

EULOGY

*Sandra Berns**

When I came to Griffith in 1995, Michael quickly distinguished himself from his colleagues, by his prodigious appetite for sustained research productivity, his ability to structure his teaching and learning materials to foster deep learning in his students and his reluctance to become involved in the political atmosphere that is, for better or worse, very much a part of university life. These qualities — always valuable and distinctive — were to become very much a part of his ‘persona’ as an academic as he matured into the academic life and forged for himself a distinctive role within the faculty.

Charles Sampford has spoken far more evocatively than could I about the rare quality of his intellectual work, producing in the span of less than 10 years a research *oeuvre* of which many academics of 20 years’ standing would be proud. Perhaps, however, I might make mention of several features of his intellectual development which are equally rare and distinctive. While his primary reputation was forged in law and economics scholarship, and in corporate law, as he matured as a scholar he demonstrated a singular ability to expand his intellectual horizons, writing effectively and evocatively in areas more often associated with law and literature than with economic scholarship and using insights from, among other areas, post-structuralist scholarship to deepen his engagement with his primary field. His was a truly remarkable mind, and one which was able to seize upon the deepest insights of other law paradigms and integrate them into his approach.

As a law teacher, he had the ability to inspire many of his students and, in some cases, to inculcate them into the life of the mind. Of this there can be no greater testimony than the numerous emails I have received from former students since his passing. Most of us hope, at most, to make a significant difference to a handful of students over our intellectual careers. Michael had, over the course of his career, already exceeded this number. His rare ability to develop intellectual structures designed to facilitate staged learning was clearly evident in the courses he designed and assisted in redeveloping, as well as in his teaching and his willingness to engage with students and to assist them in clarifying and developing their own thoughts.

I am in some ways uniquely placed to speak about Michael’s administrative abilities, shown in his work as Course Convenor, as the Law School’s first Program Convenor and as Deputy Head of School. His meticulous attention to detail and his capacity for sustained endeavour were both clearly evident in his administrative work — his natural flair for organisation, his ability to maintain calm and efficient management despite the pressure of ever-tightening time frames and deadlines, and his calm and equitable approach to his colleagues as Deputy Head of School. Over the

* Professor and Head of School, Griffith Law School. This eulogy was delivered at the Memorial Service, Multi Faith Centre, Griffith University, Brisbane on 12 August 2003.

years, I often found myself relying upon Michael for assistance with many tasks that were formally outside his official duties. His response was always gracious, efficient and enthusiastic — something for which I was deeply grateful.

As a colleague, Michael was exemplary. Others have spoken of his wit and engagement; I would like to draw attention to quieter virtues. Michael was adept at providing support and encouragement when both were urgently needed, often in a way which clarified the real issues involved and assisted me — and, I am certain, others — in clarifying the alternatives and the costs and benefits of each. These qualities made him an excellent mentor for his junior colleagues. In all of my interaction with Michael over the years, he remained absolutely straight in the best sense of that word. In an environment in which institutional politics sometimes overtake collegiality and common sense, he consistently maintained a quiet integrity, eschewing any temptation to be other than honest and frank in his relationships with others, and never saying behind a person's back that which he was unwilling to say to their face.

I miss being greeted in the mornings by the strains of music drifting up the corridor we shared. I miss Michael's gentle collegiality, his willingness to engage in scholarly debate, his openness to the views of others and his loyalty to his friends. Most of all, I miss his clarity of vision and absolute honesty. Our university community was greatly enriched by his presence and is much poorer for his passing, in ways which are not yet fully realised.