

Michael's Eulogy by Tricia Bhatia

It's so hard to capture in words Michael's exquisite gift to the world. Of course, there are his professional accomplishments--those are many and impressive--but already accounting for his great intellect, they were also attributable to the type of man he was--kind, caring, compassionate, dedicated to everyone and to making the world better.

Michael was brilliant. Brilliant isn't just a word people use to describe someone who is unusually smart, but someone who just can't help but share their high intellect with the world - one of Michael's mentors Jarat Chopra, notes that Michael arrived at Brown "...as an undergraduate struck by lightning, a bolt that pre-determined knowledge of what he wanted to do, whatever its final form." But, Michael's brilliance came at no cost. As Michael's college roommate Fred Mello has noted, "Brilliant people often have exceedingly sharp edges. Michael was the rare exception. He had heart. He was rarely not smiling, not laughing, not recognizing the beauty in people and in the world."

Michael was not necessarily religious, but he had great faith. His faith, his values, his passions directed him into the type of work which brought him to dangerous places, and he retained his optimism in spite of them. I think the values that he embodies were imparted to us by our mother - she steered Michael into scouting and the church - both of which were a considerable part of the person Michael became. Certainly boyscouting taught him alot - all sorts of camping and trekking skills, but upon reading the Scout oath and law - how remarkably Michael has remained true to it! - to serve his country, help others, and obey the scout law--to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

Myself and my family have taken great comfort and strength from how well-respected and loved Michael is. Also, that Michael's life's mission was so noble and that his gifts were so bent on improving the lives of others. Michael was a peacemaker. Upon wiki'ing the name Michael - a method of research Michael would not condone - I found that in the old testament Michael is generally depicted as the archangel, or as the field commander of the Army of God. Monsignor also informed me that the name "Michael" means "Who is like God" - and that God is the warrior of peace. How fitting that that is what he was doing when he was killed - trying to bring peace and understanding to a part of the world that had been marginalized and forgotten from decades of conflict.

Michael had the unique ability to bring everyone together. A few holidays ago, Michael and I went out with some of his high school buddies. Some guys our age sort of picked us out at the bar and started up a conversation - perhaps intent on dismantling us. One was a veteran of the Iraq war - no doubt, if Michael were here he would be able to tell us the exact number of duties the guy had served, where, and in what capacity. The young soldier had quite obviously been to hell and back, and had considerable difficulty biting back his pain. I had a hard time listening to him, but while Michael and I were both opponents of the Iraq war, for Michael that was neither here nor there - he sat there quietly listening to this man and trying to ease some of his burden.

Indeed, Michael was a selfless listener. A friend of his wrote to us about the first occasion on which she met Michael: "Upon sitting down with him, I immediately realized I was in the midst of a high brow gent whose outstanding characteristic was the ability to make me feel like I was the only person in the crowded breakfast spot. He listened to me with deep intent. He had the uncanny ability to make his listener feel as though their information was extremely important and relevant to him."

Michael's sense of humor and enthusiasm is so evident to everyone - it even comes across through his emails - so composed and respectful, but always with touches of fun and humor. His silliness, as Matthew Tejada, one of Michael's fellow Marshall scholars, noted "I don't think I've ever known a person whose eyes would have such a perceptible sparkle at the mention of anything funny, challenging, interesting or heartfelt." It's hard not to think of Michael without thinking of some silly or goofy moment or something entirely endearing about him. Michael enjoyed life and the simple things that make life worth living. Everyone who knows him is familiar with his love of food and drink, animals, art, music, culture - there was very little that couldn't occupy his interest - if you have ever been to a museum with him, you undoubtedly know that, 6 hours later.

Perhaps, as his sister, and having grown up together, I took for granted the man he was. After all, my memories of Michael also include him imposing limited visiting hours to his bedroom on me when we were kids. We grew into great friends, and our friendship was still growing in so many ways. As teenagers, he particularly enjoyed walloping me in Risk, of course. As adults, he has been a great source of strength and pride. Ours has never been a jealous relationship. We have basked in each other's accomplishments, and according to his friends he has sung my praises as much I his. But, Michael was better - he was a true role model - not jut to the young people he taught, but also people his senior. He was the best big brother - and his legacy to me, to all of us is one full of gifts of love, courage, hope, and beauty. Just contemplating his strength and character has left me with a breathtaking gift of resolve and love to give to the world in his honor.

It's not fair that he was taken from us so soon. He deserved more time. He accomplished so much in his short life and realized so many of his dreams, but he had so many more. It's so easy to forget how young he was. It's just not fair that he's gone, but I have resolved not to dwell in Michael's death, but his incredible life--where, even in the midst of chaos and darkness, Michael could find the spirit and beauty of life.