

# Remembering Michael Urick

Sometimes the simplest gestures have the most profound impact.

“

Don't stress out because it's not worth it. It seems like there is little drama every day, but it's not enough to ruin your life.”

– Michael Urick

Ezra Ferrell learned this in her senior English class when turning in a poetry project. For the final assignment, students were required to go up in front of the class and present the idea behind their work. After presenting, students placed the final product in a bin. When Ferrell went to put her paper in the bin, however, her teacher, Michael Urick, placed his hand directly over it so Ferrell would have to place the poem directly in his hand. While the presentations resumed, Urick read the entirety of Ferrell's two-page poem, wiping away a few tears. After class ended, Urick stopped Ferrell and said he knew that she was going to do great things.

“I will never, ever forget that,” Ferrell said. “The memory has helped me through hard times. I think about him every time I see a Hawaiian shirt.”



File photo from the Knight archive  
When Urick was in high school, he had a job working concert stage security. "I enjoyed working on stage with bands like Led Zeppelin ZZ Top, The Allman Brothers...and many others," he said. File photo from the Knight archive.

Urick, former McCallum English teacher, passed away this March. He retired this past June after teaching English for more than 30 years at McCallum. He told The Shield last May that he loved every day of his teaching career.

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Alum Hunter Townsend said that Urick was the first person she saw truly get excited about anything she had written."

"I told myself I would keep teaching until I reached retirement or hated it, but I haven't hated it yet," he said.

Urick said in the same interview that his favorite memory from teaching was seeing his students graduate and move on with their lives. He said his greatest lesson from three decades working in education was the value in taking it easy.

“Don’t stress out because it’s not worth it,” he said. “It seems like there is little drama every day, but it’s not enough to ruin your life.”

Urick left a lasting impression on generations of McCallum students and colleagues. The response to his obituary post on the MacJournalism Facebook page reached 27,910 Facebook users after being shared 290 times. The post garnered 125 comments and 398 reactions. All of these numbers are record numbers for the Facebook account. When followers were asked to share stories and remembrances of Urick, the responses kept on coming and coming.

Many remembered his fondness for Hawaiian shirts, which he once described as “subtle, but still flashy enough to catch a kid’s attention.”

Others described his love of music. Still, others spoke of how he inspired confidence in the way he responded to the work they submitted in his class.

Alum Hunter Townsend, for example, said that Urick was the first person she saw truly get excited about anything she had written. Townsend wrote about going for a run in the middle of the night, and Urick’s feedback has stuck in her mind.

“I can vividly remember the moment he handed the paper back to me,” Townsend said, “and how he was smiling when he said he felt like he had been running right alongside me.”



File photo from Knight archive  
Michael Urick and fellow English teachers  
Jeff Meyer and Bill Staples sing a satirical  
tribute to the female teachers at the annual  
department Christmas Party in 1997. File  
photo from the Knight archive.

According to McCallum alumni, Urick's actions were small but meaningful. Many also remarked that Urick taught them even more about life than about English. Alum Justin Franklin said that Urick would always say, "Stay the person you are, and never let the world change you," a message that he said has stuck with him.

Urick's impact was not limited to his students. English teacher Diana Adamson said that Urick made his mark in life through his good nature and sense of humor. She also talked about how Urick's interests shined through when she talked to him.

"He had a lot of interests outside of school that would be surprising to people," Adamson said. "Like music, God, he knew a lot about music."

Adamson in particular emphasized Urick's devotion to his teaching.

“He really did do his best, even when he got older and was sick,” Adamson said. “He still came in, and his dedication was the most important thing.”

Another one of Urick’s former colleagues, Carol Graham, knew Urick for more than 40 years.

Their paths first crossed during the ’70s and ’80s in the Austin music and nightclub scene, then crossed again when Graham was teaching Urick’s stepson at Lamar, and then once again two years later in 1997 when the two became coworkers at McCallum. Graham took Urick’s previous position as the DTLT, or “technology liaison” for the school.



File photo from Knight archive  
Urick and former U.S. government teacher Chris Fairman display their whipped cream covered faces after being pied in the face at a fall pep rally in 1998. File photo from the Knight archive.

“There were all of the Hawaiian shirts, the shared love of fishing, talking about old Austin and our shared students,” Graham said.

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I think about him every time I see a Hawaiian shirt.”

– Alum Ezra Ferrell

She described Urick as a Renaissance man, saying he experienced many careers and reinvented himself multiple times. She also said he was very well-read, a lover of music and art and cared deeply about many individuals.

Urick's compassion touched many. When asked what they would say to Urick now, many responded by thanking him for teaching them to believe in themselves.

"May your soul find peace as you move on into the next journey," Graham said. "May God bring comfort and strength to all who have shared in your Earthly journey."

Alum Florence Briceno wishes that "the perpetual light shine upon him," and she would like to thank Urick "for four years of dedication in teaching life's lessons."



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SAD NEWS: Former McCallum language arts teacher Michael Urick, who retired last June, has died. Urick, who taught English for more than 30 years, told The Shield last May that he loved every day of his teaching career. "I told myself I would keep teaching until I reached retirement or hated it, but I haven't hated it yet." Urick also said that his favorite memory from teaching was seeing his students graduate and get on with their lives. His greatest lesson learned over three decades in the classroom: "Don't stress out because it's not worth it. It seems like there is little drama every day, but it's not enough to ruin your life." File photo from 2018 Knight.

*A post shared by McCallum Journalism (@macjournalism) on Mar 14, 2019 at 10:13am PDT*

*The Shield's Abigail Salazar interviewed Michael Urick prior to his retirement at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. The interview, originally published in May of 2018, is included below.*

The Shield: What accomplishment in teaching fills you with pride?

Michael Urick: Well, I loved every day of it. I told myself I would keep teaching until I reached retirement or hated it, but I haven't hated it yet.

TS: What's the worst thing about being a teacher?

MU: All the homework: grading all the homework and keeping up

with the grades and deadlines.

TS: If you could pass wisdom to your students, what would you share?

MU: Keep learning.

TS: Do you see any differences between your morning classes and your afternoon classes?

MU: The afternoon ones are more tired than the morning ones. The mornings one are kind of shaking themselves awake.

TS: What are your retirement plans?

MU: I'm just not going to work. I'm probably going to go on vacation for a while and relax. I would travel to Mexico because I love their beaches.

TS: Is there anything you would miss from McCallum?

MU: The kids. They keep me feeling young.

TS: Do you have a favorite memory from teaching?

MU: Going to graduation and seeing the kids that I have taught get on with their lives.

TS: Why did you become a teacher?

MU: I've always been a teacher in some way or another; it seems like a natural thing for me.

TS: Since you're an English teacher, what's your favorite book that you had your students read?

MU: My favorite book is Dante's Inferno because it's hard to read, it's like literature boot camp. It teaches everything within that one book.

TS: What's the most important thing you learned about being a teacher?

MU: Don't stress out, because it's not worth it. It seems like there is little drama every day, but it's not enough to ruin your life.

TS: What is the most satisfying thing about teaching?

MU: Seeing kids move on year after year. Seeing them improving and getting out of high school and doing greater things.

TS: What are the challenges of teaching?

MU: Being prepared every day, but after 30 years I'm kind of used to it.

TS: Your first year of being a teacher, what was the scariest thing?

MU: Scrambling out enough materials through every day. I started making these notebooks of lessons plans every year, and now I have 30 years of lesson plans.

TS: How would you describe yourself?

MU: Laid-back.

TS: Any advice for anyone you decides to become a teacher?

MU: Plan ahead in life, plan ahead in your work.

*-interview by Abigail Salazar*