

Editorial tribute to Dr Mathilda Van Niekerk[1]

Dr Mathilda van Niekerk, the Co-Founding Editor of the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights (JHTI)*, passed away on August 23, 2019 after losing her six-year battle with cancer. While working together with Mathilda on editing the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (IJCHM)*, we decided to launch a new sister journal to *IJCHM*. Our publisher Emerald was supportive of our idea. We drafted a detailed new journal proposal and submitted it to the publisher in 2017. In the draft proposal, Mathilda made sure the editorial team of this new journal consisted of at least 50 percent of women and again more than half of the editorial team members were junior scholars and rising stars from all around the world. Mathilda was very proud and happy with all our selections.

In the final draft of our journal proposal to the publisher, Mathilda put herself as one of the associate editors of the new journal. Before forwarding the proposal to the publisher, I changed her position to the “Co-Founding Editor.” She noticed that her name was removed from the associate editors’ list. She indirectly questioned why she was not one of the associate editors any longer. After seeing her disappointment in her eyes and face. I asked her to look at the list more carefully especially the co-founding editors.

It was such a joy and fun working with her. She played a key role in *JHTI*’s launch and growth. We celebrated first submissions and accepted papers late 2017, the first issues and the first special issues in 2018. Again beginning of 2019 we were so pleased that *JHTI* was included in the Emerging Citation Index. She made sure that the ScholarOne system was nicely set up for *JHTI*, it was always current, all submitted papers were scanned properly, comments from each reviewer for every submission were evaluated, our authors received timely and detailed feedback from the reviewers, and all e-mails from our authors and reviewers were answered in a timely manner. Even when she was in treatment, she had her laptop with her and was working on *JHTI* and *IJCHM* from her hospital bed.

She made sure that all the editorial board members, assistant editors, associate editors and regional editors supported and contributed to *JHTI*. Many times she gave me clear instructions and warnings that I had to devote more time to *JHTI*. We made decisions together and if I made any decisions alone related to *JHTI*, she wanted to be informed. Mathilda and I attended many international conferences and visited universities in different countries to promote *IJCHM* and *JHTI* and deliver workshops together. It was always amazing to see how she presented, impressed people, easily connected with everyone and promoted *JHTI* and *IJCHM* so well. It was apparent that she was the lead co-founding editor of *JHTI*.

Reflecting her passion for teaching and the industry and her belief that we should be able to use our research in the classroom, she frequently emphasized that in addition to offering clear theoretical contributions, each paper we publish in *JHTI* should present specific practical implications. She was very supportive of our authors, especially junior researchers and PhD students. She had a soft spot in her heart for authors from Africa and other developing countries/regions. After her passing, we received many messages from our authors and editorial board members around the world stating that even they never met Mathilda in person, she was always nice, friendly, supportive and professional in her e-mails.

At the University of Central Florida’s Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Mathilda was our lioness from South Africa with the highest courage, attention to detail, determination, positive energy and professionalism. Anything she worked on, she did with a style, smile and perfection. She was an outstanding and Prolific Researcher. She was proud



of her research articles and her recent book on event stakeholders. She was certainly one of the best faculty members teaching event management courses at Rosen College. Many of our faculty members currently use her syllabi and online teaching templates. In a 2018 interview, Mathilda stated “For me, teaching is an opportunity to create a legacy and change students’ lives. There’s nothing as nice as seeing students complete the program and go on to be successful and happy in their lives.” She served on many university, college and department committees. She was a faculty senator representing the Rosen College for eight years. She was a strong advocate for all faculty, staff and students, and represented the Rosen College well.

For all those who knew her, Mathilda was more than a good colleague – she was a great friend that cared and supported us all. Recognizing that there were hardships for faculty in that many of us live away from our families, Mathilda initiated the “We Care” Rosen College campaign – a hospitable supportive network for faculty, staff, and students. Her “We Care” campaign at Rosen College continues to stimulate an environment where faculty and staff members embrace each other as friends and family.

On a personal level, Mathilda was my best friend, Co-Author, Co-Presenter, Managing Editor, Co-Founding Editor, Co-Driver, lunch buddy, Instructional Designer, mentor, Event Organizer and the best travel agent. She was our close family friend, our daughters’ godmother and their favorite shopping companion. She and her husband Derik organized incredible birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s parties at their house for us and their friends.

In memory of Mathilda, we have created a scholarship to support students studying at the University of Central Florida’s Rosen College of Hospitality Management. We invite our authors, readers and editorial board members to contribute to this scholarship at: www.ucffoundation.org/vanniekerk

As an angel, Mathilda should now be busy in heaven organizing mega events. She will always be remembered for her contribution, legacy, resilience, spirit, smiling face and positive attitude. Her contribution to *JHTI* will never be forgotten and as she and I dreamed together, *JHTI* will also become one of the leading academic journals in the hospitality and tourism field in coming years. Rest in peace my dear and best friend Mathilda. You are dearly missed!

Fevzi Okumus

Note

1. A similar editorial tribute to Dr Mathilda van Niekerk was published in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 32 No. 1, 2020.