



Michael Topf

September 16, 1942 - May 17, 2020

MICHAEL TOPF

Although he was born in Newark, New Jersey on September 16, 1942, Michael Topf (77) of Narberth, Pennsylvania lived most of his life in the Philadelphia area and died at home on May 17, 2020 a little more than three months after being diagnosed with glioblastoma/brain cancer, with his beloved wife of 43 years Linda by his side.

During this time of a global health crisis, the Philadelphia region lost a leader recently whose primary passion and loving focus for the past thirty-six years had been working with people in organizations to transform safety cultures through individuals taking responsibility for their health and safety. Michael was a pioneer who developed a holistic method to assist people in committing to and protecting their health and safety. After founding the Philadelphia-based Topf Initiatives in 1983, Michael identified how a person's personal attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions contributed significantly to health problems, accidents, injuries, and environmental incidents. His process focused on enhancing employee health and safety through personal responsibility and prevention. He consulted with leaders of many companies and facilitated workshops/training programs with thousands of participants both in the Philadelphia region, across the United States, Canada, and in other countries. His programs were available in English, French and Spanish. Michael truly made a difference by helping improve the lives of many people who made behavioral changes to be healthier and safer both on and off the job.

Michael emerged as a leader in preventive health and safety, becoming a speaker and presenter for over 25 years at numerous corporate and health and safety organizations, including the National Safety Council (NSC) and the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP). He was an instructor in the Graduate Program in Health and Safety Administration at Saint Joseph's University and published many articles in a variety of safety and health publications.

Earlier in his career, Michael worked as a Research Assistant for the New Jersey State Department of Health and at the New York University Medical Center. He was also a

Hospital Administrator for Mt. Sinai, Montifiore and Beth Israel Medical Centers in New York City and at John Runnels Hospital in Berkley Heights, New Jersey. Michael founded a Drug and Alcohol Department at Runnels Hospital where he served as a counselor. In the NYC and Philadelphia areas, Michael also hosted and facilitated groups of men who wanted to get in touch with their emotions. After moving to Philadelphia in 1978, he became a Mental Health Counselor at rehabilitation centers and then in private practice.

As a partner in Epoch Consultants from 1980 through 1983 with co-founder Klaus Hilgers, Michael's extensive consulting experience with business leaders included the design and facilitation of programs in Executive Leadership, Talent Development and Organizational Effectiveness.

Michael enjoyed diverse personal interests throughout his life. Michael was a sincere and skilled martial artist...and was a disciple of Grand Master Pete Pajil of the Moy Yat Ving Tsun Martial Intelligence School in Philadelphia. Through a Kung Fu Life of over 20 years, Michael practiced the way of the fist as his access to the way of the heart. He shifted things that were complicated to simple, negative to positive, hard to soft. With his big heart opened, Michael attracted many of his fellow brothers and sisters to "play" Kung Fu with him. He was a teacher who allowed you to learn by your own experience and was a close friend to his Sifu (teacher). Michael's loyalty, character and life lived "from the heart" were shining examples "on the floor" and in life.

His natural talent provided hours of peace and joy as Michael masterfully played piano "by ear." People who heard him play, including those at airports where Michael would often sit down at a piano while waiting for a flight, described his music as extraordinary and magnificent. Michael's music was never recorded. However, those of us who heard him play will find comfort in hearing his music in our hearts forever.

After graduating in 1960 from Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey. Michael earned a BS in Biology and Chemistry from Upsala College in 1964, an MA in Applied Psychology from the University of Santa Monica in 1988, and a Masters in Spiritual Science from the Peace Theological Institute in 1993.

In addition to his formal university studies, Michael participated in ongoing learning through a wide variety of programs, including Landmark Education. He embraced the importance of making a difference in the world and building communities. Michael strove to bring about positive, permanent shifts in the quality of his and others' lives, including freedom to be at ease and effective in areas that mattered the most, especially relationships.

Michael also had a strong spiritual focus in his life. In 1985, he became an ordained minister in a non-denominational, worldwide church (the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness). Since then, he lived his life according to these guiding principles of his spiritual studies: take care of yourself so you can help take care of others (health), don't hurt yourself or others (safety), and use every experience for upliftment and growth (learning). Michael was a lifelong learner on all levels.

Linda Noble Topf, Michael's devoted wife, survives him after 43 years of marriage during which time she often said: "Michael has been the wind beneath my wings." Linda, who was diagnosed with MS in 1981, felt that Michael was her muse, inspiration and support for many of her Philadelphia-centered creative projects. She was Creative Director for Philadelphia's 300th birthday celebration (Century IV) in 1982. In 2000, the National Liberty Museum opening featured Linda's concept for the exhibit called Exceptional Americans who Achieved Remarkable Success. And in 2017, the Philadelphia Museum of Art accepted her and Michael's gift and highlighted Linda's lithograph (1776-1976 Happy Birthday???). Linda is an ordained minister, a published author (Wheelchair Wisdom: Awaken Your Spirit through Adversity and You Are Not Your Illness: Seven Principles for Meeting the Challenge), an advocate for disability rights, a spiritual leader and Michael's inspiration as well.

Many friends have said that Michael was Linda's guardian angel. In their marriage, Michael and Linda embodied love, kindness, and compassion. Their love supported them through life's challenges. Michael and Linda have always been two beautiful souls who practiced "mindful loving" and have been an amazing example of mindful partnership.

In addition to his beloved wife Linda, Michael is survived by a sister Shary (Gary) Skoloff of South Orange, New Jersey; three nieces (Dani Noble of Orlando, Florida; Karen Merrill-Skoloff of Boston; and Lesley Skoloff of San Diego, California); and several close cousins (Amy, Richard, Candace and Beth) and their families. His parents Muriel (Laden) and Ernest Topf predeceased him .

Michael will live forever in the memories of his family and friends. Those who knew Michael described him as a humorous, kind, loving person. His natural sense of humor and engaging smile brought joy to everyone he met. Here are just a few of the ways that Michael's friends spoke about him:

"Michael, your big juicy warm heart and your light-hearted personality gets you through a lot."

“ You have an indomitable inner strength sustaining you, plus the love and support of so many who love you!”

“There are legions of us out here who love you and are grateful for you in our lives.”

“ Thank God for the years of connection and teachings.”

“ Your loving, caring and service throughout the years has touched not only Linda but all those who know you.

“You shared a gift of a relentless, sustaining love with Linda and with all others and you’ve brought so much goodness to those around you””

“You are an extraordinary human being and am grateful to have known you, worked with you, laughed with you, argued with you, and everything else that goes into earthly relationships.”

“Michael, you have been an ongoing source of inspiration for me. I cherish our friendship.”

A long time personal friend of his captured Michael’s essence in this quote:

“Michael lived what he espoused. Was he a perfect man, could he be annoying, did I have to explain things to him 20 times? Sure, but that was just wrapping paper. I never saw it. I always saw instead the gem inside the wrapper.”

Michael will be missed, and yet he will live on in our hearts forever.

Donations in Michael’s name can be made to the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness (msia.org) and the University of Santa Monica(universityofsantamonica.edu).

A “Celebration of Life” honoring Michael is scheduled for Sunday June 14, 2020 from 2-3:30 pm EDT on Zoom.

Here’s information on how to join in:

Join Zoom Meeting for Michael's Celebration of Life

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83090658642?pwd=V2VKbk5md2tOdzZJU2RFcnAxNnNVQT09>

Meeting ID: 830 9065 8642

Password: love

If you don't have a computer and want to call in by phone or use your phone as the audio use this phone number:

1-301-715-8592 Meeting ID: 830 9065 8642#

If international and want to call in - find your local number here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/>

u/kcA1RwRyr

Comments



“ 5 files added to the album Michael and Linda



Susan Critelli - June 06, 2020 at 09:12 PM



“ A lifelong friend since childhood. As warm and exuberant as his parents he always cared about others- always. A great friend and great husband to Linda he had a once in a lifetime personality and caring. He will be dearly missed by all.

marc auster - June 06, 2020 at 04:45 PM



“ My heartfelt condolences to Linda and the Topf family. I am Eternally grateful for having known Michael. He was the kindest most caring and considerate person I have ever known. Always there to lend a helping hand. Thank you Michael. You will be missed

Sandra Irwin - May 21, 2020 at 09:39 PM



“ Sandra Irwin lit a candle in memory of Michael Topf



Sandra Irwin - May 21, 2020 at 09:31 PM