

Four generations of graduates beat a path to Otago's door

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The road to Otago is a well-beaten path for members of the Foote family.

Starting in 1905, four generations of the family have made their way to the University, from all corners of New Zealand.

Christine Foote, granddaughter of the first Otago graduate in the family, Percy Foote, studied music and arts at Otago in the 70s and now lives in Nelson.



Percy and Rosa Foote

“My grandfather and father went to Otago to study medicine, and I was the next one to go,” says Christine.

“Originally I wanted to do dietetics, but my science wasn’t up to it so I went down the music path.”

Next in line was Christine’s daughter Imogen, who graduated in August with a Master of Science with Distinction, and is still at Otago finishing her writing bursary.



Imogen Foote, August 2018, graduating with a Master of Science with Distinction

The Foote family connection with Otago began in 1905, when Percy, born in Whangarei, travelled down to Dunedin by boat to study medicine.

As well as concentrating on his medical studies, Percy found time to captain the University rugby team in 1907. In 1908 he travelled to Britain, working at several hospitals in England and then studying in Edinburgh to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, specialising in Ophthalmology and Ear, Nose and Throat.

Even before he set foot on British soil, however, Percy's medical skills were put to the test.

"When my grandfather went to England in 1908 there was a man on the ship who had to have his appendix removed," says Christine.

"He didn't have any equipment, so he got forks from the dining room and twisted them into the shape of surgical retractors."

The story of the operation on the high seas has a treasured place in Foote family folklore.

Percy returned to New Zealand in 1914, and Christine's grandmother Rosa, who was born in Aberdeen and trained as a nurse at Durham, England, was on the ship out to New Zealand to meet up with him when WWI was declared.

He set up in general practice in Westport and was also Superintendent of Buller Hospital

from 1915-1940. The Foote Ward was named in his memory. Percy was awarded the OBE in 1948 and died in 1963.

Christine's father Colin followed a career and sporting path very similar to his father's, studying medicine from 1933-1938, and completing his final year in Christchurch in 1939. He graduated MB ChB in 1940 and along the way attained three sporting blues from Otago for rugby, swimming and rowing.



Colin and Peg Foote

Colin broke the New Zealand universities record for 100 yards backstroke during that time. His brother Peter also studied dentistry at Otago at the same time, and Colin and Peter played in the Otago University rugby team together.

After working at Waipukurau for two years, Colin was part of the medical corps from 1942-1946. He served in Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific Islands.

While he was working as a house surgeon in New Plymouth in 1946, he met his future wife Enid, known as Peg, who was a nurse there.

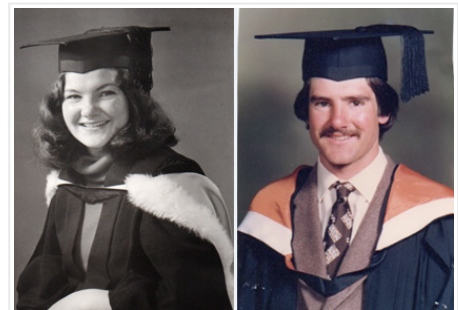
They married, then travelled to Edinburgh where Colin undertook postgraduate study to attain his Member of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh.

Returning to Westport, Colin went into general practice with his father Percy, and was also appointed Visiting Physician to Buller District Hospital. He retired in 1994, aged 78, and died in 2010 at the age of 94.

"It's interesting that both men were highly qualified, studied at the Royal College in Scotland and could have had careers as specialists in city hospitals. They instead chose general practice in a small town," says Christine.

The next generation of the Foote family to make their way south from Westport were Christine and her brother Paul.

Christine majored in music, graduating in 1977, and while she was in Dunedin played in the Dunedin Civic Orchestra (now the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra) and the University orchestra, as well as being part of a choral group.



Christine Foote and her brother, Paul Foote

"Being in the civic orchestra was like a job for me, it took up a lot of my time."

Paul graduated with a Bachelor of Mineral Technology with Honours in 1982.

Christine went on to study at Christchurch Teacher's College, which she attended with an old flatmate from Dunedin, Chris McLennan, who had studied Surveying at Otago. The pair married and now live in Nelson, where Chris has just retired from a career in teaching, building and horticulture and is involved with adult literacy tutoring, and Christine still works as a music teacher.

"Chris was a member of the tramping club at Otago, and the friends we both made at university are people we are still in contact with now."

Last in line, so far, is Christine and Chris's daughter Imogen. The recent MSc graduate did her thesis on the genetics of the reproductive behaviours of the New Zealand sea lion, and has worked as a technician and lab demonstrator for the Department of Zoology while completing her degree.

Imogen has also played the violin and viola in the Dunedin Youth Orchestra during her six years in Dunedin and volunteered at the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital.

This summer, she's heading to Myanmar and hoping to do voluntary work at the Department of Zoology at the University of Yangon.

Christine says Imogen probably chose Otago because of connections made while they lived in Cromwell, and also the fact friends in her last two years at high school in Nelson were going to Otago, as well as the University's reputation for sciences.

"And I think Otago has a name as quite an iconic place."