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Impressions, Remembrances, and Final Words to Michael Petrovich, delivered at his memorial service on July 19, 1986

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Impressions, Remembrances, and Final Words to Michael Petrovich

I.

Big in Spirit, in Dreams and Fantasies. Indomitable will, uninterrupted or subdued. A personality, a soaring mind tempered and conditioned by intelligence possessed of a scholar. A preciseness, a shrewd insight. Events past and present viewed with realism and creativity.

II.

When I was low he shored me up. He told me what life was like, what it would be. He had the vision for his friends. He showed us what we knew would be. He made me admit to myself what I did see. I was grateful, and it was fun, and we laughed.

III.

I saw him stride down streets, into offices, into situations, carrying people with him, never intimidated, not once. Always in charge, or if he wasn't, he didn't admit or even know it. By being so he accomplished much. His will prevailed. Students caught the vision. He created events for himself and others. They learned. He lived out his energy to purpose.

IV.

We drove the road from Dubrovnik to Trebinje, my head buried in my hands. Life at risk. Later on I never surrendered the wheel to him, yet it was he who led me down the roads to foreign friendships, to exciting political entanglement, to university involvement so enveloping that it encapsulates my life only slightly less than it did his.

V.

Concerts at night, the glistening white marble street, the rich archives, artist friends quietly proud of their paintings and sculptures, fish, the mackerel and blue fish, in small restaurants high on streets above the center, prepared by large faced men with moustaches. A grotto like restaurant on the sea, soft lights, gentle waves on the beach, story telling, double laughter, once when told, once when translated. Oh! Ragusa! Oh! Dubrovnik! You have lost a son, not yours by birth, but more than adopted.

VI.

Amazing! Slav to the core, American to the hilt! What manner of man is this who gives total loyalty to both? To understand his countries like a man understands a woman. To unite in his own person, like a marriage, the visceral life of the Slav and the grand freedom of the American. Maybe they derive from the same human source. Maybe that is why it seemed so natural in him.

VII.

A nation embarrassed! A President unable to understand a Pole. Not so when the President of the South Slavs came to call. Big Spirit, Big Understanding, Big Intelligence, that is what leaders need when the sounds of their words are different to one another. He fitted the big arena; he gave common meaning to different sounding words. International policy, small talk amongst the big; he loved it. He could do it best.

VIII.

Born a Serb means you are never out of place. You adapt and others adapt to you. There is tension, but amelioration too. Life is in motion, feelings cascading over one another like a waterfall. Ultimately adaptation without surrender - never surrender.

IX.

Have you seen a Serbian matador in a Dutch Calvinist Bull Ring? Maybe you don't think Serbian matadors and Dutch Calvinist Bull Rings exist, but they do. In the Ring the stakes are high. The Ring holds many who watch intently, and now lament the death of the matador who's own special corrida brought admiration from those who watch intently. They will never be the same just as he wasn't when he brought his life's skill and style to be played out in the Ring.

X.

I am upset, Michael. You were always good at surprises. Well, you surprised us again. By dying; you left us in the lurch. We don't like it. You didn't wrap things up, you died too young - in mid air. You didn't give us warning, a time to adjust. You didn't give us a final opportunity to let you know that we loved you.

XI.

Never out of character, not even at the end. You were a good startler. You taught, you influenced, you gained your objective through the dramatic gesture. Never inane, sometimes humorous, often deadly serious. Now your ultimate shock forces a look into the mirror of our own mortality. You leave us to ponder that which we ought to ponder.

XII.

The winds of our good God blow through our lives, sometimes carrying, sometimes depositing. As seeds carried on the wind the actions of our lives are carried and dropped in different places to grow and to condition and give sustenance. To become something more than they were. Though you have been carried away on a gust of wind, you have left us sturdy plants, and seeds also, to grow, and flower and bless us.

XIII.

As with all who leave our boundaries of consciousness - who we can no longer watch grow, change or touch, we must find a place in the rest of our lives. Michael, I place you in my Pantheon of Persons of Vision and Vitality. You were no dried turnip of a person, shrivelled and without moisture. You were like a fine ripe melon, moist and flavorful. You will always be a part of vigorously pursued discussion when my mind is working and clarifying. You will be a part of my travels to old haunts. You will be around for story telling and hearty laughter; at the table for carving the lamb and savoring the dark, rich red wine. Your last act of friendship is a claim on my memory so we can be together sometimes. In the future the winds will continue to blow carrying us all. Farewell until we see more clearly.

Keep it all with you



**A MEMORIAL SERVICE IN HONOR OF
DR. MICHAEL B. PETROVICH
September 29, 1933 - July 11, 1986
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY**

**JULY THE NINETEENTH
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SIX
ELEVEN O'CLOCK**

**DIMNENT MEMORIAL CHAPEL
HOLLAND, MICHIGAN**



BETWEEN PRESIDENTS

The picture, taken in March 1978, showing Dr. Michael Petrovich walking between President Tito and President Carter perhaps best symbolizes Michael's own concept of his career. He was a brilliant interpreter, in the broadest definition of that term.

When he was in Washington, called upon to faithfully translate the thoughts of President Carter or President Reagan into his native Serbo-Croatian, he served mainly as a voice, with little opportunity to express his own ideas.

At all other times, in the classroom, in campus or community affairs and wherever his travels took him in this country or abroad, Petrovich was a challenging and fascinating teacher and guide, who had strong convictions which he did not hesitate to express.

Petrovich believed that ideas were important and that an understanding of the past - A Rendezvous with History - was essential to intelligent decisions about the present and future. A citizen of the United States by choice, he combined fierce loyalty to his new country with proud acknowledgement of his European heritage. As an interpreter of both the Old and the New World he bridged the gap between the two and challenged his students and friends to join him in the adventure of intellectual and physical discovery.

In the twenty years since he joined the Hope College faculty, Dr. Petrovich made a genuine contribution to the College as a whole and to the lives of all who came to know him. His premature death is a loss which will be felt for many years. But the impact on generations of students who were fortunate enough to have Michael Petrovich as an interpreter, teacher and guide will perpetuate his memory well beyond the present century.

Dr. Paul G. Fried
Professor of History Emeritus
Director Emeritus of International Education