

A tribute to Bryan Joseph Cremin (1929–2012) – an Irishman and a South African legend

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Prof. Bryan Joseph Cremin, M.B., B.S., DRCOG, MCRA, FFR, FRCR, FRACR was from a different generation from my own, a radiologist of the analogue age. Many of you who were friends with him will wonder why I am writing this tribute, since I met him only three times. When Professor Cremin started at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town I had just been born into the world. However, I have lived with his presence daily for many years. As a green paediatric radiologist starting at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in 1998 when he had already been retired since 1995 I encountered the legend of Professor Cremin – it awed me and inspired me.

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This giant of paediatric radiology left such a footprint that I feared to occupy his office, the holy place where he wrote and worked. There were stories of him everywhere. For example, it was said that he would not let anyone else reduce intussusceptions, insisting that he be called out personally, day or night, until he considered himself an expert.

When I did eventually move into his office, I found not scents or traces of Professor Cremin, but instead an astonishingly large body of work. There were hundreds of articles he had written, book proofs, drawers and drawers of slides and lectures he had delivered. The majority of this had handwritten origins, typed pages and analogue photographs. None of Professor Cremin's work had the luxury of digital photographs, electronic submissions and computerized versions that speed up our work today – it smelt of blood and sweat.

However, it was in the cracks between the science that I glimpsed the life of the man beyond paediatric radiology – a picture of him in the British army in Malaya, an action photo running with rugby ball in hand, an image of a laughing Bryan with friends, an image of the orator. Who could fit this all into one life?

The third and last time Professor Cremin visited me, he sat very close and whispered to me in a conspiratorial tone: "They all need a photographer. The royal family needs one. So does every doctor here. Be their personal photographer and it will make you a great paediatric radiologist". I think he underestimated what he did and the lasting imprint he would have on us. I look upwards to Professor Cremin as the South African figure with the greatest influence on the international paediatric radiology community to date. May his spirit live long.