

The Man and the Voice.

For many hours today I have had Mark Colvin's voice in my head. He called often to share what we knew and felt, to revive the spirit and warmly recall both the adventure and fragility of life.

In 1994 we camped together in a gutted convent in Rwanda. Chris Masters was there too. In the darkness, ugly dogs gnawed on the corpses of Tutsis butchered in the genocide. Almost one million people killed in less than thirty days. Hard to comprehend. Yet on the road we had shared for forty years, old friends understood that this was political madness, hatched by a Hutu kitchen-cabinet that sat around a table and contemplated the slaughter.

At first light we scattered in different directions, each trying to find the truth and make the world understand. At that stage the fields of Rwanda looked more like an abattoir, nothing like any of the thirty odd conflicts I have reported on. Mark followed the streaming hordes of panic, talking to people who had trudged across fields full of the stench of the dead, traumatized children who stared right through you, old people staggering until they died on the side of the road.

That was the year that Mark became gravely ill, as if the horror had left a permanent mark on him, eating away at his will to live. Yet nothing could stop him sitting at that microphone and making sense of the world he knew so well.

What courage and heart, what eternal good humour, to go on as his body agonizingly fell apart.

To have seen what we have seen and to peer into the minds of human beings, all the glory along with the predatory violence, is to have lived ten lifetimes in one and to understand the miracle, the preciousness of every breath, the warmth of an embrace from the women we love, the touch of our children's hands.

We shared childhood experiences in different years on the island of Penang. We became the educated generation of young ABC journalists who brought the world home to Australians.

Across the globe we wandered, writing, filming and living life to the hilt.

There was so much music and laughter, so many joyful hours of celebrating, of talking about books, great writing, bold thinking, bright lives that yearned not only for the fleeting happiness of the moment but the earthly paradise we imagined the 21st Century could be.

The man calling me down the telephone line is whispering in a softer tone. The strength is ebbing. Gently we exchange goodbyes of a sort that made sense.

It has been good to share life with you. I will see you Mark, out there in the great continuum.