the Convocation of that university in the same year.

Frikkie Eloff was called to the Pretoria Bar in 1947, where he conducted practice during the next 25 years. His practice grew rapidly, focusing mainly on commercial litigation and township establishment in courts and tribunals throughout the country. Silk status was conferred upon him in 1965. He was given his red bag by Oswald Pirow QC after he had acted against Pirow QC in *Meyer v Beukes and Others*, 1956 (1) SA 130 (T).

Frikkie Eloff served as chairman of the Pretoria Bar Council from 1970, and subsequently as Vice Chairman of the GCB. He represented the GCB at conferences of the International Bar Association in Europe and America. It was during the term of that office that he conceived of the idea to establish a pupillage system for advocates joining the bar. Although there was initial resistance from at least one of the bars, it soon received acceptance throughout the country and, as is known, it matured into a well administered, essential and successful institution.

Frikkie was elevated to the former TPD bench in 1973, where he served for the next 25 years of his life. He was appointed as Deputy Judge President of the division in 1985, and as Judge President in 1991. He served for a few months in the former Appellate Division in 1984, but declined a permanent appointment to that Bench in order to enable him to be of service in the TPD.

Frikkie was an active and energetic Judge and Judge President, who made it his task to ensure that cases were expeditiously allocated, heard and decided in the division. He would not countenance delays in the determination of cases. He continued during his office as Judge President to hear cases on most days in Pretoria and Johannesburg, and conducted the administration of the courts before and after hours. The Law Reports abound with the reported judgments that he delivered during his term of office on the bench. He investigated the concept of a commercial court for Johannesburg in the early 90's, and travelled to the United Kingdom in order to learn from the experiences of judges in the English Commercial Court. Upon his return, a commercial court was established in Johannesburg. It was an effective and useful institution.



Frikkie Eloff was an early proponent of judicial transformation, and procured the appointment of the first black Judge in the country.

He served as President of the Transvaal Branch of the South African Arts Association, and enjoyed his international travels, which entailed visiting more than 50 countries.

He was a man of and for his people, being his family, the community, the legal profession and the judiciary. He was a devoted father who inspired his children to pursue their chosen vocations with passion. He inspired me, and also his two nephews, both being practising senior counsel at the Johannesburg Bar, to conduct our practices energetically and effectively. He devoted much time to his local community, which resulted in the Frik Eloff Park in the area where he resided being named after him. He actively served the advocates' profession, specifically when he took office as Chairman of the Pretoria Bar and Vice Chairman of the GCB.

The appellation “Gentleman Judge” that was given to him by the media was well-deserved. Whilst he administered the two seats of the Division effectively and firmly, he was known and experienced by his fellow judges, counsel and litigants to be a pleasant and hard-working judge. He was a strong proponent of the maxim “justice delayed is justice denied”. It seldom happened that judgments in cases heard by him were not delivered within a day or two after the conclusion of the hearing thereof.

Frikkie Eloff's legacy will remain in our minds to be that of a person who strived to better the lives of others. **A**

Editorial note: On 27 February, the late Judge President Eloff was honoured with a special ceremonial session of his court in Pretoria, presided over by Judge President Mlambo, Deputy Judges President Ledwaba and Mojapelo, former Judge President Ngoepe, and numerous members of the judiciary.