DOUG MILES AT SYDNEY.

[Tribute presented at Doug’s funeral in Canberra on 10 September 2013]

This is a tribute from those who experienced Doug Miles' early years as an academic at Sydney University, and witnessed the formation of this complex, humble and sensitive man into an influential scholar. Even as we are saddened by his death, joyful memories of Doug are bringing him closer again.

His first academic appointment was at Sydney University in 1969. He was young and enthusiastic, still writing his PhD (how times have changed), and deeply engaged with his research. His first colleagues included Michael Allen, Jeremy Beckett and Marie de Lepervanche, and all recall him with great warmth. Doug also worked with the Indonesian department, especially through his close collaboration and friendship with Peter Worsley. His academic initiatives included organising interdisciplinary studies seminars that gave students experience of academics from other universities and of advanced theoretical discussions. His strong political consciousness was apparent from his earliest years, and he always took the ethical implications of anthropologists' work very seriously.

To undergraduate students he brought the excitement of new field research, with fresh interpretations and insights into the intricacies of the social worlds of south-east Asia. Many of today's senior anthropologists have fond memories of his engaging, entertaining and informative lectures. He had many interdisciplinary students as well, in particular those working in Bali. Doug was always really generous with advice and feedback, and his enthusiasm and humour helped to expand student imaginations. He was great at creating interesting linkages between people and ideas.

He really valued people in the field, and felt enormous empathy for their trials and tribulations, in which he inevitably became involved — no fly on the wall ethnography for Doug. He wholeheartedly participated in peoples' lives while retaining an uncanny ability to identify the details of social situations that were worthy of anthropological attention. He had a collegial approach to his students. Rather than teacher and pupil, we were fellow scholars. In 1976 Linda Connor, Doug's first doctoral student, embarked on field research in Bali. She recalls:

He was the favourite visitor of the dozens of friends and relatives who visited me while I was doing field research in Bali. They couldn't pronounce or remember his name, so he said, "just call me 'dua gelas' {two glasses}. No one ever forgot his name after that, and the nick-name is immortalised in the film Jero on Jero: A Balinese Trance Séance observed, in which Jero Tapakan refers to him by his 'two glasses' name.

Doug was an inspired fieldworker, equally home with the avant garde of Jakarta's theatre scene as he was in an urban village in North Bali. People loved him. The
sense of humour and penchant for stories were evident in all his interactions. He was also a gifted linguist, and could tell stories in several Asian languages as well as he could in English.

Doug was a true mentor to all his students, deeply and personally engaged in both practical and intellectual ways and full of enthusiasm for our projects. For many of us he was a model for what a supervisor should be. He identified with student struggles, but without sentimentality. His interest in activists was not so much ideological and doctrinal as personal and directly supportive. His staunch sense of injustice meant he was relentless in taking up a cause and following it through, including the defence of anthropologists who became caught up in state-sponsored violence. He advocated for the cause of Arnold Ap, a West Papuan anthropologist and cultural activist who was eventually shot in 1984 while in the custody of the Indonesian special forces. His concern with justice is also evident from his earlier work in Thailand.

He was deeply distressed by the controversy surrounding the Tribal Research Centre (TRC) in Chiang Mai, with which he was affiliated. When the TRC was accused of being used for counter-insurgency, the Sydney University anthropology department became the focus of deep and disturbing controversy. Doug became an active critic of the TRC, and was a strong critic of the war in Vietnam, and of what he saw as the misuse of anthropology.

There was another side to Doug. He was a GREAT story teller. Was it, we wondered, that peculiar and amazing things happened to him, or was it his capacity to see, narrate and embroider the bizarre quality of everyday events? The story of leaving the manuscript of his book “Cutlass and Crescent Moon” in a taxi, following extensive work editing and revising his MA thesis leading to a rushed job to repeat the revisions before submitting it to his publisher, had its audiences breathless with suspense. Another long, detailed nightmare tale was about his going to the wrong airport in New York.

But perhaps Doug's funniest story was about his wife Toy's first visit to Sydney's city centre, which coincided with the Queen's visit to Australia. When Toy emerged into the street from the Underground at Town Hall station, she pushed forward in the crowd to see what was happening. Just then the Queen was passing, and paused to greet her. When she'd gone, Toy turned to her neighbour and said, “Who was that?” Through his stories Doug brought us all to share in life's profound absurdities. His terry-towelling hat was an ornament at social events, where his presence was always invigorating.

Doug lives on at Sydney in our hearts and memories.

Vale dear colleague, teacher and friend.

Linda Connor -- on behalf of the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University.