The passing of Jakes Gerwel in November 2012 marked the end of a life largely associated with UWC. As rector of the university in the tumultuous late ‘80s and early ‘90s, Prof Gerwel navigated the political contestations of the time and was instrumental in the university’s transformation from an apartheid institution to a leading intellectual resource for the new nation. At a time when the slogan ‘Liberation before education’ was widely heard, he led UWC to articulating a confident vision of itself as an intellectual place hospitable to socio-political visions excluded from the South African mainstream of the time. His actions resonated through the South African higher education system, inspiring significant changes in other institutions.

Under Jakes Gerwel’s leadership, UWC pioneered ways of making university education more widely accessible, and accepting the challenge of helping students thus admitted to surmount their difficulties and succeed. Defying government segregation policy, he opened the university’s doors to people of all races, producing a period of rapid growth with students coming from all around the country: UWC had become a national university. Despite severe constraints, students from disadvantaged communities graduated in increasing numbers, equipped to make a professional contribution to the new South Africa. The teaching and learning challenges were (and continue to be) both demanding and exciting.

Under the banner of ‘an intellectual home of the left’, space was created for curriculum renewal and for innovative research and outreach projects. Important social and policy issues which had been swept under the carpet by the government of the day received attention. A body of pertinent research was thus available as a basis for policy after the first democratic elections. Among these innovations was support for the establishment in 1992 of the Public Health Programme, whose skeletal staff working out of prefab offices were the foundation for the current School of Public Health. He advocated passionately for, and supported the development of, South Africa’s first School of Public Health to be established outside a medical school. He clearly saw the need for UWC to focus on public health practice that led to measurable improvements in peoples’ health.

In expressing the School’s shock and sadness at the untimely passing of Prof Gerwel, David Sanders noted that “Jakes displayed typical courage and determination in promoting this new academic venture at ‘Bush’, when most of our academic peers expressed scepticism. Jakes’ vision and unwavering support inspired us all to persist and develop a Public Health Programme of which he was proud and for which he can justifiably claim much credit. He continued to support us and show interest in our progress even when he was heavily involved in serving in the highest office in our country. His engaging intellect and warmth will be greatly missed.”

Stop press:
In early 2013, the Mauerberger Foundation and UWC launched the Jakes Gerwel Award in Public Health.

This annual Award is open to all graduates of the School, within and beyond South Africa, who have demonstrated through their work, the ability to have an impact on some aspect of population health. Evidence of impact could be derived from epidemiological or other studies and needs to specify the population who benefitted from a specific set of interventions, policies or measures and the measurable impact on people’s health. UWC Faculty, student and graduates are invited to nominate people for this prestigious award that will both bring attention to the work of Prof Gerwel, while at the same time highlighting the importance and leadership role of the School.

Appollis ‘Uncle Polly’ Jacobs, a regular participant in the School’s public events and debates, died in June 2011. A champion of under-resourced communities, he was consistent in his participation in fora where he felt it was important for the needs of, and conditions in, these communities to be represented.

Having attended a Black Sash consultative meeting in August 2010 - held in each province to document an initial conceptualization of citizen values on national health system reform - Uncle Polly wrote:

“On behalf of our communities, please allow me this opportunity to commend you and your team for a job WELL DONE. Attending your two [day] workshop on health really and truly opened the door for our Community Health Committees to continue putting pressure on our Health Authorities to honour their commitment to deliver Quality Health Care Services to our communities. Your two day workshop really gave our communities hope for the future. Thank you very much for opening your doors for active community participation. It is really and
Hambani kahle, Gavin and Del
Prof Diane McIntyre, Health Economics Unit, UCT

Following the devastating deaths of Gavin Mooney and Del Weston in their Australian home in the early hours of 20 December 2012, tributes to both flooded in from all over the world.

A health economist, Gavin had held positions (or honorary appointments) at Aberdeen University in Scotland; the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus in Denmark; Tromso in Norway; Maastricht in the Netherlands; Wellington in New Zealand; Sydney, Curtin (Western Australia) and the University of New South Wales in Australia; and the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. His writings and personal contacts have reached even further. Thousands of people regard Gavin as their father, mentor and friend, from their contact through the distance-learning health economics courses but also because he was warmly responsive to anyone who wrote to him for advice or input.

Throughout their lives, Gavin and Del demonstrated what it means to speak truth to power, to be public intellectuals, activist academics, thinkers and doers. Gavin supported us in our fight for a universal health system (never mincing his words) and to build a decent society based on the health system as a solid social institution. His all-time favourite quote was from Nye Bevan, founder of the British National Health System: “Society becomes more wholesome, more serene, and spiritually healthier, if it knows that its citizens have not only themselves, but all their fellows, have access, when ill, to the best that medical skill can provide.” It is deeply unjust that it appears to have been a failure in access to mental health services that led to their unnecessary untimely deaths.

One of Gavin’s proudest moments was when he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by UCT in 2009, with his beloved Del at his side. UCT awards honorary degrees for either exceptional academic contributions or contributions to society; Gavin would have been eligible on both grounds. The citation noted that: “In particular, he has led the way in challenging the prevailing orthodoxy in much of health economics, which prioritises concerns with efficiency over the distributional consequences of decisions. … Prof. Mooney has also made a critical contribution by shifting the health economics profession from its largely ‘academic’ and clinical outlook to embrace a broader social role.” Various grants allowed Gavin (and Del) to spend a few months each year for four years in the Health Economics Unit at UCT. When these visits started, Del had just begun her PhD (on the political economy of climate change). Her links with our other doctoral candidates, led to Gavin contributing to mentoring and developing young health economists in several other African countries (particularly Ghana and Nigeria). While Del lived to see her doctorate awarded, its publication as a book by Routledge Press will be posthumous (a draft was filed the week before her death).

Gavin and Del’s humanity was illustrated by their personal engagement with refugees in South Africa. During our deeply shameful xenophobic violence in 2008, Del volunteered at the local refugee centre. They have emotionally and financially supported a number of Cape Town refugee families ever since (despite their limited personal means). Their humanity is also borne out by their personal engagement with Aboriginal communities. Another of Gavin’s proudest moments was when he was adopted into an Aboriginal family, and given the name of Uncle Ngulla (meaning a tree or one who brings life). Gavin and Del would have been honoured that Ted Wilkes and his son ‘smoked their graves’ and conducted an Aboriginal ceremony at their funeral on 3 January 2013.

truly greatly appreciated. I am very well aware of the fact that we cannot perform any miracles but your two day workshop have proved that when we all network, collaborate and join hands and commit ourselves to work together in harmony then our integrated intervention can make a meaningful difference in all our communities…..Yours in Health and Partnerships. Polly Jacobs, Belhar Sub-district Health Forum - Western Cape “Driven by concerns.”

At the time of his passing, David Sanders remembered him:

“I have known Uncle Polly since before I joined UWC in 1993. We were both involved in the successful bid, and later the funded Western Cape Community Partnerships Project. Uncle Polly was one of the community representatives. He was an exemplar for me of the important role community people were playing, and could play, in the transition to democracy.

We remained in frequent contact over the years through the Cape Metro Health Forum, his work at UWC and later through the South African chapter of the People’s Health Movement. Polly was my Vice-Chair in this small but energetic group. He was always the one who brought us back to earth in reminding us of the persisting inequities in access to health care and the social determinants of health, exemplifying these by accounts of Belhar clinic and other formerly ‘coloured’ townships of Cape Town. He was an indomitable fighter for the health rights of the disadvantaged, and as such was an irritant to the powers-that-be. I (and we) shall miss him. Hamba Kahle, Uncle Polly!”