

Tribute to Johan Jacobs (JJ)

Bertie Brits: SAIOH member

When I was asked to write a tribute to Johan, I had no idea how I would ever be able to capture something that would do him justice. I began with comments and shared memories from colleagues, and a common theme ran through each of the contributions received...

In everything that he did – work, play, and everyday life – Johan knew the secret to having fun. He was a gentle soul, blessed with an excellent sense of humour and a welcoming spirit that made everyone feel right at home. He loved people and it showed – in how he mentored young professionals, interacted with colleagues at all levels during his career, and treated people whom he invited to his house, where there was always good conversation, a drink, and time to braai some fish.

Johan contributed greatly towards the occupational hygiene profession during his career and, over the years, was actively involved in the professional bodies – from the Occupational Hygiene Association of South Africa (OHASA) through to the establishment of the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) as it is today. He was a true professional who paid attention to detail, analysing problems from all possible angles to ensure that the chosen paths were the most appropriate for the circumstances.

I had the deepest respect for Johan, and I know he left an enduring mark on many, including me. I remember running into him at Cape Vidal while camping with my son and, after a friendly catchup, how he arrived at our campsite later bearing freshly speared fish for dinner. Even in the midst of his cancer treatment, I never heard him complain. He remained upbeat and positive, and kept doing what he could. That is who he was, and how I will always remember him.

Instead of mourning his passing, I know he would rather we celebrate the memories. So, if you had the privilege of knowing Johan, raise a glass in his memory the next time you light a braai fire. To Debbie and family, we can only imagine the hole he has left. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.



Johan Jacobs (JJ) Photograph: courtesy of SAIOH