

# Michael Eroy Eulogy

Michael Eroy was born April 9, 1952 in the Camp Pendleton Naval Hospital in Oceanside, CA. He grew up in Los Alamitos, a small town in Orange Country east of Long Beach and west of Disneyland. He was the only son of a Puerto Rican mother, Aura, and a Filipino father, Casimiro. Michael had five sisters: three older sisters—Francie, Rosie, and Mary Lou—and two younger sisters, Joanie and Mona.

His father, as a steward in the Navy, was often away on duty for extended periods of time. As a result, Michael grew up in a very loving, and very female environment. As a boy and teenager, Michael was drawn mostly to reading and studying the liberal arts: poetry, philosophy, history, and art appreciation. He even took a home economics class. And he remained an avid reader all his life: he learned speedreading techniques that allowed him to read quickly and absorb texts and literature on a vast range of subjects.

In high school, Michael did play football and earned his varsity letter, though in early adolescence he was not particularly athletic. (Rosie takes credit for teaching him how to throw a football.) Michael played middle linebacker, the player who runs the defense the way the quarterback runs the offense. In senior year, his high school team participated in a playoff competition that included some local college teams. In the semi-finals his high school team played, and defeated, a college team. Michael's family hosted the post-game celebrations, and his father, a master chef, baked a giant cake in the form of a football stadium.

Scholastically Michael was only an average student in high school. However, he did remarkably well on the SAT exams, the tests that American high school students take in their senior year to determine their readiness and aptitude for college life. The doors suddenly opened wide for Michael, and he could have attended any number of colleges and universities. He chose to enroll in nearby Long Beach State, as a Philosophy major. His first two years in college were very rewarding: Michael did change majors a couple of times, and he entered fully into college life.

But as many of us know, early successes in life can lead just as often into doubt and questioning of the meaning of life, as to any future imagined goal. Michael dropped out of college after two years, and for a while he basically did nothing. This, we can say in retrospect, was for him a Divine Nothing, a period where his internal compass was seeking its star and true internal direction home.

After a period of time hanging around, Michael moved up to his sister Joanie's home in Eureka, a town near the northwest corner of California on the Pacific Ocean. There Michael had the first of his "Eureka" moments. He heard or read about construction and home building projects taking place—in Florida. So Michael moved to Florida and worked as a builder. After a while, one of the foremen suggested to Michael that if he wanted to continue in this discipline, he needed to study for and acquire his building contractor's license. And this Michael did. When he returned to California a year later, he entered fully into the practice of the lifelong career he is so well-known for.

It was not long before Michael's second, most precious "Eureka" moment arrived. He had been reading books about the Fourth Way, and when he came upon an ad for the School, he called the number at once, arranged for prospective student meetings, and joined the School in Carmel in early February 1974. He began attending meetings and events, while driving back and forth between northern and southern California as his jobs dictated. But in a very short time, Michael encountered an unexpected interval, which was then bridged in a most unexpected way.

Early 1974 was the time of the energy crisis, when gasoline was very scarce, and drivers needed to wait literally hours at a time to fill the gas tank. People would often run out of gas just while waiting to get to the pump. And in many stations there were often only one or two pumps available, because pumps would be reserved for gasoline company credit card holders—of which there were very few at the time.

So Michael suddenly found himself stranded at home. He often fondly told his friends the story of what happened next. One day he was washing his truck when his father came out to him to ask what was going on. His father knew that Michael had joined something very important to him, and his father also recognized that Michael was a different, and much happier, person than he had ever seen him before. He asked Michael, "What are you doing here? I thought you were attending those meetings, at that place up north." Michael explained the situation, and then his father pulled out his wallet, took out one of those gasoline credit cards, handed it to Michael and said, "You—you go back to that place, and you go to those meetings." Michael was forever grateful for his father's timely generosity.

The year 1974 was a special spring and summer at Apollo. Robert had firmly decided to begin in earnest to develop the property and establish buildings, dwellings, and agriculture. This development phase accelerated and continued for the next several years. The Lodge (Apollo d'Oro) was gutted, rebuilt, and extended. The existing vegetable gardens were expanded, the chicken coop was enlarged to a "poultry complex," and we began looking for a consultant to advise us about establishing a vineyard and winery.

Michael was always responsible for "the bones" of a project: the forms and foundations, the rough construction, while others were brought in later for finishing work. Michael was involved in expanding the Lodge, helping to install the mezzanine and, with one other student, creating the first really beautiful room at Apollo—the Library, with walls, floors and shelving of polished redwood. This space, which now encompasses the Bar and Gift Shop, was also used for evening dining.

Michael often liked to recount a story during the Lodge construction phase that remained a signature moment for him. The roof began leaking at some point where the old and new spaces were connected, and Robert politely requested the carpenters, one by one, to get it fixed. Each carpenter would explain to Robert the particular problem with this leak—but without offering to do anything about it. Robert finally approached Michael, and at first Michael too began to explain what the problem was. But unlike with everyone else, Robert interrupted Michael and said, "Michael, a man is a man, and a roof is a roof—fix it!" Michael fixed it, and he took from that moment a deeper understanding of avoiding defeatist attitudes and completing octaves.

Michael worked on the Bath House in Anderson Court, helped install the roof here at the Festival Hall, did the finish carpentry at the Ming House, and in the mid-90s oversaw the construction of the large kitchen and upstairs salon at Apollo d'Oro. His signature achievement during his first residency at Apollo was constructing the large concrete pad for the Winery. Karl Werner, the winemaker, wanted to begin making wine as soon as possible, so it was decided to pour a concrete pad, install the stainless-steel fermentation tanks, and put a giant tent over all of it to begin making wine while the rest of the building was still under construction. The architects drew up all the required specifications for the floor, the runoff channels, the mounts for the tanks, and the air support system for the dome tent. The project was very complicated, and everyone who was involved at that time agrees that Michael was the only one who understood what needed to be done and how to do it. He and four untrained workers built all the forms, installed the rebar, managed a complicated series of concrete pours, and completed all the finish work. It remains one of our greatest construction achievements, and that foundation is still in place today.

In 1980, Michael moved to the Bay Area and for the next ten years did home building and renovations. Michael was a true master builder. He managed the construction of a high-rise apartment building in Berkeley near the terminal of the Bay Bridge. He was once tasked with stopping an apartment complex situated on a hillside from slipping downhill. And he participated in building many homes in Marin, large and small, simple and extravagant.

From project to project, Michael deepened his understanding and mastery of all phases of construction and finish work. Someone commented that Michael often did not know how much he knew, especially when it came to delegating tasks to others and expecting certain results. He had exceptional knowledge of all phases of a building project, and an intuitive sense of the best way to complete a given task. When he observed someone else's work, he was able to see the consequences of how they were going about something, and often made corrections and adjustments, large or small, accordingly.

Yes, he was often strict on the job, and he would never allow something to stand that was beneath his high standards. But as one fellow carpenter put it, "that was Michael's tough love." And yet, though he was very passionate, very strong, and very stubborn, if you got beyond that tough, rugged, and opinionated exterior, you discovered an extremely frail and vulnerable person, both physically and emotionally.

Michael moved back to Apollo in 1990, and except for a year in London and another year in San Francisco, spent the rest of his life here. Michael loved being a woodworker. He ran the carpentry shop and served as mentor to many students, constantly emphasizing the importance of using the right tool for every job. And although Michael was a master, he certainly made his own share of mistakes; and he could always laugh about them, and poke fun at himself for getting something wrong.

As masterful as Michael was at his craft, the person who most students knew and loved was Michael the student, the lover, the friend and companion on the spiritual path. As one student put it, "Michael would light up whatever room he entered with an unquenchable optimism. He was always fun to be around and always had a positive outlook on life."

Michael had this infectious laugh—which it was impossible to resist; he laughed easily and often. The years he lived in San Francisco he was the most generous of hosts. Students arriving either from Apollo or the San Francisco airport were greeted by Michael with his big smile and open arms. He hosted many students over the years, always beaming his big, positive energy and showing how sincerely happy he was to open his door to them. He had an exceptionally refined palate, and was a connoisseur of good wine and good food. He maintained a collection of fine wines, and he was an accomplished chef. Michael also knew the location of all the best restaurants in San Francisco, especially the inconspicuous secret ones.

Michael was always looking out for others. In the aftermath of the '97 fire, to take one instance among many, he spent several days driving to the homes of the students who were the most vulnerable—single mothers, women and handicapped friends living alone—just to see if there was anything he could do for them. And in the aftermath of the '89 earthquake, when he learned that his mother's small home near Watsonville had been seriously damaged, Michael showed up unannounced and put it all back together.

The last major project Michael worked on at Apollo was the renovation of Villa Bacetti. Some of us recall that the original living room at the Villa was basically a glorified closet. To expand the room required moving out the patio-side wall to meet the end of the balcony above. Three architects reviewed the potential project, and all three concluded that it could not be done, without serious risk of a disaster like the roof collapsing. But, a roof is a roof—Michael looked it over and said with confidence that he could expand the room. And, as we know, he did. He also remodeled the kitchen and terraces, installed a new bathroom, and fashioned the extensive metalwork that decorates part of the building we all enjoy today.

Michael was happy, strong, intelligent, loving—and then, he was called upon to take on a new, unexpected burden. In early December 2009, Michael was preparing to leave for a few days in Napa Valley, to continue work on a major construction project. Solee remembers the morning he was about to drive back there to complete a few things. He lingered and lingered, chatting with her and sipping tea and eating cakes—and basically seemed reluctant to depart. A day or two later he was working in a shed cutting boards on his table saw. Children were playing on the large construction site, and they could hear the sounds of the saw and cutting wood in the distance. But after a time they noticed that the saw kept humming and humming, but there was no sound of wood being cut. They went over and peeked into the shed, and saw Michael lying on the floor. The ambulance was called and Michael was rushed to the nearest hospital. The stroke was massive—the right side of his body was paralyzed, and a brain scan later revealed damage to almost half his brain. Along with paralysis, Michael suffered severe aphasia and lost the ability to speak.

Michael moved in with Solee and myself in early February 2010. The first ten days a different volunteer spent the night with Michael, and he was bathed every day until he felt confident enough to do it himself. During the six and half years he was with us, many friends offered help in any way they could: bringing meals, giving massages, taking him to therapy appointments, taking him for drives or walks, watching a film or TV show with him, or just coming by to say hello. Every effort, every visit, long or brief, constant or occasional, was greatly appreciated by him and by everyone giving him care.

For some years he had regular therapy sessions; he worked faithfully on his exercises, and he did regain movement and sensation in his affected leg and upper arm. He also struggled to regain some level of speech, and he was able to make himself understood, though the Michael who had mastered the art of conversation was no longer able to share in the way that delighted him and so many others.

Robert invited Michael on a regular basis to private dinners at the Galleria. He would always come over and give Michael a kiss on the forehead, and looking into his eyes he would say, “Michael, you never looked better.” And this was true—Michael was often simple and present. You gazed into his eyes, and he was always there to look back at you. By the standard of remaining in the moment, Michael continued to have much to teach us all.

And over time it became clear that, as much as Michael worked to regain mobility and acumen, he also understood at a certain point that he had to let go. And this he did. As we know, letting go is an ongoing process, not a single event. This side of Michael’s suffering—the silent, day after day living with his condition, receiving love and attention, but also living with loneliness and isolation—was the great burden that it was asked of him to bear, for fourteen and a half years.

In August 2016, Michael moved into his last home in Oregon House on Rices Crossing Road. Mary and Elizabeth, who had been helping with Michael’s care from the beginning, became his principle caregivers for the rest of his life. There he lived until 2021, when it became necessary for him to transfer to the PostAcute nursing home in Marysville. His motor functions soon declined to the point where moving him to a wheelchair became too difficult, and so he was confined to bed. A few friends continued to visit Michael on a regular basis, bringing him meals and watching a film with him or reading to him. He especially favored hearing the words of our Teacher, particularly from “Bread upon Water” and “Awakening”.

Michael died in the early hours of April 2, one week before what would have been his 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday. He had over fifty years in the School. As he was unable to attend the fiftieth anniversary dinner with the Teacher, all of his companions from that year sent him a card, sending love and wishing him the best. The last person to sign the card was Robert, who wrote:

“I am so grateful to have seen everyone in Paradise.”

Fare thee well, Michael. Fare thee well.