

## Obituary

### Caroline L. D. C. Bruins (March 14, 1914–June 17, 2005)

CARO BRUINS GRADUATED FROM THE MEDICAL school in Leiden in 1941. After a period working in the Sophia Children's Hospital in Rotterdam, she started her education in Paediatrics in 1943, working under the supervision of Professor Gorter. Although appointed Professor of Paediatrics in Leiden, Gorter had been "exiled" during the Second World War from Leiden to Winschoten, in the north of the Netherlands. After her studies in Winschoten, Caro came back to Leiden, where Professor Herman Snellen, the head of the Department of Cardiology, suggested that she should specialise in the field of congenital cardiac malformations. Further to increase her knowledge, he sent her in 1947 to work with Helen Brooke Taussig, who by then had pioneered the specialty of paediatric cardiology at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institution in Baltimore, Maryland. The experiences of Dr Taussig, of course, led the way for subsequent treatment of children with congenital cardiac malformations all over the world. Caro kept close contact with Dr Taussig until the time of her death, on May 21, 1986. "Dr T.", as she was affectionately known, had trained her pupils in many ways, but providing a better quality of life for the little patients was one of the main driving forces. This principle became equally characteristic for the work and life of her pupil when she returned to the Netherlands.

It was in 1949 that Caro returned definitively to Leiden. She was the first "real" paediatric cardiologist in the Netherlands. In Leiden, where she worked in the department of Professor G. M. H. Veeneklaas, pioneer in social paediatrics, who had succeeded Professor Gorter in 1952, Caro found a positive climate in which to build her practice in paediatric cardiology, being actively supported by the Departments of Anatomy and Embryology, Cardiology, and Radiodiagnosics. Even more important was the close and harmonious cooperation with Gerard Brom, the Professor of Cardiac Surgery, who also had a major interest in congenital cardiac disease. Together, they formed in the early fifties of the 20th century a paediatric cardiac centre in Leiden that set in unequivocal fashion the exemplar for future centres of excellence. At the same time, Caro established a



Department of Cardiophysiology in which she used experiments in animals to explore problems she recognised as arising from the congenital cardiac malformations seen in her patients.

During the period from 1950 through 1970, she was frequently asked to visit hospitals all over the country, and even abroad, to examine children with congenital cardiac diseases, and together with the local paediatricians she created protocols for their optimal treatment. From 1971 through 1973, for example, she spent one week in each month in Geneva, helping to establish their paediatric cardiac centre.

Earlier in this period, along with her friends and colleagues Anna Blanquaert, from Gent in Belgium, and Claude Dupuis, from Lille in France, Caro had suggested establishing a European Association of Paediatric Cardiologists. The first meeting was held in Brugge, Belgium, in 1961, and the membership was soon extended to include Klaas Bossina, from Groningen, the Netherlands, Luc van der Hauwaert from Leuven in Belgium, and Robert Verney, from Lyon in France. They asked Hamish Watson, from St. Andrews in Scotland, to become the first president. For the second general meeting, held in Groningen, they invited Helen Taussig, and she mentioned herself in her welcome address as "the mother of this

association". Rightly so, and this association with Taussig remains a significant honour for the Association. In 1977, the 15th meeting of the Association was held in Gent, and Caro was invited to give the prestigious Mannheimer lecture. As her theme, she chose the scientific work that had led to the production of a thesis concerning the effects of disturbances of the flow of blood on the arterial pole of the heart. She had defended this thesis with honours on March 21st, 1973. In that year, she was also appointed as lecturer in paediatric cardiology at Leiden University, a position equivalent to Associate Professor elsewhere.

With her friends from Gent, Caro established the Psychosocial Working Group, the first Working Group formed within the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology. In the Netherlands, she promoted the founding of a national centre for congenital heart disease, located at "De Hartenark" in Bilthoven under the auspices of the Dutch Heart Foundation. Subsequently, the European Association recognised her huge achievements by bestowing on her its honorary membership.

After her retirement, in 1979, she continued many of her activities related to paediatric cardiology, but extended her interest in other fields of socio-economic life. Her contacts remained frequent and varied, fed by her warm personality, intelligence and broad field of interests. The last years, unfortunately, were darkened by her slowly deteriorating physical and mental health, making her sometimes feel sad and unhappy. Her Christian belief, as well as the regular visits from her friends and family, nonetheless, supported her in her old age. She died peacefully at the age of 91.

She will be remembered by the Dutch colleagues as "the mother of the Dutch paediatric cardiology". Many, not only in the Netherlands, will miss her as a highly valued colleague in congenital cardiology, who played a role as pioneer with much élan, and with a warm heart for her patients and colleagues.

*Jaap Ottenkamp, John Rohmer  
Leiden, July 2005*