**Funeral of Anthony Low**

Thursday, 19 February 2015

St John the Baptist, Anglican church, Canberra

It is an honour to speak today.

Anthony had two families. Belle was a keystone of both of them. The First Family of course is the one we all know – Anthony and Belle and Angela, Penny and Adam and their families.

Belle of course looked after that family, the First Family; but she also acquired the other family: Anthony’s Second Family – the family of students. Being supervised by Anthony usually meant being fed by Belle and being included in outings and functions that were indeed “family functions.”

The first PhD students of the early 1960s – there were three of them: Peter Reeves, John Broomfield and Ravinder Kumar, all scholarly names to conjure with – were succeeded by regular new cohorts – grand-students, great-grand-students, great-great-grand-students and so on. And the students and grand-students had students of their own who imbibed some of the aura of Anthony, who came sometimes to be presented to them as a kind of *pater familias.*

One of the great-great-great-grand-students, who now teaches at Oxford and who knew Anthony when she was a graduate student at ANU in 2007 and 2008, wrote when she heard of his death:

I met him only a handful of times but was always bowled over by his incisive mind and gentlemanly warmth.

You once acknowledged my presence in the audience of a talk by referring to me as one of Antony’s grand-students. I loved the idea – that we are in a chain of mentoring and that the essence of an approach to scholarship, and to supporting younger colleagues on their journeys, is passed on from supervisor to supervisor.

Her remark captures the gift he gave to anyone he supervised or whose work he read – as he was, you had to be: kindly, critical, careful, immensely conscientious, always constructive. And as well, you had to strive to discover, and then to convey, the essence of the problem that you were researching.

Graduate students, downcast and doubtful about their work, would sometimes ask the existential question: “What *is* a thesis?”

Writing a thesis, Anthony would say, is like making crab-apple jelly ...

And the Crab-Apple Jelly Story has been passed on from one generation of graduate students to another.

When you make crab-apple jelly, he would say, you begin by collecting baskets and baskets of crab apples. You boil them up and throw away the pulp. You boil up what’s left and put it through a sieve. You reduce what’s remaining by boiling it some more. Then you put what is finally left into a piece of cheese-cloth and hang it over a small bottle to drip overnight. In the morning, you find a tiny bottle of beautifully clear golden jelly – and that is what writing a thesis is all about.

Anthony made wonderful Crap-Apple Jelly, and what is more important, he inspired dozens of scholars – and people who went into others walks of life – to aspire to make Crab-Apple Jelly too and to do their very best to help others to do so.

Anthony supervised somewhere between 50 fifty and a hundred PhD theses. He read and commented on thousands of draft chapters and millions words. He did this at the same time as being a top administrator and educational leader, at ANU, Sussex and Cambridge.

One of the grand-students – one of my generation, who is an unsentimental American veteran, hardened by a lifetime of skirmishes in the university world – wrote last week:

I could never quite understand how anyone could be so apparently relaxed and civilised, all the time.  I owe him a lot, and will sorely miss him.

Messages from Anthony’s student family come from Africa, Europe, North America and various parts of Asia.

He was the “gentle colossus” of South Asian studies,

one of the Indian great-grand-students, now a professor of great eminence, wrote from Chicago.

And the sadness in Singapore – the sense of being bereft and of having lost a lighthouse of good judgement and good will – is palpable. There would have been a Singapore presence in the congregation today if it had not been for Chinese New Year and the near-impossibility of making airline bookings.

Many of us may have a recollection, vague perhaps but a recollection, of the Knight in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. I refreshed my memory last week. The Knight was no softie or cream puff; he had been in the wars, in many scraps and scrapes, and come through. He was a good companion – a good man to have on a pilgrimage. The concluding lines so well describe the Anthony that the grand-students have known:

Though so illustrious, he was very wise,

And bore himself as meekly as a maid.

He never yet had any vileness said

In all his life, to whatsoever wight. [person].

He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.

People of Anthony’s Second Family – the grand-students and great-grand-students all over the world – grieve at his loss and feel deeply for Belle and his First Family; and they feel privileged to have known him and been able to take him as their exemplar.

Robin Jeffrey