

REMEMBERING MICHAEL CROWLEY

By Pat Kirklin



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Michael Crowley, who taught English and Photography at CRC for 31 years, passed away on March 18. During those 31 years he also served as the president of the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers (LRCFT) for six years, from 1987 to 1992. He was an early supporter of the LRCFT and took an active role in certifying the LRCFT as the union representing Los Rios faculty. In a heated contest, the LRCFT was overwhelmingly approved by faculty as the bargaining agent over the local CTA affiliate. Posters from that campaign in 1978 line the walls of the Union's office.

Michael was one of the first officers of the new union, representing CRC faculty on the Union's Executive Board. During his time on the Union's Executive Board, Michael was the main recruiter of new members. He also was instrumental in forming the LRCFT Political Action Fund Committee and in convincing his colleagues to voluntarily donate money on a monthly basis through payroll deduction.

Under Michael's leadership, the LRCFT increased its membership numbers from 40% of the faculty to 70%. In 1990, he led a successful campaign to implement "fair share/agency fees." Michael was president when the LRCFT negotiated the "salary bucket and trombone clause" innovations in the contract. Those two concepts are still being emulated by community college locals up and down the state. While Michael was president, he successfully steered the Union from the brink of bankruptcy. He also guided the Union through the difficult process

of hiring a new executive director. Even though he had planned to serve only two terms, he decided to serve another term in order to guide the Union through that transition period.

After his retirement, Michael was the recipient of the prestigious Ben Rust Award, given each year at the convention of the California Federation of Teachers. The award honors union members who have made significant contributions to the union movement.

Michael was a devoted family man who raised five children of his own and also raised foster children. He was a deacon at his local Catholic parish. He was a motorcycle and bicycle enthusiast and found time to build his own wooden boats. He was also an accomplished photographer and helped establish the CRC photography department.

Some people might have described Michael as "eccentric." He owned a strange assortment of pets—a raccoon and a cat that liked to take baths with him and his wife. He dressed in Birkenstock sandals and suits and ties off the rack of thrift stores. But, when all is said and done, Michael was the consummate English teacher, loved and respected by his students, colleagues, union brothers and sisters, fellow parishioners and family; a wonderful human being who will be greatly missed by all whose lives he touched. ■

MICHAEL J CROWLEY & ME: A REMEMBRANCE

By Richard Guches

Nearly 50 years ago, August 1964 to be exact, I walked into a classroom at Rio Linda High School and was introduced to fellow teacher, colleague, and soon to be best buddy, Michael J. He was about to begin his second year teaching, and me, my first. We had each served in the US Army, he as an officer with ROTC experience, me a draftee. Over the next six years we travelled similar paths: teaching high school in the day and classes at American River College in the evening. We lived on the same street only a few doors apart. And in our private lives we were each increasing the size of our respective families. Often commuting together, having dinner together between our day and evening teaching assignments, we found ourselves talking more and more about boats, specifically sailing, and about our mutual union activism. We became really good friends, buddies, if you will; never ever letting Michael's strong religious belief and my equally strong disbelief in any way interfere. In 1968 we each moved our families to the foothills in the Newcastle area, to what I called mini-ranchettes, where we each had large gardens and raised critters to eat.

Quite suddenly, in September 1970, I went full time to ARC and Michael went full time to CRC. Our commuting and dinner lives took a hit, but not our companionship around our increasing union involvement and our sailing. Michael built a small sailboat, a San Francisco Flyer, that we learned to sail on Fol-

som Lake, and then trailered down to the Sea of Cortez, Mexico for a fun frolic, just the two of us.

Michael graduated through the ranks of the union to become its president. Later I did the same. He continued his boat building and took up bicycling, he and his beloved Sissy, biking on a cycle built for two on adventures such as around Ireland.

We saw each other less frequently in the last 15 or so years because I spent many of those years sailing in the tropics off Central and South America and visited the Sacramento area less and less frequently, but tried to always save an evening to catch up with Mike and Sissy.

I will now have even less motivation to leave my enclave in the forested mountains of Southern Oregon to venture into the big city. I often said that one of the things I most enjoyed about a career as a college professor was the constant change: new class schedule, new students, new preparation, telling the same old jokes to fresh faces. The passing of Michael, however, is a change I truly lament. Sadly, that is the inevitability of life. ■

(Richard Guches taught English at ARC for many years and was LRCFT President from 1995–1998)

IN HONOR OF MIKE CROWLEY’S PASSING

By Chuck Van Patten

On March 18th Mike Crowley, our beloved friend and former colleague, passed on from cancer.

Mike had a long record of more than two decades of service as a leader in the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers (LRCFT). He was the LRCFT president for six years. Mike’s service as a union leader was defined by his vision for social justice that came out of his understanding of Biblical justice from the teachings of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets. To Mike, social justice favors the least advantaged or marginal of society, of a culture or of an organization like Los Rios. He applied that vision and those principles to his union activities.

Mike was at the negotiation table when Pat Kirklin was LRCFT president. That group established the trombone clause that has been the basis for LRCCD salary policy for almost 30 years. The idea that salaries would be cut in difficult times such as ours instead of doing layoffs to junior people is now a strong part of Los Rios culture, but to Mike, it was consistent with his conception of social justice. It affirms an equality among persons and rejects hierarchy or ranking. That salary policy, as Kirklin recently said, created labor peace.

Mike further served Los Rios by being the LRCFT’s major player in bringing about IBA when he was president. He reinforced the democratic culture of Los Rios by negotiating the Interest Based Approach (IBA) with district administrators. IBA, if followed with good faith by both sides, allows for interests of multiple parties to be met by creative and elegant options working together collaboratively by stake holders. The very idea and process of IBA inspires creativity, empathy and democracy among participants. The fact that the LRCCD board has officially established IBA as policy is a huge piece of Mike’s legacy of service. When the board officially endorsed IBA policy, that meant Los Rios was officially committed to democracy. And while some employees of Los Rios may be cynical about IBA, the fact remains that when it is followed in good faith - and it can be as alive as the stake holders wish it to be – the “win-win” consequences include more democracy and more peace.

Mike’s service to the faculty was also apparent in establishing “peer-review” in the contract. When AB-1725 passed, peer-review was mandated by the bill.



But the bill did not specify what form peer-review should take, only that it should be dominated by faculty and that the administrative opinion was less significant than faculty opinion. At that time, Bill Karns was LRCCD senate president and Mike was LRCFT president. Together they hammered out a concept and process for peer-review that still stands today in its original conception.

They saw peer-review as being about the improvement of instruction. He and Bill thought that peer-review should give faculty the opportunity to improve instruction; indeed, they did not envision peer-review as being punitive. They conceived of peer-review as being a sort of mandatory process where every three years a faculty member would meet with faculty colleagues and take a serious and rigorous look at her performance and see where the faculty member could improve her teaching.

They never saw it as a disciplinary tool or a means where individual, institutional or bureaucratic agendas could be forced upon the faculty members. They never saw it as a codification that had to be met to avoid a grievance.

Mike will be remembered by his family, his beloved wife Sissy, his many friends and colleagues, and his fellow parishioners at St. Anthony’s Church where he was a long-time deacon. ■

MICHAEL AS I KNEW HIM

By Robert Perrone

It was Thursday, August 23, 1990 when I first met Michael Crowley as he sat on a panel interviewing candidates for the position of LRCFT Executive Director. As I was in the middle of my interview, I looked over and saw Michael sitting there with his eyes closed. It appeared that he had fallen asleep, not a good sign when one is interviewing for a job. I was to find out later, from firsthand experience, that Michael often shut his eyes during meetings and, yes, sometimes he even nodded out. I learned not to take it personally.

From my first days in Sacramento as the new staff person for the LRCFT, Michael treated me as a member of his family. He made certain that my family and I were able to find adequate living arrangements and he arranged for the Union to pick up a large part of our moving expenses.

He had planned on serving as LRCFT president for two terms only but agreed to stay on in order to help me ease into my new position. In those first few months, Michael insisted on vetting everything I wrote before it became public, since, in my prior position there was a pronounced adversarial rela-

tionship between management and labor, and my writing tended to reflect that. He was patient and understanding as he helped me through that difficult transition from adversarial to collaborative.

I was incredibly impressed with Michael’s broad fields of interest. He was well versed in history, an English professor, an expert photographer, a skilled boat builder, an avid bicyclist who also repaired his own bicycles (one of which he sold to me), and an excellent writer. For all the years of his presidency, his column was an eagerly awaited feature in the Union News [See why by reading reprint of one of those articles on page 12].

Even after Michael stepped down as president of LRCFT, he remained active, mentoring those who followed and holding the position of Union College President. And, he continued to treat me as a member of his family. Michael was a very religious man and he took the principles of his religion just as seriously; they guided him in everything he did.

I will always be grateful to him. Have a safe journey, Michael. ■

I REMEMBER MICHAEL CROWLEY

By Lanny Hertzberg

I remember Michael Crowley. When I started working at Cosumnes River College, Michael Crowley was one of the first people I met. He approached me as a new teacher to encourage me to join the union. After I agreed to join he stayed to talk “just a little while.” Michael’s “just a little while” talks became one of the things I remember fondly and will miss the most.

Michael’s first talk with me was on the culture of CRC; about how we were all there to help each other, how the student was the most important, how all of the staff was focused on success. I thought it a bit Pollyannaish at the time. I soon came to realize that this soft-spoken yet intense man did not deny that there were some things that needed fixing. Instead he felt if one did not recognize all the good, one could never correct the evil. Professor Crowley believed it was evil to allow one student to fail if he or she could have been helped. He felt that his mission was to create an environment where students could prosper, where teachers could inspire and

where the entire college staff would work together to make that happen.

His work on shared governance, reading across the curriculum and negotiations based on shared interests between staff and administration helped to create an atmosphere of trust and support. His students benefited immensely from the environment of mutual respect which he demanded in his classes. His storytelling ability was notorious. His Lincoln-esque wit and charm entranced his students in the classroom and helped defuse many potentially hostile union negotiation situations.

In sum, he was a very nice person who helped a lot of us to be better students, better teachers, better colleagues and better people. All of you who work or worked for Los Rios might take a minute to thank Michael Crowley. He would probably deny that he did anything special, but he would be wrong. He did a lot. Thank you Michael. ■

DOUGHNUT FOR THE DEAN

By Michael Crowley

(The following is a reprint of the “President’s Column” from the May 19, 1988 edition of the Union News)

Monday afternoon I was hiding in my office with the door locked and the phone unplugged. My plan was to get two more hours of uninterrupted time to finish correcting the compositions I had left from the weekend.

Everything was moving along until I began to get numb between the eyes and decided to slip over to the area office to see if there were a couple of left-over doughnuts to refreshen my sensibilities.

The doughnuts were gone, but I found a couple of those jam filled things that look like sweaty hamburger buns left in the greasy Winchell’s box. Just as I finished the first one and reached for the second, Dr. Closet [Michael’s parody administrator], my new dean, came in.

“Oh, Mike, I’m glad I found you. I’ve been wanting to talk to you.”

“Well, er..., I was just going back to my office to finish my comps....”

“What’s the matter? Weekend not long enough for you to get your work done? I just want to give you a little advice that will help the teachers. I understand that you’ve been talking to some of them about going back to the old division chair system.”

“Well, I’ve been talking to a few who have been under both systems to see which one they thought was the most effective.”

“What brought this on? You don’t think I’m doing a good job?”

“oh, no, Dr. closet, you’re one of the finest managers I know. I’ve just been reading a lot of things like

the Carnegie Reports that emphasize educational improvement by putting most of the academic decision-making in the hands of the teachers. They contend that teachers are professionals and must have control over their work, and...”

“Mike, those studies are just a lot of theoretical bunk, It wouldn’t surprise me a bit to find out they’re all probably funded by the teachers’ unions. And if you keep spreading that kind of stuff around among the faculty, you just make them discontent. The teachers are the workers. The managers are the real professionals. A college is something like a hospital. The students are the patients and the teachers are the nurses. And the managers are the doctors who are the professionals and they make the decisions. They know what’s good for the patient. And the nurses, or at least the good ones, carry out their orders exactly.”

“Why, if it weren’t for the managers, half the teachers wouldn’t even show up for work and the half that did would go home before lunch,” he concluded. “But, Dr. Closet, when we elected our own division chairs from among the faculty, they were responsible to the faculty,” I pointed out.

“Mike, you’ve got to understand that the reason this district is so strong is because the deans are not responsible to the teachers. They are responsible to the administrative chain of command. That’s the way we make everyone accountable to the district office. And that’s what makes the system work.”

And then he grabbed the last jelly bun and took a huge bite out of it. Wiping the red goo from his chin with the back of his hand, he smiled and said, “Well, time to get back to your comps.”

“Yeah, see you later.”

In unity,
Mike

RESPICE FINEM

By William Karns

Mike Crowley was a wonderful teacher who led me--sometimes against my grain, I admit--to many lessons and insights in the years we taught, rode motorcycles, worked shared governance, talked, argued and built boats together. Others have and will describe with more precision and in more elegant detail how he served his students in the classrooms and his colleagues in the offices and meeting rooms of CRC and the District. But what I want to describe has to do with something else, with a beautiful, idiosyncratic form of patience, for want of a better word, that he clearly brought to his in-class teaching but that he also brought to the wider world of human relationships that surrounded us in school and in our families, a patience that for me remains an illumination, its own kind of touchstone, scripture, beatitude.

I think I first became aware of this patience when we were building boats. We were a study in contrasts: I wanted the boat, period; building it was what you had to do to get it. He wanted the boat, too, I think, but he knew how to be in the moment all the way from picking the design to carrying it to the water, working late into the night with such an intentional, perfect rhythm and a loving, unharried approach to the wood that I knew there was more to be learned from him than just spiling a complex shape or making a serviceable rabbit. He was always mindful of the greater purposes inherent in practicing the craft,

and he tried his best to help me see the larger values at hand.

But for me his most enduring lesson came before we were neighbors in the Pocket, when he was still living up in Newcastle, some forty-odd miles from CRC and beyond even his amazing bicycle reach. He usually commuted in one of his many ratty VW Rabbits, one of his kids, students at CRC, driving while he read or graded (yes, graded) compositions. On this particular occasion, as we were packing up to go our separate ways home, he mentioned in passing that he was mad at the particular kid driving that day about some small irksome thing, something long forgotten now. At any rate, I asked him the next day if he had had it out with the kid in question on the long drive home, as I might have. I have never forgotten his answer: “No, fifty miles is too far to go in anger.” Meaning, I knew from his other lessons, that what might feel good or even like justice now might not in the end be the right thing to do, might not suit our real ends, being good and helpful to one another. As you may have done as well, I saw corollaries of this wisdom throughout his work with the Union and the District: his relationships and the brilliant way he handled them created our ability to have and nurture what we now call IBA and led to this generation of peace that has meant so much to all of us. He made our world a better place. ■

