

BERNARD Q. NIETSCHMANN, 1941–2000
REQUIEM FOR A FRIEND

W. GEORGE LOVELL

When word reached me of Barney Nietschmann's death—he succumbed to esophageal cancer at the age of fifty-eight—I was back home in Glasgow, Scotland, dealing there with a family crisis of a similarly somber nature. Barney's death only deepened the sense of loss I felt, for it followed that of two other scholars at the University of California, Berkeley, whose work I admired and whose friendship I cherished, Woodrow W. Borah (1912–1999) and James J. Parsons (1915–1997). Borah and Parsons, as did my mother, reached and then surpassed the biblical span of three score years and ten. Barney, however, fell short of that mark, taken from us in his alert and fruitful prime, with much more to do and with much more to give (Figure 1). If I regard Barney's death as untimely, others must do so even more. Who in attendance at the June 2001 meeting of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, when Barney was honored posthumously with the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award, will forget how his young daughter, Tangni, whose name in Miskito translates as "Flower," accepted the recognition on her father's behalf. At Benicassim in Spain that evening, the stately palm trees lining the Mediterranean stood on surrogate guard for those of Barney's beloved "Caribbean Edge." As Tangni's choked words mingled with the sound of the sea it was impossible not to think about how much Barney would have appreciated the setting, how much the notion of celebrating his achievements beside a beautiful shore would have pleased him.

How can I forget the energy, indeed the drama, of the circumstances of our first encounter? As Barney would approve, the historical geographer in me must furnish the necessary coordinates: the time, October 1983; the place, a lecture theater in the Graduate School of Journalism, a stone's throw from the Earth Sciences Building (it will never be McCone Hall for me) on the northern edge of the Berkeley campus. Amid a packed audience I sat next to Jim Parsons, listening to Barney lament what he considered the misguided, heavy-handed, culturally insensitive, and morally unacceptable manner in which the Sandinista government in Nicaragua was treating its Miskito Indian communities. I did not know Barney personally at the time, but I admired his courage and his clarity in speaking out. I said as much to Jim Parsons.

"They're not going to like it," Jim responded.

How right he was. Much of what Barney had to say that afternoon, and subsequently, did not go over well with certain factions of those in attendance. Some ill-tempered, downright nasty allegations were hurled at him. To some of Barney's critics, coming in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Grenada, the timing of his disclo-

✪ DR. LOVELL is a professor of geography at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6.