

# Tom Rogerson



**I**t is with deep regret and with sincere condolences to his family that I tell you of Tom's peaceful passing on Saturday morning. Funeral details will be in the NZ Herald on Monday but plans are for a service at St. Luke's Church Mt. Albert at 1 pm Wednesday 16th.

Tom was a founding member of the New Zealand Council for Sailing for the Blind and Vision Impaired Persons Inc., which was founded in 1986.

As a representative of the RNZFB Tom was one of a foundation group of visionaries who saw Sailing as a suitable sport and recreational activity for Blind and Vision Impaired persons. He remained an active member of the Blind Sailing NZ Council for many years, served as Chairman for a period, helped initiate the first World Champs and always ensured that his Homai students were offered plenty of sailing opportunities. Tom was awarded life membership of Blind Sailing NZ in 2002 and has continued to show support for blind Sailing in a well received advisory role.

When travelling aboard he arranged his busy itinerary to include supporting the Kiwi Team at the World blind Sailing Champs where-ever they were, Lake Garda Italy, Newport Rhode island. We again enjoyed having him encamped with the Team at the World Champs in Rotorua in March 2009.

Tom saw Sailing as an ideal activity for Blind and Vision impaired persons. His continued support and encouragement will be sadly missed. He helped build Blind Sailing in NZ with a strong foundation which remains our ongoing guide and purpose.

Tom Rogerson was awarded ONZM for services to the visually impaired in 2008.

Dick Lancaster  
Chairman The New Zealand Council for Sailing for the Blind and Vision Impaired Inc.

**T**om Rogerson was appointed Deputy Principal of the Foundation's Special School in 1962 and became Principal of Homai College for the Blind as the school came to be known, in 1972. Throughout his tenure, Tom played a major role in the development of education philosophy for a minority group of high needs students and helped transform residential education to a "mainstream" philosophy. Tom will always be respected in Foundation and education circles as an innovative humanitarian, a man of principled action and commitment.

Homai College was built to accommodate 250 students and in the 1960's reached near capacity. But the philosophy of residential schools was changing and it was Tom's innovation, flexibility and unwavering belief in the capabilities of young blind students that enabled him to make the transition to an education service that, today, supports students and their families in local neighbourhood schools.

In 1966 Tom travelled to the Perkins School for the Blind Boston to study the assessment and teaching of Deaf-Blind students. These were young folk often miss-diagnosed and who often languished in mental institutions. Rubella was abroad and the combination of hearing and sight loss were not uncommon. The assessment and teaching of communication methods introduced to Homai College by Tom liberated many a young soul to an independent life.

In similar vein, Tom introduced an "Independent Living Skills" programme that gave boys and girls opportunities in pulling machinery to bits and putting it back together again, safe use of tools, cooking, sewing and a wide variety of other dexterity oriented and craft-based tasks.

Tom had a capacity to draw about him staff who supported his educational philosophy of broadening developmental experiences and in transforming an "institution" into a home away from home where individual needs, talents and sensitivities were nurtured. Many blind students rode bikes in the grounds, played team sports and competed in Trans-Tasman competitions in swimming and track and field events. It was Tom's initiative that started Trans-Tasman sporting contacts which continues today.

Music has always been a strong tradition in the blind community and Tom introduced to the College, a system of external tutors to teach various instruments and to encourage students to sit external music exams. Piano playing, a brass band and choir, were very much part of College life.

As well as breaking new ground in education at a time when Special Education was being hotly debated, Tom continued his formal studies towards a double degree in Education and Anthropology and working with Australian colleagues formed the Australian and New Zealand Association of Teachers of the visually Handicapped with a view to raising standards of teaching qualifications and practice. This Association of which Tom was a life member continues today, albeit under a different name. Further, Tom gave strong practical assistance to teachers of the blind in the South Pacific, Fiji in particular, and teacher exchanges were seen as part of professional development.

A Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education Vision Impairment, Faculty of Education Auckland University owes its existence to Tom and his colleagues during the early 80s.

Tom's personal ethos of helping people to help themselves spilled over into the community and resulted in the strengthening of the Residential Care Association, formation of the Deaf-Blind Association of New Zealand, and Blind Sailing New Zealand. This latter venture has led to six International regattas, most of which Tom has been present and at which Kiwi teams have done remarkably well, winning Gold, Silver and Bronze, 2006, New Port Rhode Island.

Since 1972 Tom has been a Rotarian focusing on the prevention and treatment of hearing loss. He was made a Paul Harris Fellow in 2005, a prestigious award in Rotary Circles.

Tom left Homai College in 1985 with a legacy of innovation, transformation to mainstream education and an abiding belief in the potentials and accomplishments of young blind and partially sighted students who, when he began as a young teacher were often sidelined in the traditional school system.

Tom Rogerson has played a huge innovative role in creating an educational and humanitarian philosophy that has equipped hundreds of blind and partially sighted students to become productive citizens of this country, working at a time when such approaches to blindness education were not at all well supported.

When I spoke to Tom a few weeks ago he was "over the moon" about being invited to the recent reunion of Homai pupils. He obviously got a huge buzz from the event.

We all have cause to be grateful to the dedication and commitment of teachers such as Tom Rogerson, Gwen Nagel, Lorna Grant and many others, past and present, who have had the insight and skill to engender a love of learning and who have given us the tools to take charge of our own lives.

Don McKenzie.

Past Chairman of the Board, Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind