

Remembering Allen Tough

Allen Tough was a 'second generation' pioneer of the futures field and, apart from his family, will be remembered most fondly by his students and those who, like myself, had the pleasure of working with him.

I first met Allen at a series of World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) meetings in the late 1980s. Even then he played a prominent role. He took on the task of organising a number of 'Cutting edge ideas' sessions at a number of conferences. These attracted a good deal of attention and interest in part because the format dictated that every presentation – without exception – was always brief (maybe five or ten minutes.) If someone went over time Allen would ring a bell and the speaker be asked to wrap up. This was achieved, however, with great good humour and the lightest of touches. I particularly remember one of these sessions in Budapest in 1990 as among the high points of that time.

1990 also saw us in Salzburg at a meeting organised by the World Future Society (WFS) and Robert Jungk who had established his ground breaking Futures Library there. Again I have a clear memory of Allen and I having lunch on a balcony overlooking one of the city squares as we ranged far and wide across our many shared interests. One of these was a concern for the wellbeing of future generations. He was at that time in the throes of writing what would become a classic futures text – *Crucial Questions About the Future* (Tough, 1991). The book was an instant success. It was quickly adopted for use in a number of futures courses and also widely quoted. It came to the attention of Japanese entrepreneur and philanthropist Mr. Katsuhiko Yazaki who, around this time, was setting up his Future Generations Alliance Foundation (FGAF) based in Kyoto.

So it was that a few years later, in 1994, Allen, I, and some fifty or so futurists from around the world were invited to Kyoto to a grand event known as the First Future Generations Kyoto Forum. Allen played a prominent role both in organising the event and in assisting at the venue. The latter was an impressive modern building set in wooded hills just outside Kyoto that later became famous for its association with the Kyoto climate protocol. Yet, given this picturesque context, it's strange how the memory works. What I most recall about the meeting itself is Allen laughing about my earlier response to what he (not I) referred to as his 'wimpy prose.' I forget what we were working on but the memory reminds me of his light-hearted and self-deprecating nature. He was certainly one of the easiest and most rewarding people to work with.

Which is perhaps partly why we were both centrally involved in a FGAF meeting that was held in Allen's home town, Toronto, in October 1995. This was a much smaller event. The topic that was debated by about a dozen invited guests over two or three days was 'Learning and teaching about future generations.' With Allen's help, I was asked to edit the papers from the meeting. These appeared in a subsequent issue of *Futures* (Slaughter & Tough, eds, 1997), the leading international futures journal.

Not long afterwards some big changes were occurring in my own life, one of which was that I moved from the UK to Australia. So from that time on we met less frequently but kept in touch. He became more interested in SETI (the search for extra-terrestrial life) which was a theme he'd touched on in his 1991 book and I saw his name appear from time to time in connection with a number of high profile events. We stayed in touch, however, and caught up a year or two ago via Skype. I was shocked at his condition which brought back some of the many memories sketched in here of this outstanding futurist, colleague and friend.

I know that the memorial he'd most desire, however, would not be about him as such. Rather, it would reflect the underlying theme of his life - 'caring about the future.' Perhaps the most concrete form this could take would be twofold - the further development of SETI and a much greater commitment by the rich and powerful to get serious about the wellbeing of future generations.

Bibliography

Slaughter, R. & Tough, A. (eds) Learning and teaching about future generations, *Futures*, 29, 8, 1997.

Tough, A. *Crucial Questions About the Future*, New York, University Press of America, 1991.

Allen Tough website: <http://allentough.com/>

Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_Tough

Richard Slaughter
Foresight International
Brisbane

May 2012.