

# Obituary: A trout fishing legend passes — Tom Sutcliffe

**CHRIS BATEMAN**

Globally regarded as the doyen of South African fly fishing, Tom Sutcliffe, a former Pietermaritzburg General Practitioner and later executive head of the Western Cape Health Department, died peacefully at his Cape Town home on April 8 after a two-year illness.

He was eighty-one.

A former chairperson of the Federation of Southern African Fly Fishers (Fosaf), president of the Fly Fishers' Association (FFA), president of the Natal Fly Dressers' Society and vice-president of the Cape Piscatorial Society (CPS), Sutcliffe authored seven fly fishing books.

One anecdotal chapter in his *Hunting Trout*, was included in a 2010 compendium by New York publisher

Nick Lyons titled, *The Greatest Fishing Stories Ever Told*.

It included angling tales by Rudyard Kipling, Guy de Maupassant, Lord Byron, Lefty Kreh, Norman Maclean, and Jimmy Carter.

Sutcliffe's website "The Spirit of Flyfishing" played a huge role in enhancing the image of fly angling in South Africa and his monthly newsletter was read in 92 countries.

He was influential member of the Western Cape's mental health review board where his life-changing interventions on behalf of patients who fell through the cracks in the health-care system remain unsung.

He championed initiatives supporting the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, the largest stand-alone tertiary hospital in sub-Saharan Africa dedicated entire-

ly to children and served as a Trustee, raising funds for upgrading, vital equipment and critical training and research programmes.

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

According to his life-long fishing companion, former SABC TV journalist Ed Herbst, a close peer in fly tying skills and knowledge and a small stream expert, Sutcliffe's DDD (a spun and clipped deer hair pattern that pioneered dry fly fishing on South African still waters), Zak Nymph (a weighted mayfly nymph imitation), and his Single Feather Midge, remain enduring favourites among local fly

anglers.

Sutcliffe was highly regarded for his exquisite drawings and paintings of pastoral angling scenes and of trout themselves.

He was described by long-time friend Nick Lyons, as "the rarest of companions in piscatorial prose — wise, gentle, modest, inquiring, and full of practical knowledge — it made our travels with him, from a first trout to a glorious autumn sojourn, all the more rewarding ... Tom was a poet whose words resonate in your mind long after you have read them."

Extending condolence to his family and loved ones, Fosaf described Sutcliffe as, "the most influential freshwater fly angler South Africa has seen in the past half-century."

