

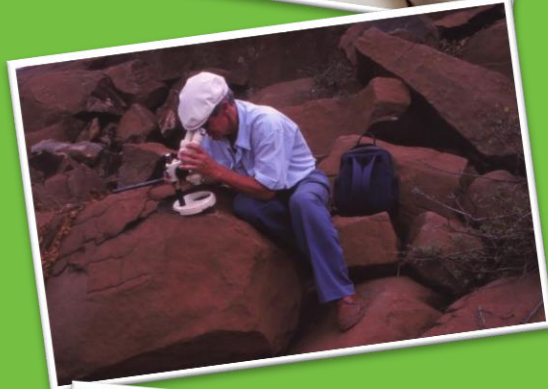
## In Loving Memory of Prof Pieter Daniël Theron



1945 - 2021

Sincere condolences to his  
family and friends.

*All background text and sketches contained in the  
memorial are extracts of Prof Theron's own handiwork.*



## Tribute to Prof Pieter Theron: His astonishing impact on students, colleagues and friends

Henk Bouwman

Gentleman, friend, mentor, scientist. Words that describe Prof Theron for many of us. Sitting in Prof Theron's class as a young student, one cannot forget his enthusiasm and eloquence when he describes the wonders and diversity of nature he so loved. That was the first impression of him most of us experienced. His phenomenal memory was one of the characteristics that drove his passion for nature. At the same time, his smile and soft-spokenness conveyed a silent confidence and invited trust.



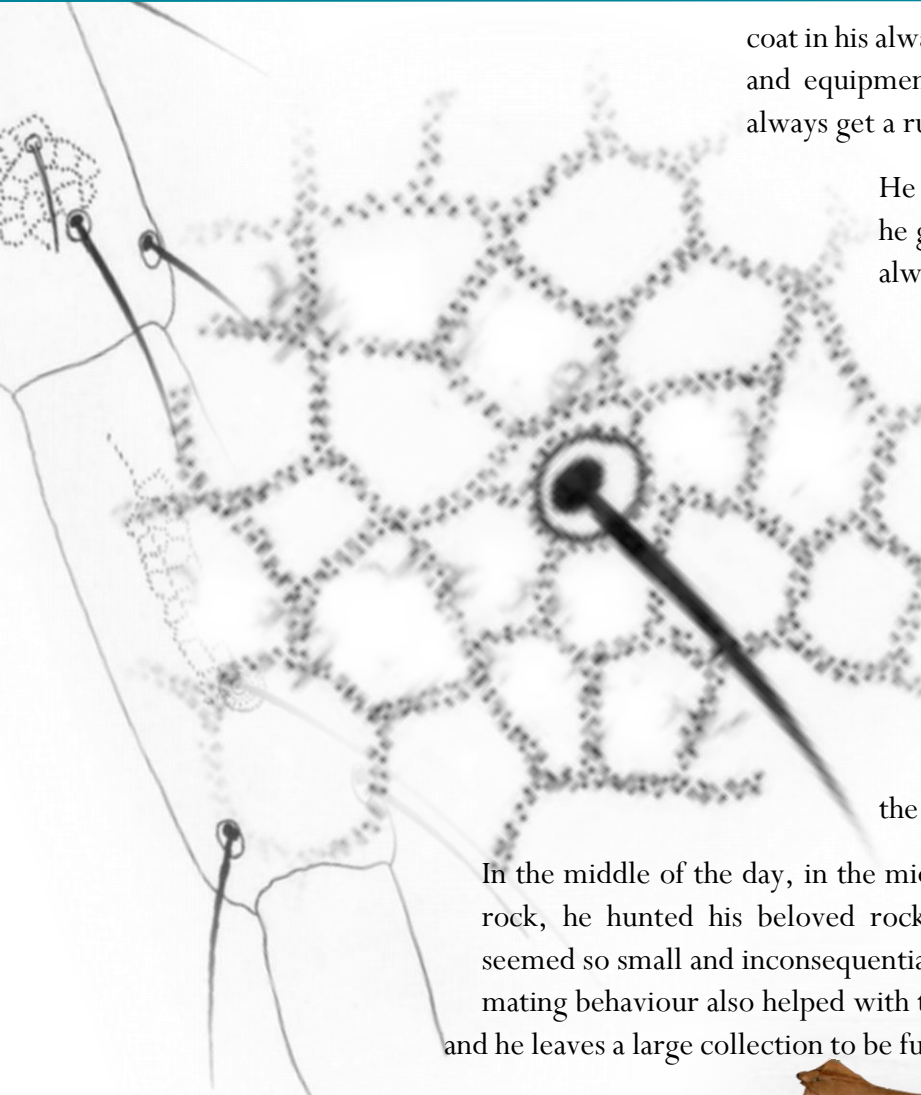
Showing the ropes to 3rd year zoology students during their field training.

We never failed to be impressed with the way he followed the progress and careers of not only his own students, but also others that crossed his path. And there were many of us. Even years later, he can accurately recall names and dates and places and incidents and backgrounds, but never an unkind word. These students came not only from the PU for CHE and later NWU, but also from UNISA. Many an aspiring school kid was imbued by his love of nature and science. Thousands of us have passed under his kind gaze and guidance, softly influencing with his wisdom and insight, imbued with his particular take on nature. When he spoke with you, he gave you his full attention and a smile.

Many a time, the phrase "Gaan vra Prof Theron" ('Go and ask Prof Theron') was uttered to colleagues and students alike. And the breadth and depth of the topics he could expound on and the stories he could tell were vast. No wonder

that corollary to talking with him was to make time for it as he would cover all angles and colour in with ancillary information and 'staaltjies' ('anecdotes'). One came away with much more knowledge and insight than anticipated—never a second of it wasted, and much the wiser for it. Long discussions were held on Latin, evolution, taxonomy, history, entomology, philosophy, foreign places, and the regaling of many an adventure. He always wore his spotless white lab coat in his always-clean office, with his always-clean microscopes and equipment – a perfectionist in his work.





coat in his always-clean office, with his always-clean microscopes and equipment – a perfectionist in his work. And one could always get a rusk or chocolate from his not so secret stash.

He had a particular love for Afrikaans—the language he grew up with in his native, Britstown, Karoo. We always went to him for advice and proofreading. He spent much time on proofreading and correcting. But the product, although mostly covered in red in his fine handwriting, came with love and attention, and many a suggestion gladly accepted.

Spiders and snakes and a host of other goggas and critters surrounded him in his office, were proudly displayed and explained. His books came from far back, and were his pride and joy. Many a request from the public was directed to him on almost anything zoological related. Many a specimen so brought in found their way into the zoology museum he much cared for and cherished.

In the middle of the day, in the middle of the summer, under a baking sun, on a hot rock, he hunted his beloved rock mites (Adamystidae and Saxidromidae). What seemed so small and inconsequential he made interesting and wonderful. Their weird mating behaviour also helped with the fascination. His drawings were perfectionist and he leaves a large collection to be further worked on by his friend Eddie Ueckermann.

He travelled mostly to Europe, often to France, where he spent much time at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, in Paris. Here he worked with his friends Yves Coineau and Nestor Fernandez. There, having worked in the actual offices and collections used by greats such as George Cuvier and Jean-Babptiste Lamarck, endowed us a sense of connection with the past and grand old days of biology. Piet Theron gently reminded us that the present is based on a long history of exceptional work by other greats. Now, for many of us, Piet is one of them.



Hunting for mites in termite mounds, with colleagues from Russia: L-R. Vladimir Khaustov, Dr Sergey Ermilov, Prof Pieter Theron, Alexander Khaustov and Petrus Bronkhorst (not a Russian).



‘n Taalpuris, perfekisionis en lopende ensiklopedie van die diereryk, maar meer as dit ‘n toegewyde belangstelling in die vakgroep Dierkunde, sy personeel en studente. Die kombinasie van hierdie eienskappe is raar, maar in Prof Theron het dit gestalte gevind.

**Ché Weldon**



I came across this picture that I took of Prof Theron back in 2001. I was a new PhD student and he took me out on a daytrip to Rustenburg to collect mites!

Prof Theron in his element! Searching for mites near Rustenburg (2001).

**Ché Weldon**

I was a first year student when I met Prof Theron for the first time. His passion for the subject was the reason for me changing the direction of my studies - from psychology to zoology: The first steps towards my career in environmental management. You will be missed...

**Claudine Roos**

Ek was altyd beïndruk met die baie moeite wat Prof Pieter met skoolkinders gemaak het wat die universiteit tydens skooluitstappies kom besoek het. Sy entoesiasme vir sy vakgebied was aansteeklik en ek is oortuig dat hy daar sommer baie voornemende dierkundestudente gewerf het.

**Lieb Venter**

Prof Theron was one of my first year lecturers, he was charismatic and immensely knowledgeable. In particular, his manner of teaching systematics inspired an abiding interest in etymology and the roots of scientific names; these lessons remain with me until today.

**Jonathan Taylor**

## Tribute to Prof Pieter Daniël Theron

Huib van Hamburg

The departure of Prof Pieter to his eternal home on 3 February 2021, reminded us again of the frailness of mankind but also the continuous change of everything. Pieter was one of the cornerstones of the foundation of the Zoology department: an example of virtue, loyalty, and love for everyone.

In a tribute, one can reminisce on his academic legacy as exceptional acarologist and contributions to soil fauna. Much can be written on this!

However, when reflecting on Prof Pieter as person, he will always be remembered as a people person: always the same dedicated colleague, always friendly and helpful in all circumstances and especially his loyalty to the Department, the School of Environmental Sciences and Development, and the NWU. Through all the years that I was privileged to have known him, I never heard him say anything negative about anyone.

His interaction with students was remarkable and they were in his office regularly for advice on academic or personal problems. He knew them all by name and they loved him. For years he was the institutional memory of Zoology and the Faculty of Natural Sciences, which was underscored by his contribution of the chapter on Zoology in the book on the history of the Faculty.

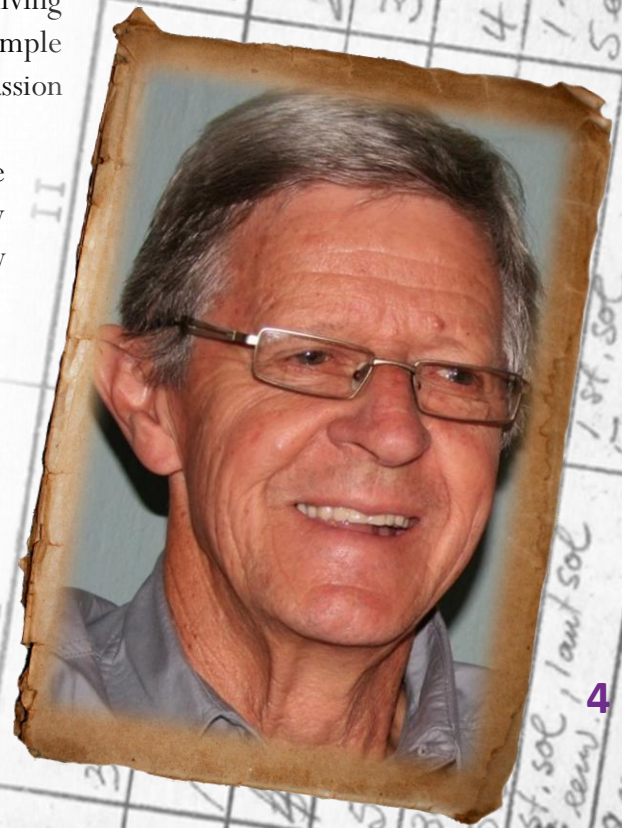
His passion for his spouse, Lien and his children, Pieter, Chris, Lindah, Lienmarie and ten grandchildren was exemplary and only closely equaled by his passion for his job. I was fairly envious of the daily lunchbox filled with delicious sandwiches together with a sweet treat, which Lien prepared with much love.

In the last months of his life, he, but especially Lien, were seriously tested by the deterioration of a memory that used to be sharp and a living encyclopedia on biodiversity. Apparently he was still looking for a sample bottle to collect an insect or spider right at the end of his life. This passion of a deeply valued colleague and friend is sorely missed.

Deep spiritual conversations with my friend Pieter will always be remembered and his ability to integrate faith and science was very valuable and stabilizing during conversations in the Zoology department.

During the funeral we were reminded again by 2 Cor 4:7 that Pieter, and all of us, are but fragile clay pots but that the power of God shines through the cracks. Pieter lived through this power and he regarded the wonderful biodiversity he observed through his microscope as evidence of the amazing power of God in nature. We will always remember him as an example of a god-fearing friend, colleague and scientist who shared his passion with those around him.

We honour his memory.



I met Prof Theron as PhD student attending a Soil Zoology conference in the Czech Republic (2000) and will always remember the stories shared during chance meetings in his office; chats during practicals; on our way to do fieldwork or at subsequent conferences attended with him.

**Mark Maboeta**

Ek het die eerste maal met Prof Theron kennis gemaak in my eerste jaar as student en hom uiteindelik ook geken as kollega. Ek onthou hom vir sy sagtheid, sy medemenslikheid en die manier waarop hy almal om hom met respek behandel het. Hy was baie lief vir sy vakgebied en as jy vir hom iets wou vra oor 'n spinnekop of 'n skerpioen moes jy seker maak dat jy BAIE tyd het om te luister. Die leemte wat hy agterlaat is nie net as uitmuntende akademikus nie, maar ook as 'n mens na wie ander kon opkyk.

**Sarina Claassens**

Toe ek in 2007 by die NWU begin werk het as 'n administratiewe beampte vir die Skool vir Omgewingswetenskappe en – Ontwikkeling, het ek gereeld by prof Theron gaan aanklop vir hulp om my in te lig oor die geskiedenis en ontwikkeling van die Skool en die Eenheid se kurrikulums. Ek was so bevoorreg om iemand soos hy te kon vra, want prof Theron kon tot in dag en datum die totale agtergrond uitpak. Hy het dit ook met soveel geduld vertel, en was altyd reg om 'n staaltjie of twee by te las, wat die 'geskiedenisles' net soveel meer interessant gemaak het.

**Frances Siebert**

As ek aan Prof Piet dink, onthou ek hoe ontsettend netjies hy op sy persoon en kantoor was. Sy kennis in terme van Dierkunde asook sy woordkeuse was altyd baie sorgvuldig gekies om die organisme of situasie presies te beskryf. Ek het aan sy lippe gehang om meer van sulke onderwerpe te leer. Prof Piet was altyd vriendelik en bedagsaam en het die Afrikaanse taal in sy suiwerste vorm gebesig. So sal ek Prof Piet onthou.

**Driekie Fourie**

Who do you call when there is a rock monitor in your garden! Prof Theron was the obvious choice to help us with this uninvited guest! He will be greatly missed as an expert, enthusiast and someone always willing to help.

**Marié du Toit**



It was with deep sadness that I learned of the passing of Prof Theron. He was one of my lecturers over the years whilst doing my undergraduate studies in Zoology. During my MSc dissertation

I was fortunate to have him as my primary supervisor. With his wisdom and experience, I always felt confident about the final outcome. After my MSc graduation we would occasionally have discussions about research and he would mention his latest discoveries on mites.

My last and most special memory of Prof was the day of my MSc graduation when I met him in his office and we walked to the graduation hall together. I

would like to extend my sincere condolences to family, friends, and colleagues. I feel privileged to have known him and will always have fond memories of him. RIP Prof Theron

**Wayne Forrester**

I will never forget the many times Prof Pieter gesticulated with his hands around his face to demonstrate the relative position of mite and insect mouthparts. I thought it funny when I was a student but now I follow his example.

**Rialet Pieters**

Prof Theron se ware roeping was die oordra van kennis, en sy liefde vir Dierkunde was aansteeklik. Hy het 'n lewenslange impak op studente en kollegas gemaak. Sy geduld, opregte belangstelling en bereidwilligheid om te help was altyd sigbaar.

**Leone Hudson**

Prof Piet played an incredible role in my academic career and it seems as if he was always there, lingering in the background, first as my PhD examiner at UFS, being on the interview panel for my promotion to Associate Prof at UJ and then at NWU I was actually appointed in his position when he retired. Proudly following in his footsteps, I moved into his old office when I arrived at NWU in 2011 and then when finishing my term as Director in 2019 I again moved into his then E6 office. Thank you, Prof Piet, for always supporting my work and career. I will try and follow your amazing example as great academic and wonderful mentor.

**Nico Smit**

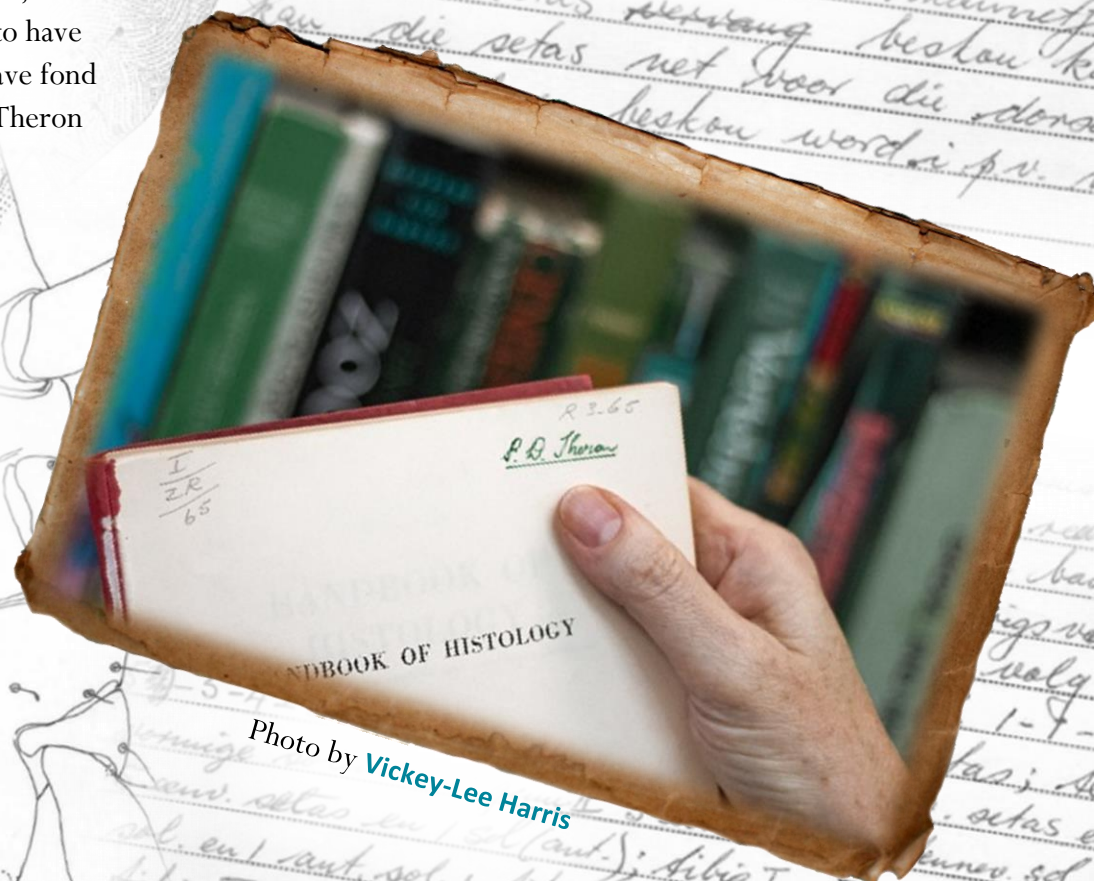


Photo by **Vickey-Lee Harris**

## Huldeblyk aan P.D. Theron as mede-werker en vriend

Vic Hamilton-Attwell

Soos ons deur ons lewensreis gaan, is daar mense met wie ons kontak het, met wie ons selfs goeie verhoudinge sal hê, maar wie nie werklik enige blywende impak op jou lewe maak nie. Hulle is bloot kennis. Dan kry jy spesiale mense. Dis die individue wat deur hulle optrede, hulle opregtheid en hulle werklike belangstelling, 'n wesentlike verskil in jou lewe maak.

Vroeër vanjaar het ek een van dié mense in my lewe verloor - Pieter Theron.

Ons paaie het gekruis toe ek by Dierkunde met 1ste-jaarsprakties gehelp het. Later jare het Pieter as nagraadse student ingeskryf, en het ons paaie meer gereeld gekruis. Vir 30 jaar plus het ons saam die lief en leed in Dierkunde beleef. Pieter was ook lid van die offisiere-korps van Potchefstroom Kommando en het ek hom genader om my Adjudant/(sekretaris) te word. Hier het ons meer as 15jaar, nou en onder moeilike omstandighede, saamgewerk. Hier het ek Pieter dieper leer ken en waardeer.

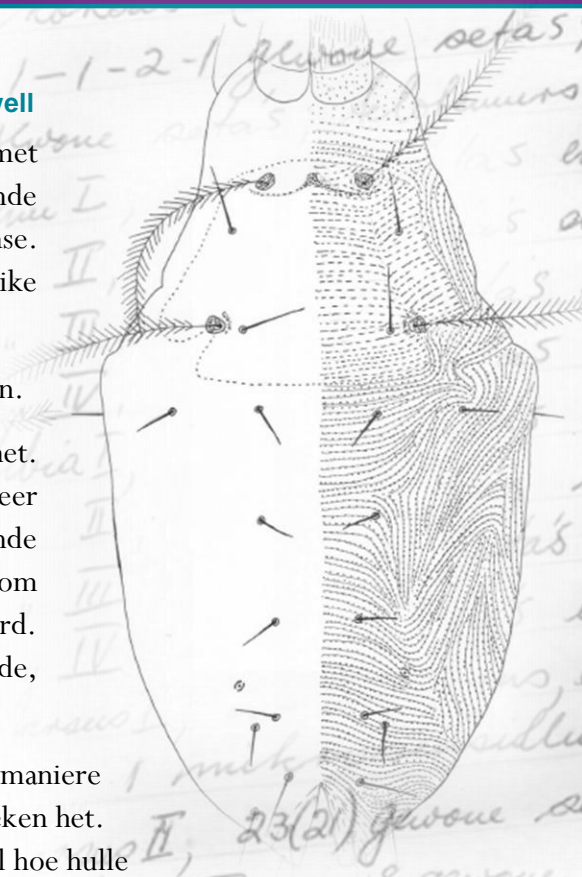
Piet of Pieter of Kaptein Theron het op verskillende tye en op verskillende maniere baie mense se lewens geraak. Hy sal altyd deel wees van elkeen wat hom geken het. Nagraadse, voorgraadse en veral "nuwe" jong nagraadse studente, het vertel hoe hulle die stil, netjiese man, wat vir hulle prakties gegee het, bewonder het! Elkeen wat ooit sy pad gekruis het, onthou iets – al is dit net dat Pieter altyd sy wit jas in die laboratorium gedra het! Ons is hartseer omdat hierdie bron van vriendskap, kennis en stille onderskraging nie meer daar is nie.

So is daar een gebeurtenis waar Piet aan die korste ent getrek het! Hy kon lekker skrik en by verskeie geleenthede is dit uitgebuit.

'n Senior kollega, Gouws Oberholzer, het op 'n plaas langs die Vaalrivier op die karkas van 'n witkruisarend afgekom. Hy het die twee kloue afgesny en as trofeë saamgebring. Die Maandag tydens tee-tyd wys hy die paar reuse kloue vir almal. Na tee weerklink daar 'n angswekkende skril gil deur die gange. Almal storm uit. Hier staan Pieter, wit geskrik en bewend in die gang. Gouws kom krom-gebuig en laggend uit Pieter se kantoor. Dit blyk toe dat hy vir Piet 'n poets wou bak. So kruip hy onder Piet se werksbank in. Toe Piet kom sit, streel Gouws eers saggies met die kloue oor Piet se been. Na 'n paar strele, kap hy die kloue met mening in Piet se been, en die res van die storie ken ons. Voor sy aftrede en selfs daarna het ek hom gereeld gekontak met vrae oor myte wat lede van die Botaniese Vereniging van Hermanus in die fynbosblomme gekry het. Nooit het hy ons teleurgestel nie. Net voor Covid-19 toegeslaan het, het Lien my laat weet dat hy nie meer kan help nie. Hy is nie lank daarna in 'n versorgingseenheid opgeneem met "Lewy-body" Alzheimer se siekte. Enkele weke later is my vrou ook met terminale Alzheimer se siekte, in 'n versorgingseenheid opgeneem. Deur Lien, het ek 'n baie hartseerpad die laaste maande saam met haar en Pieter gestap. Sy afwesigheid is 'n groter verlies as al ons individuele gevoelens saamgegooi. Die verlies word ervaar in al die sferes van die samelewing en werksplekke waar hy beweeg het, want op elke plek het hy 'n sleutelrol gespeel. Sy geesdrif en lewensvreugde, sonder ophef en groot trompetgeskal, en ek glo, sonder dat hy daarvan bewus was, het hy gesorg dat dinge gebeur, dat niks platval nie.

Na al die jare saam, deur lief en leed binne en buite die laboratorium, wil ek net sê dat ek Pieter sal onthou as iemand met integriteit, met passie vir die taak en en sy wye kennis van sy vakgebied en van die Lewe. Ek sal altyd met heimwee en aangename herinneringe aan hom dink.

"Pieter, ek groet jou en salueer jou".





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Toe ek in 1975 by dept. Dierkunde van die destydse PU vi CHO, tans die Noordwes Universiteit, aangesluit het, het ek beseft dat ek my nagraadse kwalifikasies moet verbeter. Wat 'n voorreg om onder Prof Pieter Theron as my studieleier aan te sluit.

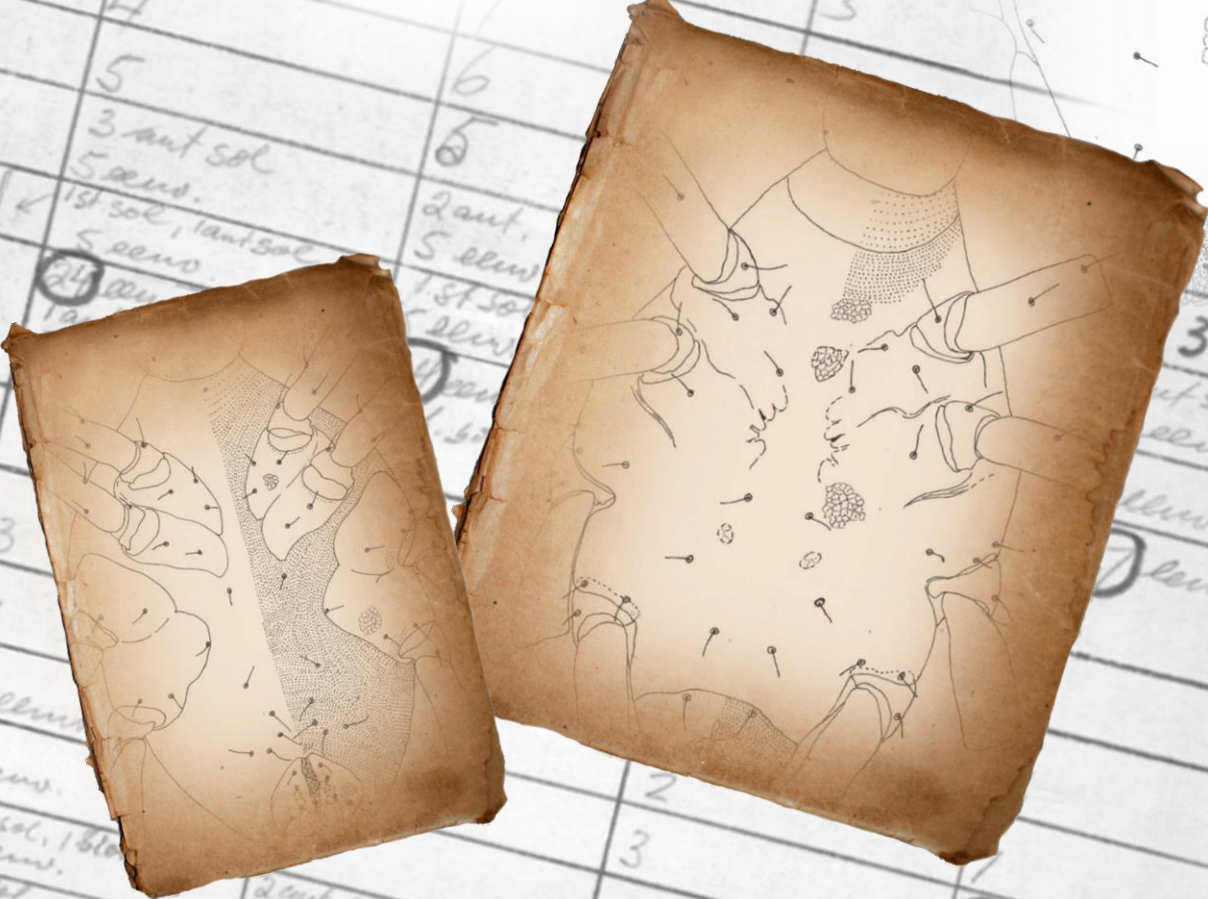
Om die sprong van sekondêre onderriggewer na dosent en nagraadse student aan te pak was vir my 'n uitdaging. Hoeveel dank en waardering is ek nie aan Prof Theron met sy simpatieke bystand en studieleiding te danke nie. Sy geduld moes sekerlik meer as een keer beproef gewees het!

Die bystand van my studieleier het nie net tot my spesialisingsgebied, Acarologie - Familie Cheyletidae, gelei nie maar hy het ook my visie vir die wetenskap verbreed en geprikkel. Toe ek in al wat 'n lewensvatbare habitat navorsingsmateriaal versamel het, het ek my soektog met sy goedkeuring ook na die Kangogrotte uitgebrei waarna ek 'n nuwe spesie kon beskryf.

Gedurende my studiejare het Prof Theron my ook aan befaamde wetenskaplikes soos Prof van Frankryk bekendgestel. Dit op sigself was 'n kosbare bevruggende ondervinding.

Ek het uiteraard Prof Theron met 'n arendsoog dopgehou terwyl ons met belowende navorsingsmateriaal besig was. Sy koel, sistematiese en kritiese benadering van mikroskopië-preparate het deeglik aan my afgevyf. 'n Studieleier en persoonlikheid soos dié van Prof Theron kan enige universiteit net verryk.

Laudis Meyer



## From the UESM Research Director: Tribute to Prof Pieter D. Theron

Carlos Bezuidenhout

When I arrived at the then Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, now the North-West University, Prof Theron was a leader in Biological Sciences. He arrived at this institution many years ago as a student, developed into a young academic and grown into a formidable leader of research. He was painstakingly meticulous in his work and this made it an absolute pleasure to work with him.

I met Prof Pieter when he was on the pinnacle of his research career with collaborators in various countries. He was a mentor to many of us and a true example of what a mentor should be. Many of us that started with our research careers could approach him for advice. He was also always available to act as a sounding board for some of our ideas. Several colleagues and I used this opportunity to engage with Prof Theron on that level.

Prof Theron was there when the talks about the establishment of a research entity for Environmental Sciences and Management (a focus area entity) took place. He contributed actively to ensure that this focus area was so successful that it was upgraded to become a research unit. As part of the Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management he also played a formidable role ensuring that the research profile of this entity was maintained and improved. He published regularly, supervised postgraduate students, and was a NRF rated scientist. Prof Pieter encouraged colleagues from local and overseas institutions to join the UESM as extraordinary staff.

On the event of his retirement, Microbiology hosted a breakfast on behalf of him and his wife. At the event I had the privilege and honour to express our gratitude for his contribution, honouring him in his lifetime. After retirement Prof Theron stayed on as a post-65 appointee to complete some manuscripts for publication.

It was a sad day when I was informed of the passing of this great individual. With sombre feelings I made the announcement to all members of the UESM. Besides the uplifting role that PDT had on my career as an academic, we also shared a birth month (April).

To the family of Prof Pieter D. Theron: This memorial edition of the ENVIRA is testament to the inspirational influence that he had on many lives and careers

Hamba gahle, Prof Pieter D Theron

RUS IN VREDE

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 Soos mylie. ( ~~the~~ )