

A Tribute to Sydji

Rick Hosking

I met my wife Sue in Syd's first-year class at Flinders in 1966. He taught me only one short course on the Indian writer R.K. Narayan: only in the 1970s would Syd develop his world-famous specialisation in the New Literatures in English. We knew him first as an inspired teacher of American Literature and of poetry in particular.

While Jane (Syd's wife) might have called him Tiddles, for close to half a century I have called him *Sydji*: the honorific suffix given to teachers and gurus in India. He has been not just a teacher and mentor but a best mate: one of Flinders University's most celebrated teachers, researchers and postgraduate supervisors. For decades he held the record as *the* most successful postgraduate supervisor in Flinders: Syd's postgraduates teach in universities all around the world.

A few years ago our head of faculty had her bag stolen in Singapore; she rang the Australian High Commission to get some help with the paperwork to enable her to fly home. She managed to get the Cultural Attaché on the phone; when she told him she was from Flinders, his first question was: did she know Syd?

There are so many wonderful memories of Syd: generous, good-humoured, friendly, collegial *Sydji*. Syd winning Vince O'Sullivan's Bronze Turd Award one night in Brisbane with an extraordinary telling of the wide-mouthed frog joke – with the actions. Syd by the side of the Bangalore to Mysore road in south India, at two in the morning, our hire car broken down, his big thumb up, hitching a lift. Then Syd in the back of the bus that picked us up, surrounded by young Indian men and holding court on matters of great import: cricket and Bollywood and poetry, claiming all the way to Mysore with great authority that his travelling companion was Dennis Lillee.

A colleague from Social Sciences went to a conference in Calcutta, and found himself a little unsettled by a cohort of young men in the back row intently following his presentation. At the end of his paper they trooped down to the front of the room, and – expecting a barrage of questions about his paper – he was delighted to be asked the question: was he knowing Syd Harrex?

I think we should all be grateful and delighted we knew Syd Harrex. In 2016 Flinders will be 50: Sydji was there at the beginning, and will be remembered as one of the great creative presences of our first half-century.