

Michael Moffatt
February 8, 1944 – November 26, 2011
Sunghwa – Dec. 3, 2011

Born in Hartford, Connecticut to Stan and Kay Moffatt, Michael grew up in a household filled with love, industry, a firm belief in eccentricity, wonder and the value of art in its myriad forms. Stan grew up in India as the son of missionary parents, an engineer by profession, he was an artist by night and Kay not only took on community causes, but played piano, sketched and delighted her children, Michael and his younger sister, Harriet, with pranks that disguised her hard-won wisdom as a veteran kindergarten teacher.

From 4:00 a.m. newspaper deliveries, to archeological digs and a thousand mile plus bicycle ride through the New England countryside with high school chums, Michael vigorously engaged in the world around him, and reveled in its most mysterious inhabitants: human beings. He pursued this passion studying anthropology at Dartmouth, then Reed College, Oxford University studying with Rodney Needham and finished his PhD at the University of Chicago while polishing his dissertation for publication with Princeton University Press and beginning his more than thirty-year professorial career at Rutgers.

More than anything in the world, Michael loved being a father. He relished helping to parent Alan and Sasha. He loved galumphing around the woods or playing charades with the “young cousins” Adam, Josh, Amanda and Asha. Michael cherished the Manganaro children like his own nieces and nephews. He had a natural affinity for enjoying what he called “the back side of the moon” way a seven or eight year old saw the world and kids never stopped delighting him, including his own two, Alex and Jacob. He was a natural parent and connected all the children he helped raise with the rugged and real beauty of nature.

As a spouse, there was none more devoted. He tended the household and bravely bore “nuits blanches” of rolodex worries as his spouse, Pamela, finished her dissertation. Pamela’s dissertation director, François Cornilliat rightly noted, “There should be a special medal of honor for the spouses.” He was a mensch, and never backed off from what he thought was right even if it was unpopular. When September 11, 2001, arrived, academic discourse seemed far less crucial

than active engagement. Then living Central Jersey, Michael took his anthropology of religion students on field trips to many different religious centers to give them first-hand experience with the multiplicity of Indic faiths and cultures: Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. We shared a vision of inter-religious harmony and appreciation of diverse faith traditions.

Michael gave public support to the local Hindu community when small-minded neighborhoods persecuted them. The Swaminarayan Temple in Edison fully embraced Michael and our family as he and our younger son, Jacob, regularly attended services, and we all enjoyed the fellowship and delicious meals. As a family, we attended marches and rallies for peace transcending religious, national and cultural barriers. And yet, Michael would always find time to enjoy spontaneous forays into nature taking our eldest son, Alex, on a canoe trip or feeding a dead squirrel to a wild red-tailed hawk by hand to the amazement of his students.

Michael, ever intellectual, was a challenger of post-modern theorists and classical theorists. He probably would not have called himself a religious man. Yet he lived as a Godly man. He was brutally honest and concretely gave of himself to serve others, helping raise boys who were not his own with unconditional love in addition to his own sons. We made yearly pilgrimages to Family Camp in Pennsylvania where the parents as well as the children enjoyed fellowship and natural faith-based community. He faithfully attended many religious services for hours on end understanding neither Gujarati nor Korean. He was not the sort of person to feign religious deference, but he had a sincere heart of attendance to the divine.

Nor was he the type to beg God for spiritual experiences; the three dimensional world and multiplicity of cultural constructs that surrounded him fascinated him – be it a grandmother in a cow dung hut in India, college student culture in the dorms, or the good old boys in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. But this practical man came to cherish the true love values that we shared in raising our children. And he lovingly endured what he jokingly referred to as “Unification Ordeals” when sermons would go on far longer than anticipated. When we last went to hear Father Moon speak at the Manhattan center in 2009, before anyone else in the audience was aware Father was onstage, Michael, who could see into the

wings from his balcony seat, leapt to his feet applauding and shouted “Yay!” in classic Michael mode. He never shied away from saying what he really thought.

Brothers and sisters of many faiths filled our lives with love and the sense of family. Rev. Marquez and his wife Noemi became as second parents to Jacob; Susan and Keith Howells, whom we’d met singing in the Reformed Church choir in Highland Park, took us all in for six months when we were homeless and Michael was first hospitalized in 2002. The prayers of many have sustained us. We’ve been a long journey since then as Michael’s illness developed and the treatments produced their own wayward side effects.

At young ages, Alex and Jacob, once the recipients of Michael’s fun-loving adventures, found themselves serving as caregivers, guiding their dad where he needed to go and helping to dress him. As a family, we learned many love lessons through Michael’s illness. We learned that some talk is just talk and other words have real meaning. We learned the value of true friendship. We learned of the strength of spirit that we had to create within ourselves and we experienced over and over again Michael’s unconditional love, his heart, patience and determination. These are the legacies he leaves with us – the courage to take on the world and to follow our dreams.