

## GERARD RIXHON, 1925-2012

### *Maricor Baytion*

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On September 1, 2012, Prof. Gerry Rixhon, beloved author and teacher, passed away after a massive stroke. He had just turned 87 a few weeks earlier, on August 20.

Prof. Rixhon spent a good part of his life studying Sulu and its rich culture. In 1968, after two years of graduate studies in anthropology at the Ateneo de Manila, he returned to Jolo amidst political turmoil and uncertainty to direct the research activities of the Coordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture, the research arm of the Notre Dame of Jolo College. His dream of preserving Tausug verbal arts was met with challenges on several fronts—from an initial lack of enthusiasm for the project displayed by young educated Tausug, to outright disapproval by some religious leaders; from the restrictive atmosphere created by martial law, to the destruction and disappearance of recorded material as research became an added casualty in the crossfire. His last book, *Voices from Sulu* (2010), tells of the heartbreaking loss of documented artifacts: after the Army took control of Notre Dame of Jolo in early 1974, “the soldiers recorded radio music” over cassettes that contained Tausug ballads, songs, and proverbs, which represented hundreds of hours of painstakingly taped interviews and performances.

But Prof. Rixhon proved to be of sterner stuff than all the obstacles that came his way. He eventually published articles about these oral traditions in subsequent issues of a journal called *Sulu Studies* from 1972 to 1994. In many more venues—classrooms, conferences, conversations—his passion for the study of Tausug life and culture had been truly palpable. And through all this time, his desire to propagate knowledge about and appreciation for it had been unwavering.

To the young people he had encountered and converted to his cause decades ago, and to those of us whom he had infected with his enthusiasm in more recent times, Prof. Rixhon showed how it is to dedicate one’s life to scholarship as a way of instilling greater understanding of and respect for ourselves and one another.

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