

Michael Alexander Ingall
Yehiel Michel ben Moshe Z'ev U'Batya
Died August 12, 2004—26 Av 5764

It is so sad for me – for all of us – to bid farewell to Michael Ingall – cousin Michael. But this is the season of *nehemta*—of comfort and consolation for the Jewish people. We must find some comfort that Michael lived so much of life, though he struggled with life itself; that he exemplified the highest values and commitments; and that he was outrageously and irreverently funny.

All this began 64 years ago...

Bess, you remember Michael as having a good childhood in spite of his struggle with polio. You said he was not a mischievous child, but he was always provocative.

His sisters have a bit of a different story – they remember the provocative part, but as for “not mischievous,” ...Nancy, you recalled all those “noogies” Michael would give you just when you fell asleep in the car. And Gilda, you don’t like to recount the time Michael decided to try out your father’s ether on you, and how you dislocated your arm trying to wiggle away. But Michael really loved you both dearly. When you were at camp he was protective of you as a big brother, and he really was sorry later for the teasing he did as a kid. You remember his loyalty, his dedication, and love of family, and how he embraced your Joel and Sam and your children.

Carol, your *shiddukh* with Michael goes back to your childhood. You were one of Michael’s father’s patients, and you later saw in Michael, his father’s loving and loveable qualities. Michael’s father, Morry, took out your tonsils on the kitchen table. One time, he even told your mother, “Do I have a *shiddukh* for your daughter!” Though Michael would say that his father told that to all the mothers with young daughters, you had a sense that Morry really meant you were Michael’s *bashert*. And, in many ways, you were. You have been such a wonderful match over the years. You were the more goal-directed serious one, and Michael added the wonderfully outrageous fun and spice to your life. It was not until you were 14, right after Michael’s father died, that you worked up the courage to tell him how sorry you were and to strike up a conversation at Hebrew College. But it was at Camp Yavneh that you really saw Michael’s true qualities. One day, one of the campers jumped off a roof breaking his legs, and it was Michael who stepped forward to take charge, getting one camper to call the ambulance and another to go for help. That competence impressed you then as it did your whole lives. As you said, Michael knew how to fulfill the injunction,

B'makom she'ain ish hishtadel lih'yot ish

--stand up and be the in-charge person when noone else comes forward.

At Barnard, you waited for his letters. They were *great* letters – a precursor to Farklempt – just the right combination of funny and serious – like Michael. Over the years you have supported each other. He encouraged you in your career, and delighted that you went back for your doctorate, and he never wanted to stand in the way of your doing what you love to do. It was “Carol’s” apartment in New York, the apartment he was so happy you got to set up but, sadly, he will not share with you.

When you were 60, he memorized *eshet chayil* – “A woman of valor” – because you wanted him to sing it to you each Friday night. He did have to change one word: instead of “teref” – “provisions she brings to her home,” Michael couldn’t resist saying, “traif,” in his inimitable humor. But your home together was not only kosher, it was a wonderful and loving home for Margie and Andy.

Margie and Andy, both of you appreciated so much the love and encouragement your father gave you as you were growing up and maturing into adulthood. And you especially appreciate how he listened to you so attentively.

Margie, you remember sitting on your father’s lap telling him silly stories you made up, and how carefully he listened to your stories. In many ways, that encouragement of you to be a storyteller, to go in your own direction, and to be a little outrageous as he was, is what led you to be the wonderful writer you are. His letters to you at camp were a model. Your mother dutifully wrote long informative letters every day, but the few letters your dad wrote were so hilarious, that it was those you had to read out loud to the entire bunk. But your father also had his serious side and his deep values. He was so proud of you for your giving blood – something you thought nothing of doing. He was steadfastly there for you on the phone when you had your allergic attack, literally saving your life, and he has been generous to you in many loving ways.

Andy, your father’s ability to listen was crucial to you. When you were going through a crisis and turning point in your life during college, your dad was right there at Thanksgiving, taking you aside and listening, and, more importantly, understanding and empathizing with what you were saying. You learned many things from your father’s example: being an anti-war activist, having a flair for the dramatic, and also being a bit irreverent. Andy and Margie, Michael was so proud of what you have become, in your professional and personal lives, and he felt so fortunate to see you mature and find wonderful partners in life.

Jonathan and Neal – Michael loved both of you like his own children. That had two sides: He embraced you immediately as part of the family, but he also would tell you directly if he felt you were headed in the wrong direction. Jonathan, he loved your special genius with computers – there would have been no Farklempt page without you. And, Neal, he had a special bond with you as a fellow physician – especially after you taught him something about polio that he never knew.

And, of course, Josie was the love of his life – you don't have to read *The Forward* to know that. Josie and Michael had a special connection. Michael would light up when she was around. Michael, of course, knew she was brilliant at birth. But Josie is perceptive. She said this week, that she was going to visit Zaidie, and she would kiss him on the cheek, and then he would open his eyes – and if anyone could have performed that miracle, Josie could have. Sadly, Michael will not see Josie's sibling.

Michael was a family person through and through. When everyone was gathered around the table for an occasion, he would be his maudlin self, and say how wonderful and fortunate they were to be together. He was devoted to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and us cousins.

But Michael was an outstanding person in this community. As Carol said, Michael was “larger than life.” He was one of the leading psychiatrists in Rhode Island. Michael loved medicine from his childhood. He would go on house calls with his father, who was an outstanding and compassionate doctor. And Michael would see not only the fine medical treatment, but also the kindness when his father would quietly slip money under the pillow of a poor patient. Michael had an uncanny knack of being able to size people up in a moment. He combined his love of medicine and his understanding of human nature into a unique career. Following his father's example, Michael had the personal concern and caring for each of his own patients, especially those who were less fortunate. That is why he would go out in a Taveler's Aid trailer to treat indigent patients. That is why the Whitmarsh House was special to him and its director a beloved friend. Once, when one of the boys there wanted to hear an opera, Michael got him a ticket, made sure he was properly dressed, and personally took him to the opera. Patients in nursing homes, facilities and hospitals were so devoted to Michael and grateful for what he did for them.

Michael always liked taking the “road less traveled” – the unconventional route. When everyone was doing private practice, he built a community mental health facility – at the

Providence Center, and at RIGHA, to be exemplary programs. But Michael had no patience for less than excellent treatment, and when funding shifted and the tide seemed to change, Michael moved to private practice where he could be free to criticize a system that he felt was heading in the wrong direction. Whether it was regarding managed care or individual treatment, Michael never compromised his principles and he stood up and spoke out when he felt patients were getting less than excellent care. As one of his colleagues said, “Michael was the conscience of the psychiatric and medical community for a high ethical standard of practice.”

Michael was a man of strong values and uncompromising principles in every area. He always spoke out for causes in which he believed: Whether it was the anti-nuclear movement, or Soviet Jewry, or Israel, Michael was there to demonstrate and speak out.

Michael was a devoted Jew even if he was sometimes ambivalent about observance. He was a *yode'a sefer* – he was knowledgeable, had a good background from Maimonides and Hebrew College, and he respected Jewish knowledge. He loved doing things the old fashioned way – and the seder he ran was like his Zaidie's; not that it didn't have innovations – like the guitar music he loved from the time he was the music counselor at camp. Last Pesah when he was missing his guitar, it just wasn't the same. He loved singing – whether in the Providence Singers or in the High Holiday choir. Singing and music were ways to get the most enjoyment out of life – and Michael loved to get the most out of life.

Life was indeed not easy for him – having polio as a child, a heart attack at 39, and a major heart reconstruction. Michael had the approach that you have to get the most out of life, and you shouldn't take life too seriously. We all know how much Michael enjoyed food and drink and fine restaurants. He would regale us on Farklempt with every last detail. But restaurants were also places to have fun.. As a matter of fact, he would often make a reservation under the name “P-h-u-n-n” – fun – just so he could hear the maitre d' call out, “Is the Phunn family here?” Even a few weeks ago he recounted to us his story of reserving a table at a famous Boston restaurant on a Saturday night, by putting on an Italian accent and using an infamous family pseudonym to make the reservation. Needless to say, he got a preferred table...and fast.

Michael loved going to the opera, seeing good movies, and watching good theatre. He had a flair for the dramatic. Anyone who heard him read the Akedah – “The Binding of Isaac” – on Rosh HaShannah knows what I mean. He would lift the pointer as it came to the dramatic moment, and then he would call out, “Avraham, Avraham,” to stay the knife.

Michael enjoyed biking – he got me and other friends into being bikers. He would bike to work as long as he was able, and he loved the Newport and Boston rides.

Michael loved to enjoy life because he knew that his own life was so precarious. The image of his father's death haunted him, and after that first heart attack, Michael felt he was dodging the *malakh ha-moves* – the Angel of Death – at every turn. He was named for his uncle “Michel” who died at a young age. So that this Michel would not have the same fate, they added “Yehiel” to Michael's name – May God bring life. And, indeed, Michael did ward off the *malakh ha-moves* – the Angel of Death – for 25 years. He got to see his children's weddings, he got to enjoy his granddaughter; he saw Carol in her new career; he saw many events, special occasions, patients, that he might never have seen. He found every medical treatment that would prolong his life. He and Carol were so hopeful that a heart transplant would again give him a new lease on life – even if it was for a limited time. That was going to be the summer's project – a new heart for Michael. But things did not turn out that way. One medical challenge after another, and then the fall, all became too overwhelming.

Carol, you have been so devoted to Michael. You kept up your hope, and your humor, and your rational approach until the very end. You have been by Michael's side all these years – half a century. You were always Michael's *eshet hayil*. It was not easy, but you wouldn't have missed a minute of it. You got to say, “I love you,” and hear his quiet, “I love you” in reply. And when he finally left us in that sad last moment you said how much you will miss the fun you had together.

But Michael had put down his own goodbyes years earlier. When Michael had his first heart attack in 1980. he wrote an ethical will to his family. It was typical Michael – a few of his words to us:

Last night I was resuscitated. That's the kind of pressure it takes to get me to write such stuff down. But I hope I have already said through my living, through my actions, through my family, through my behavior, through my work, what I now set down. I have loved life in this world. I have been lucky. My world has been good. Wealth, health (up to now), position, family, et al. Some of it I've earned, but a lot of it has come through plain old luck. Rule #1 Never, never take anything too seriously. Especially yourself.

I'm proud to be a Jew. To be a Jew you must know. You must study. You must go to Israel and see your heritage. Ritual is important. Community is important.

To my mother – Ma, I never told you “I love you” in those words. Ma – I love you. Ma, thank you for being father and mother after Daddy died.

Gilda: You are a good woman, A good mother. A caring person. Gilda I love you. You loved me.

Nancy: In some ways you had it over all of us. You were easy to talk with. A good kid. Nancy, I love you.

To my wife, to Carol. Now I am crying. You I will miss.

Zakharti lakh hesed n'urayikh, ahavat k'lulotayikh

“I remember the devotion of your youth, the love of your days as a bride.”

I have told you all. You know me better than anyone. You know my faults, my craziness, my psychosis. [and] You know my strengths and beauties.

To my children – I love you, you loved me. I am so proud of you. I would not want better children. I would like you to do the following:

Be what you choose.

Help other people, whether this is your work or not. This is critical to the survival of Man and the worth of Man in this world – Help other people. Help other people to feel good about themselves. That gives you a wonderful feeling, too.

[and here we see Michael's humor]

Belch loudly at the dinner table. It is a compliment to the chef, and a long established Ingall tradition. Teach your children this above all.

[Josie has already learned that lesson].

Always laugh and sing and make music.

I am so sad to leave you all. I am so rich and blessed to have loved you.

I have sung my song and made my music the best I could. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Michael Alexander Ingall. Yehiel Michal b'r Moshe Z'ev.

May we find *n'hamah*—consolation—in Michael's life.

Hamakom y'nahem etkhem –May the All Merciful One grant you, and us comfort.

Shalom cousin Michael!

Yehe Zikhro barukh.

May the memory of Michael Ingall be for a blessing.