

## A Personal Reflection

*Merritt T. Cooke*

I will use a different yardstick and a different angle to add to what the contributors have already put together: a broad measure of Gerry Berreman's deep impact for all of us, as anthropologists and personally. My yardstick, though, won't measure Gerry's professional legacy in any of its well-calibrated dimensions: the ethnography of place and power, the ethics of responsibility in action, or the vision of culture as interaction. Although my own work among the Manangis (Nyishangte) on the Nepal-Tibet borderland north of Annapurna would not have been possible without the bench-mark Gerry set in each one of these areas, that is not what I want to try to gauge here. Nor should it be—my involvement with the professional field of anthropology is now as limited as my twenty year-old research is dated.

Instead, I will share a few personal reflections.

I remember that when I arrived at the Department in the fall of 1978 with a background in Chinese studies, my new calling as an anthropologist already looked like a hoot. I had foregone a full scholarship at the University of Chicago to position myself, impecuniously, to take advantage of Berkeley's better access to the just-opening door of mainland China. At the moment I was arriving on campus, though, the Steve Mosher incident was slamming shut and locking that door to any subsequent doctoral-level fieldwork for years to come. As I introduced myself at the first meeting of my first 240 class, I felt like it was the opening kick-off of the Big Game and I had just fumbled the ball at my own goal line.

This was how I first came to know Gerry. I had known his reputation, of course, well before seeing him in action as one of the co-professors of my 240 Class. But I got to know Gerry as a person over the following weeks, as he recognized the fear in my eyes and quietly encouraged the realization that the game was not over. By the end of the first semester, I was improvising a new target for future fieldwork—not entirely unrelated in cultural terms to my original target and, more important, not entirely impossible in practical terms. I would hitch my dwarf star to Gerry's supernova and study a Tibetan-type population in the mountain valleys of Nepal. Fortunately for me, an ethnic community which Furer-Haimendorf had identified as one of the most intriguing in Nepal had just voted with black and white pebbles to turn their Khampa automatic weapons over to the King of Nepal. The King satisfied their single condition—helicoptering to their valley to take receipt, in person, of their weapons—and the Manangis then opened their valley for the first time to officials

from the King's government, to trekkers circumambulating the Annapurna Massif and, soon, to a UCB Cultural Anthropology grad student under Gerry's care and handling.

As I prepared for my Master's, I saw the human side of Gerry that we all have witnessed: the unfailing generosity with his time and guidance, even when the line of waiting students in the hallway made me despair of even getting a foot in his door; the calm regard that always seemed less that of a professor looking at students and more that of a traveller looking out for fellow-travellers; and always the inexhaustible humor mooring knowledge in some wiser understanding. Whether the subject was C. Wright Mills or the idea of untouchables replicating caste hierarchies among themselves, there was always that sense that, amid all the academic earnestness and moral high-stakes, we could all still laugh.

I am grateful for the many times that Gerry stepped back to let me find my way down the field on my own. Equally, I am grateful for times when he saw me about to get hit and ran interference to keep me on my feet. The Department questioned why I should take a year to continue Mandarin at the Inter-University Program in Taipei if I was throwing my lot in with Himalayan Studies. I didn't have an answer, just a conviction. Gerry found a way to answer the question. When I needed to make room for a Tibeto-Burman linguist (Jim Matisoff) and a political scientist (Leo Rose) on my dissertation committee, Gerry's natural curiosity and intellectual breadth made the fit feel easy for everyone. When I decided to apply Barth's framework to try to make sense of the ethnic dynamics in the Manang Valley, Gerry neither quibbled nor scoffed. It was not until years later that I realized that my ability to work directly with Barth had had little to do with my brilliance and everything to do with Gerry's stature and personal recommendation.

I sometimes think of the paradoxical counterpoint of my career in relation to Gerry's. The mountains we lived in, the music we listened to, and the academic "life-chances" we negotiated were subtly different because of the intervening political boundary between India and Nepal. The people I studied were not oppressed by external power structures, but had instead allied themselves with the royal family and, in certain respects, were reinforcing oppressive relationships of power in Nepal. Rather than making my career in academic anthropology, I pocketed my degree and moved elsewhere, trying to extend the anthropological perspective into my work in international business with the Foreign Commercial Service.

But these contrasts all seem minor. Despite the centrifugal pressures on both of us, Gerry and I have managed to stay in sporadic contact through the years. He showed the interest to get to know my sister's family and then, after I married, to meet my wife. He has found the time to keep me up to date with key events in his life. There's even the possibility we play with of our getting Gerry and Keiko to Taiwan sometime before my tour-of-duty there ends.

I mention these things simply to have noted in this gathering an essential measure of who Gerry Berreman is for all of us—whether we're undergraduate students, grad students, anthro colleagues, or UCB associates.

He is an uncommonly generous and kind friend. As a friend, he has shared generously his passion for people in a remarkable corner of the world. As a friend, he has set standards for looking at the world with clarity and humanity.

To close, I just wish I could be there to extend these thanks in person. When I think back to the seven-day walk I took on almost a dozen occasions to reach the Manang Valley during three years of research, the beauty of the Himalayas still seems stunningly immediate. But even more powerful and lasting has been the memory of some chance encounters with fellow-travellers along the way. Gerry, I'm glad my path crossed yours.