

Hennessey, Michael 30 May 1938 - 25 October 2021

Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Michael Hennessey

Michael lived a life guided by strong values, which started with his early years in Dorset, was affected by war in England and Malaysia, finding its natural end here in south west Western Australia. It has been a life focused on the care of others, through applying his skills and talents as an educator and friend.

Michael came to Friends quite late in life after a long history of service to the community within the context of Catholicism. Unfortunately, his experiences with the Catholic hierarchy had not served him well over the years so he found a haven and respite in Quakerism, as well as an intellectual satisfaction in Quaker theology.

Michael was born in Weymouth, Dorset, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the town was bombed, he was evacuated with other children to a country convent, which must have been a difficult separation for such a young child. Michael often spoke in Meeting about his early memories of the war, both negative – seeing bomber planes overhead, fearsome nights in bomb shelters; and positive – playing in bombsite rubble, discovering treasures.

Separation from family continued at boarding school, where he was abused by two priests. This trauma does not appear to have been adequately acknowledged by authorities at that time. Further loss was occasioned by the death of his father when Michael was aged 15.

Despite these setbacks Michael did well at school and went on to attend the University of London. However, his studies were interrupted by two years military service. Called up at 19, after training he was deployed to serve in Malaysia. He encountered some deeply disturbing experiences there which left him with a horror of war. Returning to university at 21, Michael trained as a teacher, with initial postings in UK Catholic schools. During this period, he met and married his first wife, but the marriage didn't last.

In the early 1960s Michael migrated to Australia. Here he continued to teach and subsequently pursued doctoral studies to graduate with a Ph.D in 1981. His thesis investigated administrative pressures from Church and Independent Schools on government education policies, a subject with which he'd had troubling personal experience in both UK and Australia.

Also, in 1981 Michael married Jadwiga, known as Jacky in Australia. This has been a strong union, enduring for 40 years. In 1987 the couple adopted two-year-old Luke from a Polish orphanage and becoming a father was a great joy for Michael. Luke says "He always had time for me as a great teacher and sports coach", a commitment which has always been deeply appreciated: "Dad as a father figure did the best job I could ever ask His leadership, loyalty, love and jokes are the reason I am the person I am today." When Luke reached adulthood Michael supported a search for his birth family in Poland and subsequent development of a strong relationship with them. Luke is currently living with members of his birth family in Poland, yet in Luke's heart Michael remains his father.

In a prestigious education career Michael served as a school principal in WA within the Catholic system, spent a few years teaching in Sweden and then served the WA Education Department in several schools., also lecturing at Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities. His move to the WA

Education Department was prompted by a brave decision to resign from the position of principal of a Catholic school after being directed by the bishop in the diocese to take actions which he felt compromised his principles. A number of former students attended Michael's funeral or have otherwise acknowledged his impact on their lives.

Other forms of community service Michael offered over many years have been as a Marriage Celebrant and as a Justice of the Peace, the latter until his last illness.

Within WARM, Michael served faithfully as WA representative for Quaker Service Australia, keeping Friends informed about and involved in overseas and First Nation aid projects. He also contributed considerably to the life of Fremantle Local Meeting.

Michael struggled with health issues for the last years of his life, spending frequent times in hospital and coping with significant limitations. Nevertheless, he strived to attend Meeting for Worship whenever possible and greatly valued Meetings gathered in his home from time to time. A lifelong love of classical music also proved a great comfort to him in difficult times.

From Michael's funeral service –

“ [Michael's life exhibited] ...serious deep experience and insight into this complex world, as a pacifist , against war, as a Justice of the Peace, with his stories of human conflict, as a man who described the world as he saw it, through his own lens. “

Minute of Record

Our Friend Michael Hennessy died in Fremantle Hospital on Monday, October 25, 2021. A funeral in the manner of Friends will be held on Thursday, November 11. A memorial meeting to celebrate Michael's life will be held at a later date. We ask the WARM Membership Secretary to adjust our membership records accordingly. West Australia Meeting for Worship for Business, 7 November, Minute 11-11/2021