

Prof Martin West – A man for a moment in time!

Tribute by Mr Jerome September,

Saturday, 25 July 2015

My condolences on the passing of Prof West, your husband and father. May his soul rest in peace, and may you in time find comfort in the beautiful memories you share. Thank you for affording me this opportunity to share some brief thoughts and reflections on a man I knew as Prof West, a man who was also on an occasion also referred to Prof Bremner Building.

I had the fortune of meeting Prof West in 1997. I was just elected to the UCT SRC, a period that was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. In 1999 I became SRC President, after much drama. Prof West, was legendary in student leadership circles. He was an institution. The induction and handover, at least informally, included tips on how to deal with and respond to him. Needless to say, that meeting him was a big moment in itself. He was gentle, yet firm, had a big welcoming smile, and was always very encouraging, very caring, very present. He took time to get to know you, took time to hear your views. He loved debate, discussion and engagement. He thrived on it. His door was always open, and one knew that one could call on him. No university function was too big for him not to support a student initiative, over weekends, at night. No student function for him too small to make an appearance, often finding out that he is the guest speaker upon arrival. Student leaders knew his office well, he knew our offices well. He knew our politics. He knew our heartbeat. He was a formidable opponent!

He was a man for a moment in time. A moment in our country's journey (and particularly UCT's journey) where engagement, discussion and debate was critical. A moment when steering the path meant a presence that was gentle, yet firm, a presence that opened discussion and debate, instead of closing it, a presence that sought to understand, and not dictate, a presence that offered a smile and one of

his many anecdotes, and not the formalities that university governance processes are often bogged down in. He was the right man to lead UCT's transition from the confrontational apartheid style of engagement with student leadership, to one of cooperation, of holding hands, on opposite ends but towards a common destiny, a shared future as co-creators and co-authors of a UCT that must be the best it can be, not only for its own sake, but especially for the sake of our nation, our continent and the world... He understood his role very well. He embraced his role. He lived his role. He was the man, for that moment in time...

At a personal level, he's made an incredible mark on my journey. He taught me the importance of finding one another, of being in dialogue with one's opponent, of coming to the table. He taught me that my views matter, that my contribution is important. And he reminded me, more than once, about the bigger picture. He himself intervened and made it possible for me to graduate in 1998, when finances stood in the way of spoiling that special moment for me. He did that, because he understood that my journey wasn't mine alone, but that it was that of domestic worker and farm worker people who was given a chance at a better life, a new hope, through my admission to UCT. To him his student affairs role was in fact an important transformation role... Even in my professional life, he took an active interest in my journey, always encouraging me, always offering me a smile and a kind word... I know he did this not just for me, but also for many other student leaders.

I am better for having shared a moment in time with your husband, Val, and with your father, Adam and Paula. Thank you for having shared him with me, and with generations of students.

As we celebrate his life, and we reflect on his contributions to our many journeys, may we be renewed in our resolve to make our contributions towards making this world and particularly UCT, a better place. And may our journey forward be built on the foundations of a smile, an open door, a commitment to dialogue and

debate, a presence that re-assures and values, an anecdote that provides an appropriate lesson amidst crazy laughter, and may we walk this journey committed to the values of excellence, and democracy, and of working together towards a shared future...

I salute Prof Martin West – A man for a moment in time!

Jerome September

Former student leader and former colleague