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In 1991, Hamilton Naki retired from his position as a surgical laboratory assistant after 37 years of service to the profession of transplant surgery at the University of Cape Town. He was a consummate animal surgeon, a dedicated and patient teacher and a pioneer in transplant techniques. His talent, innate surgical skill and his outstanding contribution to the training of Heads of Department of future transplant and surgical programs resulted in him being honored with a Master of Science in Medicine degree by the University of Cape Town in 2003. [1] This despite his humble beginnings and the oppressive apartheid regime under which he lived for most of his life.

### *His life*

Hamilton was born in Ngcingwane, a small village near Centane in the Transkei region of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa in 1926. After only six years of primary education, he moved to Cape Town to work as a gardener at the University of Cape Town Medical School. It was here that his life took a dramatic turn and where his remarkable surgical talent was discovered. Robert Goetz, Professor of Surgery, needed an assistant to conduct animal experiments in the Surgical laboratory. [2] Although Naki was first employed to hold the animals during anesthesia and to clean out their cages, his keen interest and innate ability to relate to these complex procedures impressed Prof Goetz sufficiently for him to invite Hamilton to work in the laboratory. His profound intelligence and memory was soon evident, and he became an intrinsic part of the laboratory team, performing a wide range of surgical procedures and providing all the post-operative care. Under the regulations of the Medical School at the time, he had to be given special permission to continue research work in the laboratories, due to the official designation as a gardener. After Professor Goetz left for the United States, he started working for Dr. Christiaan Barnard who had returned to Cape Town after his study of open-heart surgery abroad in the United States. First his role was as an assistant, then the anesthetist for the animals and finally as principal surgical assistant in the laboratory. Barnard described him as having incredible dexterity and finesse

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