

# Deadly spotlight

 By [Siphosethu Stuurman](#)

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Longevity in the light of fame is something that eludes most of today's celebrities. For most, their time in the limelight is no more to be relied on than the Proteas performance in the Cricket World Cup. However, an extraordinary few manage to keep the fire burning until the very end. The late Elizabeth Taylor was one of those exceptional Hollywood stars and was often referred to as the last surviving link with the golden age of Hollywood. A visibly frail and wheelchair-bound Taylor died on 23 March at the age of 79. There is obviously so much that one can write about Elizabeth Taylor, including her well-publicised eight failed marriages or the fact that most men went bonkers over her beauty.



## Little side note

I, on the other hand, am more interested in what I perceive to be a lack of mainstream media interest in her death. If Taylor was a golfer she would be our Tiger Woods; if she was a cricketer she'd be the "little master", Sachin Tendulkar himself. The death of such a high-profile person should be making headlines, but when you compare the media frenzy when Taylor's close friend Michael Jackson passed away on 25 June, 2009, it would seem that Elizabeth Taylor's death is nothing more than a little side note on news websites.

Jackson's death triggered an outpouring of grief and caused social media websites like Twitter to crash due to user overload, but Taylor's death didn't make half of the impact.

## Bad timing

My estimation of the situation is that Elizabeth Taylor died at the wrong time. She died at a time when the world had bigger issues to worry about. She died at a time when the world's attention was focused on Japan and the devastation caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami that hit that Asian nation. Governments, media and celebrities from all corners of the world are working together to provide aid to Japan, and Africa also has its fair share of big concerns, such as the continuing Libyan political unrest.

Even stunts such as arriving "fashionably late" for her very own funeral didn't get Taylor's death any huge amount of publicity. Taylor was largely free of controversy, unlike her close friend Michael Jackson. This makes me wonder whether she would have made the headlines if she was accused of molesting children or other scandalous incidents. The media seems to prefer controversial personalities because they sell newspapers and bring a lot of traffic online.

## Sadness and piety

When famous personalities die it is almost expected for people to show uniform sadness and piety, and magically all the ills

that this person caused while they were alive are absolved. How else can one explain the heavy criticism that controversial 5FM DJ Gareth Cliff received when he didn't show sympathy on the passing of former Minister of Health Manto Tshabala-Msimang on 16 December, 2009. Somehow, the country turned a blind eye to the fact that she encouraged people to eat beetroot and garlic instead of receiving ARV treatment, which led to the death of many HIV-positive patients.

So, without overlooking Taylor's dreadful marriage record or some of her erratic behaviour, I believe that if she had died at a different time, perhaps her death would have had more share of the limelight - she certainly deserved it.

## ABOUT SIPHOSETHU STUURMAN

Siphosethu Stuurman studied towards a Bachelor of Journalism (Honours-level degree) at Rhodes University, specialising in Radio & TV broadcasting and also majored in Industrial Sociology.  
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