

## Farewell Royden

21 August 2012



In June, the industry lost Royden Paynter, Head of the Lighting Department at Wits. To everyone who knew him, he was a gentle, lovely individual.

**At his memorial service at the university, a letter was read from his sister Robyn, and the Euology was by Sarah Roberts.**



**Royden Paynter, 7th January 1969 – 7th June 2012, you will be missed by all those who knew you.**  
***Letter from Royden's sister, Robyn***

Royden Paynter was born in Harare, Zimbabwe on 7 January 1969. Most of his childhood was spent in Bulawayo. He immigrated to South Africa with his parents when he was 14, and attended Florida Park High School in Roodepoort.

He did his National Diploma in Drama at Durban Technicon. Royden had three great loves in life – theatre, flying and travel. He showed an interest in theatre at a very early age. I remember him dancing and performing even before he turned three. He started speech and drama lessons when he was about 7.

His first professional job was with the Out of the Box theatre company. However, it was behind the scenes where he made his mark. He worked in Stage Management for Pieter Toerien and at the Market Theatre. He moved to Wits as a lighting technician, and to his last job at Rhodes as a production manager. Royden loved working at the Universities, and really enjoyed working with the students. Royden's second great love was flying. In our childhood, the passageway in our house was a runway which I am sure was busier than Heathrow. He had model planes hanging from his bedroom ceiling. When I was staying with him during his last few months, I noticed that he still had numerous books on aircraft.

In 2005 he started learning how to fly microlites. It was such an achievement for him when he got his microlite pilots license. He loved the peace when he was flying. It was at about this time that I got him a tandem skydive as a present.

Royden was also able to travel. One of his favourite countries was Turkey. He would hire a car there, and just

take to the road. He was also able to tour with productions and went to Ireland, England, Sweden, Switzerland and Australia.

Royden faced his illness with great dignity, and always showed a positive face to the world. He often said to me that we live in a beautiful world, and he would point out the birdsong and the colours.

Shortly before he passed we spent a few days in Addo. He couldn't drive around too much, but we spent many hours sitting at a waterhole and watching the animals come and go. This was the world he loved. Royden was blessed with great friends, and I am forever grateful for all the love and support you showed him.

After a beautiful funeral service at the Rhodes Chapel, I was able to scatter his ashes at Addo. Royden is now part of the natural world he loved, he is one with nature. Rest in peace, baby brother. You were well loved, and we miss you terribly. You are now free to fly with the eagles.

### ***Eulogy by Sarah Roberts***

Royden Paynter: 18.7.2012 (Nelson Mandela's 94th birthday on a clear day with the blue sky crisp and bright around us)

We are all of us here today with our own particular memories of Roy and what he meant to us. Each of us has had his or her own reasons to grieve, but the point of today is to celebrate the different ways in which Roy touched the lives of all of us gathered here in that quiet generous and invariably dependable ways of his.

Our thanks must go to Melanie, Nolene and Cathy for their different contributions in organizing this get together. I have been asked to pay tribute to Roy and find myself wondering how on earth one sets about doing this without unintentionally neglecting some important aspect of a life so well lived and richly appreciated.

His sister Robyn's e-mail shared with us the kind of details that perhaps only a sister can offer and find the words to say.

Those of us here probably know at least two out of the three things that Roy loved about life: theatre, flying and travel. Perhaps we could add a fourth – he thoroughly appreciated the ins and outs of this bizarre world that is life on a University campus as his stay here and move to Rhodes suggests.

Roy came to the Wits Theatre in 2002 – to replace the inimitable duo of Jerry Coughlan and Uncle Solly who had been here from that crazy first opening night. Any new theatre that opens with fan fare and a Comedy of Errors is a place where close bonds and a sense of humour are part of a necessary survival kit, and Jerry and uncle Solly could have given any professional duo a run for their money.

It was hard, initially, to imagine anyone filling the gap left by those two founder members of the Wits theatre family: but Roy's generosity as a friend and as a colleague, his relaxed good humour and the way in which he was always up for a theatrical or artistic adventure of a sort soon ensured his place amongst us all.

Roy was the consummate often invisible theatre technician – unflappable, on the surface at least, always around and always available to solve a problem.

Perhaps, like all theatre technicians he was not always sufficiently acknowledged and appreciated in the course of a day's work. Today is a moment to redress that. He was always smiling and obliging and ready to expand his workload: even if he might have had some quiet private reservations about whether it was appropriate to take on additionally responsibilities– he usually did so without even hinting at the idea that this might be inappropriate.

My most vivid memories of Roy are of the ways in which he became such an integral and reliable part of teaching generations of Drama students in the time that he was here. He taught them through guiding their

hands, heads and hearts as they came to grips with what it means to light a show or operate a board. I think of his patience and of his pleasure in the achievements of those to whom he was mentor. I also think of how he became such a crucial part of scenic design assessments in the main theatre : in great solemnity the main stage would duly be lit for the occasion and perhaps for the first time students really began to understand how nothing, certainly not a stage flat, operates independently of lighting and the perspective of the audience.

If those assessments were fun days, then what emerged from it was perhaps even more gratifying: Roy developed his second year lighting course and the rewards of that were many. Somehow, and I suspect that his patience and an impish sense of fun and enormous tolerance for structured experiment, had a great deal to do with ensuring that some really memorable presentations were produced– on the main stage and in the Nunnery.

These performance installations with a minimum of lamps carefully calculated to ensure that students really did know how each operated, was carefully thought through. A meticulous rubric defined the parameters: x number of cues in y number of minutes using z number of gel colours along with tight control of derig and rigging time. Roy's efforts stimulated and produced some extraordinary mini theatre works. These were worthy of a larger audience and the lighting design presentations were a highlight of the assessment calendar for a small appreciative audience – those of us who were really into “theatre” and the magic that can be produced with a set of fairly rudimentary understandings. Perhaps what was such fun, because the pieces were short we could see them twice – and of course the process of watching the changeover was part of the assessment.

I think of how often Roy would be ready for a quick chat on a one to one basis – a twinkle in his eye more often than not, and even when drop dead exhausted. He was ever the open and receptive ear : the buddy to touch base with, snatch a coffee and a cigarette and in those last months catch up on hearing about his grand new adventure. The constant updates about Roy's flying lessons and the thrill of his achievements was a way to share his love of open air and wide spaces – his joyous celebration of natural light, rather than a what his toys in the theatre could produce on stage lighting it up or slowly fading to a blackout.

So that is how I will remember Roy – a gentle and generous man, essentially private man who nonetheless shared what he loved best with us and who found his own way of reaching out to the light way beyond the spaces of this campus.

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