

Jyoti...

I am John Edmonds and have the honour of saying a few words about our dear friend.

I first met Jyoti - and Alan – at this very time of year, in 1990, on Lady Elliott Island. That was a time and place as happy and tranquil as the present moment is dark and leaden-hearted. To meet two such people. Clearly extra-ordinary people - full of energy, living intensely in their world of music and art and nature, was very exciting. It's been wonderful, over the years since for Sue, my wife and for me to have become their friends and to share so much fun, so many fine things, so many good times. I'm sure many of you will have had that same pleasure.

To speak about Jyoti, is inevitably, for me, to speak of a couple – of Jyoti and Alan - two people, each quite different and complete, but whose lives seemed so close, so intercalated. I sometimes tried to get Jyoti to come to something that she, but not Alan, might enjoy – cricket, sailing; I never succeeded. She really wasn't interested. And how often have any of you had a phone conversation with one or the other that didn't become a three-way conversation – with comments offered or sought from the party 'off'?

Jyoti was many things: a musician, writer, reader, student, teacher, cook, critic, nature lover – and always passionately a partner, a mother, a grandmother and friend. And she did everything well.

She was born in England and lived there until she was about 25. Her mother was English and her father, who had been brought up in India, was Anglo-Indian - a heritage of which Jyoti was proud. As much as she disdained the exploitative elements of the Raj, she enjoyed the elegance, the colour, the singularity and wisdom of India.

In London she studied singing. During this time she was taught yoga breathing techniques, skills that were to become so important later. One line of youthful opportunity may have seen her become an opera singer but she married William Brunson, an Australian, whose work, at the time, took them to Italy: first to Milan and then Perugia. During the 4 years she spent in Italy she acquired not only near-perfect Italian but, of much greater importance, her two precious sons, Sebastian and Nicholas. The family returned to Australia in the late 60s.

When Jyoti and William Brunson separated and she needed the independence to raise two small boys, she brought one of her many latent talents into full play: she extended her yoga skills and became a yoga teacher. For some 20 years she taught yoga to hundreds of students from the northern beaches. She also hosted the many visits to Sydney of Swami Venkatesananda, so that 23 Waratah St, Harbord, (not Freshwater), often became a very crowded and exotic household indeed.

The Swami Venkatesananda and his teachings were important to Jyoti. Towards the end of last year, she completed a massive compilation of his teachings and writings, entitled

‘A Disciple’s Dictionary: the philosophy of Swami Venkateshananda’. She spent much of the last months of her life, often with Alan’s help, proof reading this 700 page text, which will be published next year on an anniversary of the Swami’s death.

Jyoti was a woman of words – she liked them; she liked them used well and she used them well.

In 1988, when Alan was commissioned to write the opera ‘*Dorothea*’, Jyoti wrote the libretto which was published in full in a double page spread in the *Manly Daily* at the time of the opera’s first performance. Writing the libretto led Jyoti into the kind of research she loved. She met Kath Strang, a cousin of Dorothea Mackellar, and burrowed into the diaries and other Mackellar holdings in the Mitchell Library. As a result the Mackellar estate approved Angus and Robertson’s commissioning her to edit and background the Mackellar diaries, published by A&R in 1990.

Her next book, *The Cure*, began a collaboration and friendship with Mike Hudson and Jadwiga Jarvis of the Wayzgoose Press. This book, beautiful in form and content, is held in many libraries around the world. The Library of NSW has 2 copies, one in the Mitchell Library, the other in the esoteric Rare Book section.

Back in 1988, at the Bicentenary, Jyoti had written 5 poems, *Manly Tales*, for a concert in the park with the Manly Bicentennial Youth Choir. Subsequently, she wrote a further three poems, *More Manly Tales*, that were set by Dulcie Holland. Wayzgoose Press published both sets of poems as ‘*All the Manly Tales*’, in a beautifully illustrated volume in 1993. It is important to note the comment at the end of the book:

‘The Wayzgoose Press has printed this work as a token of respect and friendship for Jyoti and Alan and to express our appreciation for the results of their creative integrity.’

I want to read a poem from that collection because it shows so beautifully the lively flexibility of Jyoti’s imagination and her power with words. The page facing the poem tells us that....

The first Manly Wild Flower Show was held in October 1881. The venue was a pavilion described by a Manly resident as ‘gaudy and paultry and shabby in every board...a relic of a bad, old time -...the first thought of a reasonable man towards it is fire or dynamite.’

In a poem she called ‘An Old Pavilion’ Jyoti has transubstantiated that venue:

An old pavilion, drab and down at heel,
Dreamt it was a temple, with cedar
Columns and sandstone altar touched by
The first rays of an October dawn.

And then the old pavilion saw within
A congregation of wattle and boronia,
Worshipping God who made the flowers
Before He thought of man.

No longer windows broken-backed,
Endlessly answering the wind with sad,
Insistent tappings, but shimmering
Reflection of orange blossom, orchid and
Featherflower, falling sunbeam soft on
Crimson and gold, purple and blue
Outpourings of a Spring that races
Breakneck to the scorch of summer.

Jyoti wrote many pieces that were set to music by Alan and by Dulcie Holland: 'A Singing of Sayings' for Dulcie, Borneo Songs for Alan, and many others.

Jyoti was a musician. For someone like me, a music groupie from its outside, Jyoti belonged, like many of you, among the cognoscenti of its arcane workings: as a flautist, a chamber musician, a teacher. Singing had been her introduction to music but in Australia she learnt flute - from good people – among them Geoffrey Collins and Christine Draeger. She performed often, playing in many chamber groups, in the Northern Chamber Orchestra and as a founder member of the Sydney Bach Orchestra and The Gallery Players, often with Christine Draeger.

She continued flute studies for many years. And she taught for many years - at St Luke's School, for example, for some 23 years. Her private pupils, many of whom I expect are here today, included children, HSC students (who often did strikingly well) and adults, some continuing lessons with her for 20 years or more: surely because they loved the experience and the encounter with her as much as they loved the flute.

I know she really enjoyed so many of her students; she often recounted funny or insightful things that some of the 'littlies' said. The physical limitations of back problems gradually curtailed her yoga teaching but, fortunately, she was able to continue teaching flute... and she still had a large group of students at the onset of her recent illness.

In 1995, she combined her musical and literary skills in documenting what she had learnt from years of experience as a teacher flute. 'The Aussie Flute Book', elegantly illustrated by Mike Hudson, was commissioned and published by EMI. Gordon Webb, then Head of the School of Performance Studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and previously principal trumpet in the London Philharmonic, LSO and SSO, wrote:

'What a joy to read through this book! I learnt such a lot. The presentation is admirable & needs to be emulated by aspiring educators. Music is about having fun (or should be)

& Aussie Flute IS fun. How much easier my progress as a musician would have been had I had the benefit of this approach. Lucky flute players'

But all of these parts – writer, musician, flute teacher, yoga expert– come nowhere near the whole. Multi-faceted as she was, Jyoti was still much more than a set of talents, even such formidable talents.

There was nothing ordinary about her: she had such passion, spirituality, warmth, and engagement. She was strikingly thoughtful and generous. It was clear that giving something that she thought may bring pleasure to the receiver was one of her great delights.

She loved the life of the mind - books, ideas, films. But she loved physical things just as much.

For years, until stopped by side-effects of anti-arrhythmic drug therapy, she swam every morning in the rock pool at Curl Curl. She loved good food and wine; lunch with a few friends; the experience of a delicious dinner at one of her favorite restaurants; the sunshine and the flowers. She simply loved all the good things that life has on offer.

Jyoti was fun to be with. There are people whose way of thinking stimulates and enlivens. I was always interested to know what Jyoti thought of something: a performance, a film, an article, a book. Sometimes I may have disagreed - but her opinion was worth careful attention - because it reflected very high intelligence and an educated sensibility.

Conversations with Jyoti were a great pleasure; she was incapable of being dull. But in talking with Jyoti one couldn't be slack; she had a low regard for sentimentality or the banal. To something that she saw as nonsense or bad taste Jyoti was more than capable of a succinct and caustic dismissal. One needed to stay up to the mark. But this was no burden; it was energizing; it was a kind of respect. Some people, simply because of what they are, command such respect.

I cannot quite agree with John Donne's assertion in his famous Devotion that 'any man's death diminishes me'. But I think it true that the deaths of some people, special people, do truly diminish us; our lives lose a vitality. Jyoti was such a person; she will be very greatly missed. But memories will last – and they are good.