

In Memoriam

OBITUARY: PROFESSOR MARK WILLIAMS

Many of us will have had the pleasure, the academic and life education by passing under the tutorship of Mark Williams. Prof. Marcus.

Some of us had the marvellous experience of being classmates of Mark's for those crazy OP years. Crazy in the amount of information we were expected to retain, and crazy in the flamboyant habits that we picked up from our colourful, irrepressible companion.

It was without any formal agreement that in our final year many of us, saturated with vet science, for sanity's sake took up totally alien interests. One a photographer, another a cordon bleu chef, Chris Carrington tried to school us in the wily skills of chess, another dragged us to operas and concerts, and one studied aloes. Barry Bousfield became adept at deciding from 150m whether a woman had ever done ballet.

Mark simply carried on his boyhood passion as a lepidopterist, a butterfly fundi. He rose to become not only a South African aficionado but was in that hallowed realm of international cognoscenti. Besides the numerous articles of his that appeared in lepidopter journals, he published several books on his passion. Students of his cruelly made use of this when, during a boring spell in the syllabus, they would somehow shift the topic to that of butterflies, or his philosophy of life! For the rest of that session, he'd be on an enthusiastic tangent!

During our OP years 1970 – 1973, when we formed groups of 5, Dr. Hampie van Staden took us on ambulatory clinics. It was on these plot-to-plot outings that a) our fond regard for Hampie was formed, and b) Mark showed us how to find an amusing or thought-provoking angle to every semi-serious situation. He also caused Hampie to suffer several near heart attacks when he'd yell "Stop! I think that's a *Pelargonium heterophyllum* in the veld there.

So there HAVE to be some *Orachrysops hiwayinni* butterflies nearby. They feed only on that plant!" Our clinic outing would stop for half an hour before a grinning Mark jumped back into the kombi. The rest of us might have wondered if *Pelargonium* was a superior species of cannabis.

Six of us, his classmates, one night celebrating after a test, decided that Mark was wasted by studying to be a vet. He should rather get onto the F1 Grand Prix circuit. We were crammed into his shock-absorber-less boat (a Plymouth or Oldsmobile or Buick) and tearing back in a rocking motion to OP, almost motherless, in the mother of all storms. Mark was crammed side-on while he was driving when, through the sheets of pouring rain and hail, we sped upon a stationary vehicle in our lane, cowering under a railway bridge. He spun the steering wheel and his long low car spun through 360°, still going at top speed, but fortunately on the adjacent lane.

We passed the stationary car as ours went through the 180° stage. The occupants of the other car – that we passed going like the clappers – must have thought we were racing in reverse!

They might have seen Mark's faithful old jalopy continue its rotation until it completed that 360° spin ... and continued straight on to the OP residence.

The raucous shouting and singing coming from 7 inebriated students before that pirouette turned into a deathly hush for the remainder of the trip. None could find our tongues. Only Mark, when we abandoned his composed vessel, said, "Exciting trip, hey, blokes?" As I said, not even Nikki Lauda could have performed that manoeuvre.

Mark married his colleague and student, June, who also had a fine academic brain and became an acclaimed and well-liked OP personality. Their two children are Bronwyn now in Australia with two sons Dorian and Kai; and Carmen who is living in Norway and has a daughter Yiva.

After June and Mark followed their separate ways, he was spoilt to find or be found by Tildie, with whom he spent the last 28 years of his life. We, his colleagues and close friends will be forever most grateful to Tildie for being such an awesome wife and partner for Mark, and for tenderly caring for him during his last season.

To use the endearing term of an old farming clan near Donnybrook, and which is particularly apt on Mark's passing on to another of our Father God's mansions, or dimensions, Mark has moved to Butterfly Island.

Wow, what a very special kind of man he was.

Tod Collins



The Coolest of '73