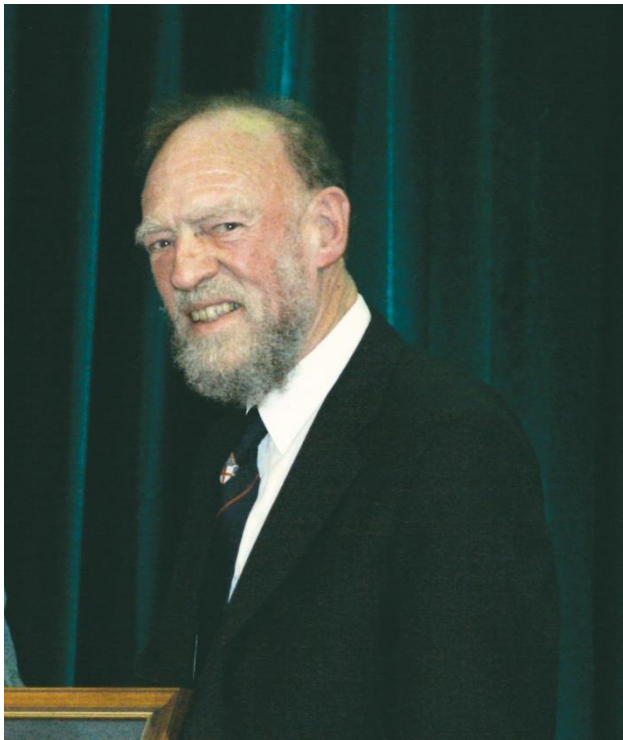


Selwyn Jebson

6 March 1931 – 20 January 2021



Our friend Selwyn was a husband and father, a man of faith, a chemical engineer, a researcher, a university lecturer, a bridge player, an organist, a chorister, a Mr Fix-it, a vegetable gardener, and later, an active member of SeniorNet.

These descriptors are all true, but by themselves do not adequately describe or do justice to the man that he was.

Born in Auckland, Selwyn graduated as a chemical engineer in 1955. After working for some years at an Auckland chemical processor, he married Bae, moved to Palmerston North and in due course became the father of Richard and Frances. In addition to being a devoted husband and father, he was a man of

deep faith, and served his church in many ways, including being a chorister from the age of seven and an organist shortly after. Like many in his generation, he became an all-round Mr Fix-it, especially with mechanical items like washing machines and the family car. He was greatly helped in these endeavours by a deep curiosity of how things worked – especially useful in maintaining a Hillman Imp, a notoriously difficult vehicle to keep running well. He was even rumoured to be able to repair machines and have them running while having a part or two left over!

He joined the then New Zealand Dairy Research Institute (NZDRI, now known as the Fonterra Research and Development Centre) in 1960, at a time when the Institute was expanding rapidly to play its part in helping the industry (and with it, New Zealand's economy) survive Britain joining the Common Market. Suffice it to say that the industry not only survived, but thrived, and in these, their golden years, NZDRI and the NZ dairy industry were the preeminent forces in the worlds of dairy science and technology, and the international trade in dairy products.

In the 20 years he was at the NZDRI, he was mostly known for his work in the milk fat and butter areas of the industry, where one of the more notable of his projects was the solvent fractionation and crystallization of milk fat, the first large step on the road to what became the all-natural spreadable butter.

Particularly in the early years, he was also involved with reducing the variability of composition and properties of dry casein (the major protein in milk). The nature of the 16-hour fermentation process resulted in variability of the processing properties, which in turn resulted in some noticeable differences product characteristics. Selwyn's work reduced the variability of the final product that gave New Zealand casein a reputation for consistency much appreciated by its customers.

A characteristic of all really good researchers is that they are frequently pushing the boundaries and taking risks. One consequence of this is that not everything works as expected first time. Blending and conditioning is one of the ways to make a powdered dry product such as casein more uniform. In a commercial scale trial to study the efficacy of a new approach, a small amount of a food-grade dye was introduced to the mix as a "tracer" to follow the process. Sadly, the whole batch turned blue ...

Selwyn's thinking was often ahead of its time. One of his passions was on-farm concentration of milk (why cart all that water around?). Notwithstanding some very good work in the area, he remained frustrated because the commercial-scale technologies available to him were not suited to the job at the time.

In 1979, Selwyn moved across the road to the Food Technology Department at Massey. There has always been a significant collaboration and cross-fertilisation between NZDRI, Massey and parts of the manufacturing dairy industry, and he was able to continue his research interests there, frequently through the research projects his students needed for their graduate qualifications. His interests widened to include most dairy products, including the production and properties of various milk powders.

In addition to his teaching of aspects of dairy science and technology work to both undergraduate and graduate students, Selwyn taught Principles of Engineering and Principles of Processing to a whole generation of Dairy Diploma students. It's almost certain that all our manufacturing factories are operated, supervised and managed by Massey's Dairy Diploma graduates, thus Selwyn's influence permeated the whole industry.

Teachers of all kinds use a whiteboard or similar as a tool in their lecture. Amongst his many qualities, Selwyn was ambidextrous, and could write and draw equally well (or untidily!) with either hand.

Selwyn was widely recognised and respected by his professional peers, and received a number of honours. In 1999, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the Dairy Industry Association of New Zealand. He was also a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Food Science and Technology, a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Chemistry, and a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Professional Engineers.

And so, to bridge.

Selwyn learned bridge in the early 60's with the NZDRI lunchtime bridge school, which included Lawrie Creamer and Bob Lawrence, both former Presidents of our Club. Very quickly, he also became part of a small social bridge group who played at each-other's homes: Selwyn, Lawrie, Bob, Cath Goodman and Val Pain, whose common bond was their playing of the Precision system. He later taught Precision at the club, while he and Val went on to become regular tournament partners for more than 20 years.

As time went by, he became, as some of us do ... a complete bridge fanatic. Along with some other notable NZDRI colleagues that go back to at least 1956 (President Hugh Whitehead), he was part of the core of our club for decades. His contributions are only partly revealed by our honours boards.

He supported and contributed to the Club in many ways. He was an excellent Director, President in 1978/9, and again in 2003/4, and was President when our clubrooms were built. He also applied his innovative capabilities to bridge, and was an early pioneer in computer-based scoring systems.

A very competitive player, he played tournaments in many parts of the North Island for a very long time, as well as being a very keen club player. However, notwithstanding this competitiveness, he was a scrupulously honest man – if he found himself to have revoked, but the revoke having been missed by others at the table, rather than keeping quiet about it as the rules permitted him to do, he would call the revoke (and the consequential penalties) on himself at the end of the hand. Similarly, when scoring the hand, if he thought he was 3 down, while others at the table thought him only two, he would press the matter until they convinced him that he was being wrongfully hard on himself.

After retirement, Selwyn and Bae became early residents of Summerset Village. While there, he became very interested in teaching his fellow residents how to use computers, and as a consequence, became a very active member of SeniorNet. But while he may have slowed a little, bridge and the Palmerston North Bridge Club remained a very important part of his life.

Selwyn preferred to cycle to and from the bridge club rather than use a car. In both directions, up and down the hill from Summerset. For a time he played on Thursday nights as well as Monday afternoons ... but always travelled by bike, mostly without incident. He was often running a little close to time, and many will picture him arriving a little pink in the face, bicycle clips still in place – which sometimes stayed on all afternoon. On one Monday afternoon, he was unusually late, and a call was made to Bae to make sure he was coming. “Yes, he left some time ago, and should be there by now”. A hasty plan was being made to go and look for him ... but fortunately for all, he turned up, all apologetic, but his hands all black and oily. The explanation? “The jolly chain fell off!”

For 60 years he derived huge pleasure from the challenge of the game, and the social interaction that went with it.

So the full picture we should keep of him is that he was a much loved family man, a man of deep faith, an enthusiast, an innovator, a supporter, a participant, a contributor, and an honourable and thoroughly decent man, who will be greatly missed by many and fondly remembered by a great many more.

Tony Fayerman and a team of 11 contributors