

Eulogy honouring Dr. Tom Sutcliffe by Ilan Lax

St Andrews Church Newlands 18 April 2024

[Watch the full memorial service on YouTube.](#)

Dear Kathy, Theresa, Victoria Anne, Robert and Alison and your families, as well all those people who cherished Tom in whatever sphere of life they encountered him.

Thomas James Sutcliffe was an icon of South African and world Flyfishing. A veritable flyfishing polymath he has shaped the flyfishing practice and ethos of so many people:

His books, there were seven of them, achieved world-wide recognition, inspire and elucidate; his art, which is much sought after, provides joy and appreciation. The Spirit of Flyfishing' played a huge role in enhancing the image of fly angling in the country and his monthly newsletter was read in 92 countries.

His innovative fly tying: the DDD, his Zak Nymph and his Single Feather Midge are used extensively.

in 1981 he journeyed to Manchester Vermont and obtained the South African agency for Orvis. This resulted in the opening of The Flyfisherman, South Africa's first dedicated fly-fishing shop.

These are a few examples of Tom's influence and why his knowledgeable practiced craft and experience on almost any kind of waters and facet of our sport make all of us want to emulate him in becoming better fly anglers.

Tom was a founding member of FOSAF in 1986 and together with other leading flyfishers from across South Africa, was instrumental in bringing various groups together in an over-arching federation, to foster flyfishing interests and the riparian and aquatic ecosystems we spend our time fishing.

Tom was a consummate administrator and diplomat. I vividly recall attending my first FOSAF engagement which was a Trout workshop held in Pietermaritzburg in the middle 1990s. I had been invited to participate by Bill Bainbridge and Jim Read. As a young earnest human rights orientated person I had made a few heartfelt but assertive comments about flyfishing's reputation at the time and the need to be seen to be making a contribution to the unfolding new democracy including some thought on what we might do to change these perceptions. I could not help notice a few incensed faces around the room. Nevertheless, Tom in his inimitable way defused the situation and steered the discussion to a point where almost no one in the room disagreed on what had to be done to take FOSAF and flyfishing forward. His wisdom and leadership ensured these ideas were effectively implemented.

Tom served on FOSAF's Executive Committee and as National Chairman led the Federation for many years. He was our current President and maintained an important presence supporting FOSAF's leadership. We thank his family for sharing him with us.

Tom was extremely well connected having built professional and flyfishing networks across the globe. He leveraged these effectively as a supporter of FOSAF and flyfishing in South Africa and was extremely generous with his contributions. It's somewhat ironic but I find myself wishing for some young upstarts to shake things up now that I'm restless in that chair.

These are just a few aspects of Tom's contribution to our gentle art.

The expressions of mourning reflected in social media posts are a manifestation of the esteem in which he was held and the sense of loss which his passing has created.

I end by quoting two passages from Rumi 13th-century Persian Sufi, poet, philosopher

"Grief can be the garden of compassion.

If you keep your heart open through everything,

your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom"

"I learned that every mortal will taste death. But only some will taste life."

Tom really tasted life! We would honour him by endeavouring to emulate his fine example.

Ilan Lax

National Chairperson FOSAF.