

Tribute from Barry Smith (W 69-73)

I was saddened to see that Robert 'Jock' Pattman had passed away. There are some people you meet who you never forget and Jock was one of those. As a Scotland and Glasgow Rangers fan, he would have loved Scotland's recent and spectacular qualification for the World Cup but wouldn't be so impressed with Rangers' performances.

We were both in Winder House and on the School running team in the early 70s. Jock was a maverick but he was kind and we had some good fun. I want to pick out three instances

1. In a closely fought race at Ampleforth in 1972, Jock won the race helping us win the match. He was very modest about it and more interested in the performance of others than bragging about his own performance.

2. In 1973 I was sent to the Sanatorium with a temperature of 105(!) and told I could not run in the Ten Mile, my only chance to run the race. Within 24 hours Jock was knocking at the Sanatorium window offering me an 'escape route'. After a week I finally got out and Jock suggested we run the Ten Mile together to show I was fit to run the race. We had a great run round the course in 1 hour 17mins but breaking the rules didn't impress the Housemaster!

3. My most lasting memory of Jock was the Blue Ribbon in the summer of 1973. Jock decided that three of us should run it including John Bullock who was a natural sportsman but not a recognised runner. Jock coaxed him round the Ten Mile, the Three Mile and most of the way up Winder in an excellent time before Bullock broke down. Jock was determined he should finish and they spent a long time arguing near the top of Winder as any chance of a good time slipped away. But Jock was like that. He cared more about others than himself and added colour to our lives at Winder House in those days over 50 years ago now.

I haven't seen Jock since Sedbergh but very much hope he had a good and enjoyable life

Tribute to the Late Professor Robert Wesley Pattman from Trevor Makhetha, a PhD student of his at Stellenbosch University, who became a close colleague

It is with deep sadness, but also immense gratitude, that I write in honour of my mentor, colleague, and dear friend, Professor Robert Wesley Pattman.

There is so much I could say about Rob, but I want to focus on my experience of him as my PhD supervisor, and on the countless ways I saw him shape and inspire students, including many he did not formally supervise.

Rob believed in his students, often long before we believed in ourselves. He didn't just see potential; he nurtured it. He pushed us not simply to "do" research, but to imagine it differently: ethically, reflexively, and with young people's voices at the centre. He wanted research that dignified participants, foregrounded their agency, and reminded us, as sociologists, that we are accountable to the people we write about. For Rob, theory was never meant to impress; it was meant to serve.

He also hated hierarchy. He actively flattened the distance between “professor” and “student.” For him, supervision was never a transaction. He didn’t just mark drafts or tick boxes; he walked alongside us. He got into the trenches, read with us, thought with us, and challenged us to think harder and deeper. He never wanted disciples or mini versions of himself. Instead, he insisted that supervision was about nurturing thinkers who, in his own words, could “teach and be taught at the same time.” That was perhaps his greatest lesson of all.

For many of us (especially first-generation black students at UKZN and later Stellenbosch), research was unfamiliar terrain. It could feel lonely, intimidating, even dehumanising. Rob knew this. He knew how imposter syndrome stalked so many of us. And he found ways to break it open, to make us feel like we belonged.

One of those ways was humour. Rob understood that the best kind of learning often happens when you’re laughing so hard you almost forget you’re learning. He showed us that humour was not a distraction from serious scholarship, but often the very thing that made serious scholarship possible. In a world where academia can feel alienating and hierarchical, Rob’s humour cracked open spaces where we could breathe, belong, and imagine differently.

His wit wasn’t about making light of research, but about making research lighter: less heavy, less lonely, less rigid. For Rob, humour was ethical. It levelled the ground, removed the stiffness that silences students, and reminded us that supervisors are also learners. In his hands, humour became a methodology, a way of unsettling power, inviting reflexivity, and insisting that thinking critically does not mean abandoning joy.

This was Rob’s gift. He made us laugh so we could learn. He made us laugh so we could face difficult ethical questions with courage. And he made us laugh so that, in the grind of academia, we never forgot that we are first and foremost people in relation to other people.

It was through these informal, often hilarious encounters that CRAP was born. Only Rob could dream up a postgraduate support group called Critical Academic Practitioners (CRAP) and then run with it. CRAP had its own constitution, anthem, handshake, and even initiation rituals. It became a space where students brought their draft proposals, anxieties, and half-formed ideas, and left with sharper arguments, bigger laughter, and a stronger community.

CRAP was Rob’s brilliance in action: transforming the loneliness of research into solidarity, turning academic anxiety into laughter, and reshaping “methodology” into something creative, ethical, and alive. In CRAP sessions, you didn’t just learn about theory, you learned to think with each other, to laugh at yourself, and to remember that learning is always a communal act.

Rob himself was the biggest trickster of all. I will never forget one April Fool’s Day when he emailed us:

“I’m really sorry to have to break the news but earlier today Rob just got eaten by a shark while courageously trying to rescue a baby from the jaws of the shark, which the shark had grabbed from the arms of the baby’s mother, who was paddling close to the shore. And on Wednesday 9th there will be a collective memorial service for Rob and opportunities to tell loads of stories about what an inspiration he was to us all and to make donations, however large, in celebration of his memory.”

*You may be wondering who I am, well I'm Rob's identical twin brother, also, coincidentally, called Rob, and people find (or should I say found) it almost impossible to distinguish us, though I am (or should I say was) the better-looking one.
Yours in grief and sorrow,
Rob."*

That email captures him perfectly. Irreverent, witty, self-mocking, and absolutely committed to reminding us not to take ourselves too seriously, even as we took the work, ethics, and humanity of sociology with the utmost seriousness.

We have lost a sociologist, yes, but more than that, we've lost a mentor who showed us that knowledge is best produced in fellowship, not isolation. We've lost a comrade, an academic father, and a friend whose legacy will not be measured in titles or publications, but in the students who survived and thrived because he made space for us.

Rob's legacy lives in every laugh, every uncomfortable but necessary question, every bit of CRAP that made us better sociologists.

So here's to you, Rob, for the laughter, the irreverence, the wisdom disguised as jokes, the terrible acronyms, the CRAP food, and the constant reminder that sociology at its best should never be pompous. It should be CRAP: critical, reflexive, messy, funny, and unapologetically human.

Rest in eternal peace, Rob.

With gratitude and love

Trevor Makhetha

