

## Why

By Ian Cox

Stelios has asked that I write a valedictory piece explaining why I resigned from DFT and in so doing gave up editorship of the Bobbin. It is not a bad question even though there is an element of “giving a person enough rope” in it. However, I have never been averse to treading dangerously with a noose around my neck so here goes.

Friends have questioned the wisdom of the decision pointing out that the Bobbin is “my baby” and the strategic advantage that is to be had in having your own mouthpiece especially given my involvement in the trout fight. But the Bobbin is not my baby. It is the baby of the Durban Fly Tyers Club with a 25 year plus history of careful and sometimes not so careful stewardship behind it.

I did not create the Bobbin nor did I bring it back from ceasing to exist altogether.

Alan Jellis did that and after five years of passionate hard work created a magazine any club could be proud of. But five years of pulling the bus with very little support from your fellow club members takes its toll and after five years Alan had about had enough. Fortunately I was keen to step in and so Alan gave up the Bobbin to me.

I built on Alan’s work. I realised just how much when I looked at Stelios’ new format and just how much it has changed. Get up has never been my strong suite so I never changed Alan’s format. I must say that after ten years the new cleaner look is a welcome change.

Most of you do not realise it but my last edition of the Bobbin marked my fifth year as editor. That is near as dammit sixty editions each of which involved at least two days’ work, sometimes a lot more. So I calculate that I have spent at least four to five months producing the Bobbin. And like Alan, I have of late begun to feel the burden of pulling that bus unaided.

Don’t get me wrong. This is not a complaint. I have loved producing the Bobbin, just as Alan did. Furthermore the increasing burden of doing so, month after month with very little support, is not the reason for me resigning from the DFT. Well at least not entirely.

My decision to resign was an emotional one that I reached very quickly after the AGM earlier this month. However although the decision was taken quickly, I realise looking back, that it has been coming for some time. And even though the impulse to resign was emotional it saddens me to say that it is also an entirely rational and correct decision.

You see a club is not a service provider to whom you pay your subscription and get something back in return. It is not just a good deal though functioning clubs are a very good deal. A club is a community and healthy functioning communities are not built on the commercial rules of trade. They are social constructs and social constructs require people to give back to the community they belong to.

You build a business by selling a product people want at a price that people are willing to pay and that leaves you room to make a profit. But successful businesses are only able to do this sustainably because they create a culture of service within the business. That requires the business to inculcate

a sense of community amongst its workers. That is why many businesses liken themselves to a family.

A club in a sense is the other way round. The emphasis is more on the importance of community rather than the sale of a product. The community that a club encapsulates is its reason for being rather than the “business” that drives that sense of community.

Sadly the advent of what the late [Tom Wolfe called the me generation](#) (these are the baby boomers that make up most of the club membership) and the slide into barbarism that has characterised generations since then have lost sight of this important truth. The result has been a decline in the appreciation of the cohesive properties of community and with it the success of clubs.

Durban Fly Tyers is no exception.

It is a sad truth in life that there will come a point when, if you start taking cement out of the mix, that the building will fall down. It is also true that while this may initially manifest as a gradual sense of dilapidation, the ultimate failure will be catastrophic.

There is a profound truth in the Yeats poem “The second coming”:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.”

Community is what prevents this from happening. Not a sense of community that destroys the individual will because that itself is an evil but rather the realisation that no person is an island and that with freedom comes obligation. It is a balance of the right to do your own thing and the obligation to contribute to your community for supporting the fact that you can do so.

My Damascus moment came on the night of the AGM when I realised that club members did not really care enough to put the cement into the mix that is required to maintain the integrity of the club. The realisation was personal and distinctly me-ish in that I realise that notwithstanding all the work I had done in fighting to save trout, members were not prepared to make the infinitesimal gesture of joining FOSAF. Worse this was not because of any antipathy towards the organisation but rather because they did not think it represented a good deal for them personally.

There was absolutely no sense of the importance of giving back. The club had become a one way trade of what is in it for me. The idea and fact of service had become a mugs game of others feeding off your passion and commitment with no sense of any reciprocal obligation other than to pay the subscription price.

Service is not about getting back. It is not a transaction. It is, however, about being entitled to expect the support of your community. I realised after the meeting that the community I thought was the club did not support the work I was doing. This was not because club members disagreed with it..

The reason is much worse. The bulk of club members just do not care enough to make an effort either way. What is more they resented attempts to try and make them give that support, I suspect because it shine a light on the uncomfortable truth that is this general lack of care.

This does not apply to everyone. I have made lifelong friends in my time at the DFT. I have had the privilege of working and fishing with some exceptional people. But they are not the club. They are exceptions to the general ethos of a careless what is in it for me attitude. Their energy and service is not enough to gainsay this.

Harsh words I know, but that is how I saw it and how I still see it. And with that realisation the enthusiasm which fuelled my desire to serve what I though was my community died. So I resigned.

There is a terrible tragedy in all of this that is especially true of the country we live in. If we are not prepared to fight as communities for the things we care about, then the things we fear most will happen. The trouble is that South Africans have come to embrace that expectation of failure. As a consequence we work far too often to make hay while the sun shines rather than to build a society our children and grandchildren will thrive in.

I fear that DFT has become a microcosm of this expectation of failure.

So Stelios will continue to produce the Bobbin. It is likely that he will do a better job than I did. He has more time and is much more talented in this direction than I ever was. I have known Stelios a very long time and I wonder if the club members have any idea how lucky they are that someone of his calibre and character is prepared to step in and assist. But how long will it be before his enthusiasm and desire to serve is also ground down by the indifference of a club whose preoccupation is "what is in it for me"?

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