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Saturday



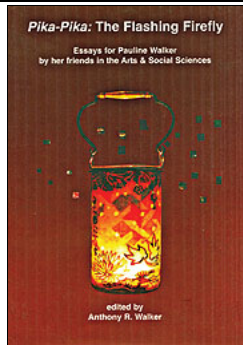
- Local News
- Opinion
- Features
- World News
- Sports
- Dennis Lau's Borneo
- Stopff's World
- Event Horizon
- Daily BB Online
- BB Sunday Online
- Media Permata Online
- About Us
- Letters to the Editor
- Feedback & Comments

Features

Tribute to Pauline

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Pika-Pika: The Flashing Firefly: Essays for Pauline Walker by her friends in the Arts & Social Sciences. New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 2009. xv+489 pp., black and white photos; maps; index. ISBN 81-7075-087-3. US\$36.00



The cover of Pika-Pika designed by Michael Arun Walker in honour of his mother.



Pauline Walker with Rungus Dusun in northwestern Sabah, 2000. - A.R. WALKER

Avid readers of the *Borneo Bulletin* will over the last years have become familiar with the Lahu people of northern Thailand and the Todas of southern India. The author of these serialised ethnographies is Anthony R Walker, professor of anthropology at UBD, who has spent the last five decades studying these societies. But many readers may not know that his collaborator in much of the fieldwork on which his research is based and the editorial work for many of his publications (including articles for the *Borneo Bulletin*) was his wife Pauline, who died in 2005 here in Brunei.

In time for the fifth anniversary of his wife's death, Professor Walker has edited a book to honour Pauline's memory and celebrate her life. Their son Michael illustrated the cover of the book with a lantern that illuminates little sparkling fragments swirling around like fireflies that soak up light. The book contains twenty essays by, as the subtitle says, "her friends in the arts and social sciences". Although each essay begins and ends with a tribute that connects its respective subject matter to Pauline's life, this is not a biography, apart from the introduction by Professor Walker as editor, which gives the reader a brief outline of her life. One cannot review this book without reference to Pauline's life. Born just before WWII and brought up as a Protestant pastor's daughter in the Mid-Western US, after completing an M.A. on the poetry of W.B. Yeats's, Pauline volunteered for the recently established US Peace Corps to teach English in Kenya. After finishing her assignment there, she set out on her own to travel back to the US through Africa and Asia. It was on a stopover at Seoul airport that she first met Anthony. And after fate led them together again shortly afterwards in Japan, they stayed together for the next thirty-five years until Pauline was tragically taken from this life. Their stations in life led them first to Oxford where her husband finished his doctorate, and then on to Penang, Singapore, Ohio, Fiji and eventually to Brunei, all places where her husband took up teaching positions, and in-between again and again there were research visits to the Lahu and Toda. Although Pauline's life stations depended on her husband's jobs and interests, at each place they lived together she developed her own interests, built her own circle of friends, and published her own work (the book concludes with a bibliography of her publications). Unlike her husband, Pauline was not an anthropologist, but she had a wide range of interests and correspondingly diverse circle of friends all over the world. This diversity of her life and her interests is reflected in the essays by her friends collected in this book. The first part deals with music and dance (in Singapore, Pauline was dance critique for the *Straits Times*), the second part deals with literature and theatre (her major at university), the third and fourth parts on pottery and craftsmanship (which she collected and on occasion produced herself). The remaining three parts are more anthropological in nature: women's issues, non-western healing practices, and religion. In a brief review such as this, it is not possible to do justice to this very diverse collection of essays, especially since each focuses on different parts of the world that Anthony and Pauline called home at one time or other. But of particular interest to readers in Borneo will be Pudarno Binchin's paper on traditional healing practices of the Brunei Dusun, and Tan Chee-Beng's essay on the decline of traditional crafts of the Badeng, a subgroup of the Kenyah living in the upper Rejang river in Sarawak.

Also of interest to readers in island Southeast Asia will be Gregory Forth's comparative study of bird myths in eastern Indonesia, and Roger Long's account of the changes Javanese shadow play (*wayang kulit*) has undergone as a result of technological innovation, for example through the introduction of electrical sounds and lights. Artistically inclined readers, particularly those interested in Indian dance, will also find Vineeta Sinha's account of the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Association of interest. Given her husband's decades old research interests in the hill peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, it is not astonishing to find several of the contributions from friends working in the same area. For readers keen to pursue their interest in Lahu ethnography further, James Matisoff's linguistic analysis of Lahu religious poetry will be of interest. Other essays focusing on the same region are Elizabeth Hinton's paper on the sacred music of the neighbouring Karen and Paul Cohen's account of Buddhist pilgrimages in the Upper Mekong.

There are other essays on modern jazz music, Haitian trance rituals, Elizabethan theatre, South Pacific pottery, Toda dress, the commercialization of Native American crafts, body modification in Africa and the US, a Japanese mountain goddess cult, Korean sex slaves during WWII, Nepalese faith healers and an analysis of the myth of the lost Worlds of El Dorado in Colombia. Together they are testimony to the amazing range of topics that could engage Pauline's interests. This is thus a very diverse collection of essays that first and foremost reflects the interests and life stations of Pauline Walker. But is it just a collection of essays, or is it more than the sum of its parts? For those who knew Pauline, it is testimony to her diverse intellectual interests, multicultural life and cosmopolitan personality and even her closest friends will discover in the book aspects of her life they did not know about previously. Those readers who did not know her will have to choose the essays closest to their interests, but as a whole the book is intellectual memorial created by her friends that give fascinating glimpses of a complex and unusual life. While today a life as multi-cultural and cosmopolitan as Pauline's, may not be quite as unique as it was for her generation, her intellectual curiosity, her hunger for new experiences, and her willingness to engage with different worlds are a source of fascination and inspiration not only to her friends in the arts and social sciences, but also to those who did not have the fortune to know her personally.



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