

A short tribute delivered at the celebration of the life and work of Colin James AM; Redfern, Sydney, 2013

(Col, Uncle Col, the Chief, the big fella)

I would like to thank you all for being here and celebrating the life of Col James

I would also like to thank Karine, Zoe and Col's immediate family for allowing us to share this day with them.

'Col James was a giant'

That's how Col's obituary started... before using those words I read hundreds of pages about Col's life, his achievements, the many projects and extraordinary people he had worked with – many of you are here today.

By necessity, 90% of all that history had to be left out

Since then, literally hundreds of people have emailed and called to describe their shock, grief and sadness.... almost all the communications have had one common line about 'how Col had changed their lives' – he'd found jobs, made links to people, given a new scope, planted a new idea, supported them, shown faith, or won a fight 'Col *had* changed their lives'

Col was an educator – he led each of us out of ourselves.

He raised the bar for us all, he made us just a little bit better than we could otherwise have been. I think he taught us all,not just the 3,000 students in the university courses that he guided into new worlds, and he taught us all by example .

He taught us to be respectful of history but at the same time question the prevailing orthodoxy, and to say calmly, quietly but if necessary repeatedly – things should and can change.

He taught us how to make ideas happenhe was a social entrepreneur - and he knew better than most how to work with people ...often many people.....whether professional, government or community didn't really matter – he mixed them all togetherwhat really mattered was the idea .

He knew the difference between the *house* that was a pile of clever, expensive, stuff sitting lifelessly in magazine photos ... and *housing* that regardless of whether it was public, private, new, old, urban or rural had to be about enriching people's lives. He took a house and with an idea he made *housing a verb*

He showed how to continually look forward and rarely spent time basking in the glow of his considerable number of past wins and successes –

- late last year visiting Col in the nursing home ... I saw how the room had become his officewith projects still to sort, letters to write people to talk to – there was always more to do.

Last and perhaps the hardest of all, he showed the courage to take on projects where the chance of failure was not just on the cards but almost certain,

he worked for those with need ... not money – I asked him one night on a plane flight back to Sydney how he kept going after a defeat ... and he confided that first you look forward and second, you remind yourself that anyone who has been given access to an education ... had the responsibility to at least try and make change.

Col would gently demand action from us all.

It's time now for us all to take giant steps.