Graeme Hugo Colloquium

Graeme’s Initiation Rites

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2 December 2015

Graeme’s stellar carrier as a researcher, teacher and academic leader is well reflected and summarized in the high praise in the nine papers we have heard today. As friends of Graeme and as co-workers, the speakers have been able to bring a first person perspective to all the dimensions of Graeme’s work from his life-long obsession with migration studies through his work on Indonesian demography, aging, refugees, and population policy. Seen as history the steady growth of his hundreds of publications seems to be a feat of persistence – fast and steady builds the list, and destroys a small forest. The words that come to mind are ambitious, driven, or even obsessed. Certainly a younger generation of students looking to him for inspiration might well wonder how a teenager from Findon High School training to be a secondary school teacher could turn into famous demographer tapped by numerous governments to provide high level advice to ministers and world leaders. That Adelaide starting point would be more likely to lead to a life as a member of the teachers’ union, and maybe as an advisor in some MP’s office, after which the ambition would have taken him to Canberra, but on the south side of the lake. Thank goodness Graeme avoided that path. Imagine Annabel Crabbe asking him to cook a vegetarian meal for her show.

Glenn mentioned luck, but David Lucas noted that it was more an issue of serendipity. Instead of hanging out in Adelaide we know that Graeme spent the holidays of 1967-68 on a study tour of Southeast Asia making his way through Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This was funded by the National Union of Australian University Students overseas travel scheme. There are a number of lucky parts to this story. First, there were thousands of Australians visiting Vietnam at that time, but they were in uniforms. Graeme was “travelling” and following his curiosity to determine his trail. Second, in July 1968 the government instituted some rules that inhibited people like Graeme **–**

***From June 1968 men turning twenty who intended to travel overseas could not do so without first obtaining permission from the DLNS (Department of Labour and National Service), while airline and shipping companies were not to issue tickets to men in the twenty-year age group without first obtaining a departmental certificate*.**

**We complain about government policies today!**

Graeme had just turned 21, and at the end of his Southeast Asian Tour he was returning to a position as a Tutor at Flinders University where he could do his Masters degree. He had seen Asia, and he had caught the bug for travel, but he did it without carrying a gun.

That trip remained in Graeme’s thoughts and was recalled in anecdotes with a freshness and immediacy that stamps the experience with the quality of an INITIATION. It was a rite of passage and a point of maturation.

Graeme’s initiation brought him into a tribe. It lasted for a decade and shaped both the way he would later live his life, and set the values that guided him. When he arrived at the ANU Jack Caldwell was putting together a program of international demography that would lead to the recruitment of a corps of specialists on Asian and African demographers, with even a few South Americans thrown in to spice the mix. Val and I were doing fieldwork in Yogyakarta in 1972-73.

Graeme and Meredith arrived in Indonesia just as we were leaving, and were getting ready to carry out studies throughout West Java. Like us, Graeme received a research budget from the Demography Program -- $3500 – and like us he used the funds to hire a small army of student research assistants to gather and process data. That would be unimaginable for a student today.

* At the end of our study we went on a weekend trip to Solo, but never made it. Instead I ended up in hospital after a slip on sand and three days in hospital.
* Once we packed up we took the motorcycle to Jakarta where I sold it to Graeme. For a discount. I believe he sold it on later that year. He told me he made a profit. It was only some years later that I learned that the profit was due to a change in the currency exchange rate.

Fieldwork is obviously more than “data collection” – it changes the way you see the world. Graeme’s 14 villages and 5 cities meant that he met the challenge of Indonesian bureaucracies more than most of us. And he did this all for $3500.

* In the years since he often told of his anxiety in meeting the head of villages – fearing he would call him Kelapa Desa (Village coconut) and not Kepala Desa (Village Head). And of course he was always afraid of saying saya sudah kentang (I am a potato) instead of saya sudah kenyang (I am satiated).
* When he returned to Canberra he and Meredith joined the “Turner Flats” group. When Val and I both submitted our PhDs on March 10 1975, we had a huge party in our flats, with friends from demography, anthropology, economics and other disciplines all crammed in with music, dancing and lots to eat and drink. Graeme and Meredith came in around 5 (end of office hours). Graeme sat in the corner for a while, but was obviously concerned about something. After a brief drink he rushed back to his apartment to continue his thesis. Luckily Meredith stayed on to help us celebrate, and clean up the mess.

In those days students had to face a terrible strategy challenge. On the one hand there was a 100,000-word limit for the thesis. On the other you had to pay a professional typist by the page and the margins and spacing were fixed by the rulebook. And then there was the unwritten competition to submit a thicker thesis than any other student. Graeme was nothing if not competitive. He went for the pages – annexes and bibliography did not enter in the word count. So he reached 699 pages, all packed in the light blue colour of the ANU. After that effort students were advised to take pity on examiners. Since the 1970’s theses have become thinner – mainly due to back-to-back printing. Still the forests are getting some protection, and there are fewer back injuries as students carry their products across the campus for submission.

The PhD process is definitely one of initiation, but it was not the end of the initiations that Jack Caldwell managed over the 1970s and 1980s. An entire cohort of graduates was funded by very modest government program (AAUCS/AUIDP/IDP) to be seconded to population centres overseas. Peter McDonald went to University of Indonesia, Val and I went to Gadjah Mada University, and Graeme and Meredith went to Hasanuddin University in Makassar/Ujung Pandang. They arrived in January 1978.

* More motorcycles. Soon after arrival Meredith discovered she was pregnant. She also fell off the motorbike.
* Luckily Professor Ken Back from AAUCS visited soon after and approved the provision of a car and also a trip to Jakarta to see the Embassy doctor.
* Meanwhile Graeme worked with the enthusiastic staff to set up the population centre, and Meredith spent her days writing to any donor they could think of to try to get funds for books, equipment and research. As the books came in they were duly locked behind glass doors, and Meredith catalogued them using the Dewey decimal system. Her memory of the time matches Graeme’s – working from 0730 till late, a house with a huge mandi (bath) that they joked about using for fish farming, and the regular Saturday evening trip to town to buy Kraft Cheese Slices for a treat.
* Meredith flew back to Adelaide in August and Justine was born on September 13th. Graeme arrived just in time for the birth, flying in on September 11th. This was a pattern he tried to maintain with hundreds of conference presentations over following decades, but sometimes things didn’t work out as well as the timing for the birth.

Graeme had a great sense of humour, an infectious laugh, and sensitivity about his hair. For years he tried to use a comb-over to cover the growing bald spot, but gusts of wind and office fans defeated his best efforts, and quiet teasing pushed him to eventually accept the inevitable and cut his remaining losses.

Sometime in the 1980s we all completed our initiations and settled into career paths that ran parallel, frequently crossed, and kept us close. Gavin, Graeme, Val and I worked on a compendium book on Indonesian demography (The Demographic Dimension of Indonesian Development, OUP, 1987), and over the years we frequently got together on podiums or classrooms to talk about demography. The shared times in Indonesia, and the shared times in Canberra were a great experience for us and a crucial initiation into the culture and life of Indonesia; the discipline and vibrancy of demography; and the ways and wonders of the close-knit tribe of Caldwellian researchers.