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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Memorial Tribute
to
Michael Shower

"Remembrances of a Wordsmith with a Cause"

UNICEF House
10 May 1994



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"Michael Shower:
Remembrances of a Wordsmith with a Cause"

Michael Shower lived a life-time cause.

Michael Shower's skills were: intelligence, energy, persistence and, above all his abilities as a great wordsmith.

Born in 1949, in the first era when it was possible to think seriously, in Toynbee's words, of bringing the benefits of progress to all humanity, Michael devoted the mainstream of his life to the creation of world structures in which all might look forward to living together in harmony and dignity.

Both his cause and his skills made an early appearance. When still in junior high school he wrote his City Council urging special observance of United Nations Day. He was sufficiently convincing that the Council wrote back, asking what might be done. Another convincing epistle followed. Who should the Mayor appoint as chairman for this newly accepted observance? Michael Shower, of course. It was only later, when Michael's changing voice cracked during a telephone conversation, that the Mayor was to realize he had appointed a 14 year old to chair and prepare this community-wide innovation!

Later, in college, he was President of the nation-wide youth arm of the United Nations Association, known as CIRUNA. Here another trait was to reveal itself -- Michael's capacity, in the words of George Bernard Shaw, to "dream of things that never were, and say 'why not?'" , and then to pursue that dream with a persistence and vigor that was to greatly irritate the more staid and conventional adult leadership of the UNA. Michael was always reluctant to take "no" for an answer.

Michael and I were to first meet seriously when he, by then Executive Secretary of the World Federalists, brought senior leaders of the World Federalists, notably Michael's mentor, Luther

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Evans, former Director General of UNESCO and Librarian of Congress, to the Overseas Development Council (ODC) to discuss how our two organizations might collaborate. New Directions, a citizen's lobby for a more active US leadership stance on the now, to us, clearly emerging issues of global poverty, environment, population and development, was a principal result. Actively involving such diverse leaders as Margaret Mead; Father Ted Hesburgh; two former governors, John Gilligan of Ohio and Rudy Peterson of Delaware; Norman Cousins, and yours truly, New Directions was to flourish briefly in the Nixon and Ford years, only to lose financial support when the new Carter Administration appeared, wrongly as it was to turn out, to obviate the need for such a lobby.

Michael and I, fellow dreamers aspiring to be doers, were to grow increasingly close during those years, and when I came to UNICEF, Mike, then Legislative Assistant to Congressman Michael Barnes, offered to help. Most of us at this memorial service know the fruitful results. He was the main architect of the strategy, in 1982, that during 12 years of Republican Administrations with their annual request for a 20 to 30 per cent reduction in the appropriation for UNICEF, brought the US contribution up in steady increments from \$34 million to \$100 million. He capped his accomplishments with serving as the Executive Secretary of the World Summit for Children in 1989 and 1990.

Never quite as effective with oral as with written interaction, Michael was truly a genius with the written word. Sketch out some rough ideas, and he would -- within hours -- produce a greatly refined product. He showered us (pun intended) on the 13th floor of UNICEF with brief, articulate notes with ideas, reminders, suggestions. Once a theme was agreed on, he could produce a sermon or address that would move thousands, as twice in the vast Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Yes, Mike will be, is already, sorely missed. But so much that he has helped to create to make this a much better world -- the Child Survival and Development Revolution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Summit -- live on. As Sean O'Casey wrote:

He who through this life
weaves a pattern of vigor and elation
can never taste death,
but goes to sleep among the stars
his withered arms outstretched
to greet the echo of his own shout.
When a true man dies
he is buried in
the birth of a thousand worlds.