

## **As I See It: Remembering Michael True, the heart and soul of Worcester's peace movement**

**By David O'Brien**

Posted May 1, 2019 at 3:01 AM

Michael True, Worcester peacemaker, poet, historian, interfaith organizer, teacher of English and model Worcester citizen is gone. He passed away last week in Minneapolis where he and Mary Pat moved just a few weeks ago to join three of their six children who have settled in Mary Pat's hometown.

Mike and Mary Pat were among the very first persons my wife Joanne and I met when we arrived in Worcester 50 years ago this fall. Almost before we unpacked Mike had updated us on local peace actions and drawn us into the ecumenical "floating parish." We learned that this open-ended community had succeeded the legendary "Phoenix" storefront as home to local social activists — and lots of children.

From that period of crisis around the Vietnam War through the Plowshares and nuclear freeze movements to the 21st century resistance to unwise wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Mike was consistent and courageous, the heart and soul of Worcester's peace movement.

Sometimes he stood with a few Catholic Workers in lonely witness at Lincoln Square or outside a weapons research building in the suburbs. At other moments he was joined by larger crowds who agreed that one or another war was wrong even if they did not yet share Mike's conviction that nonviolence was the surest way to a just peace. In later years as leader of the Nonviolence sector or the International Peace Research Association he traveled the globe working for peace, teaching in China, lecturing on many trips to India, even once speaking on nonviolence in North Korea.

Mike's peacemaking work was far from his only contribution to our communities. He was always engaged with religion, across many denominational boundaries. He enthusiastically assisted the draft counseling work organized by

the city's Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders and directed by his dear friend Annabelle Wolfson. Later when his Catholic church backed away from ecumenism Mike lent support to local Catholic Workers and drew on his close relationship with the American Friends Service Committee.

Along the way Mike began to attend services at the local Friends Meeting. With his friend the late Bill Densmore, one of Worcester's most distinguished citizens, he helped lead an interfaith dialogue that bore fruit in a statement of shared values for use in Worcester schools and civic life. Later he, Mr. Densmore, Catholic Worker Claire Schaeffer-Duffy and Clark professor Paul Ropp organized the Center for Nonviolent Solutions which, among other good works, offered training in conflict resolution skills to students and faculty of several local high schools.

Mike delighted in teaching English teachers at Assumption College. With some of them he organized the nationally recognized Worcester Poetry Association. They brought the nation's top poets to read, including Worcester native Stanley Kunitz, they organized a poets in the schools program, and before long there seemed to be small poetry groups in every coffee shop and library in central Massachusetts. Mike loved to break open the long ignored history of Worcester revolutionaries, abolitionists, labor radicals, peacemakers and poets and writers.

He wrote several books about local and national peacemakers and justice seekers and his comprehensive "An Energy Field More Intense than War," the title drawn from a poem by Mike's friend Denise Levertov, is a classic study of literature and nonviolence. It is safe to say that Worcester's many superb colleges never had a professor who more fully embodied the idea that scholars and teachers have important public responsibilities.

Mike True loved Worcester, its history, its diverse neighborhoods, its colleges and universities, and most of all its young people. His many friends testify to his generous encouragement of even the smallest effort to contribute to the city's civic life. Alone with a picket sign or alerting us in a newspaper column, he seemed like a prophet, but in this case a prophet who was also a good neighbor and an excellent friend.

He deserves after a lifetime of service to now rest in peace. The rest of us might wonder about how we can honor his legacy. Perhaps by raising a few Mike True-like questions about our decision under our Noble Peace Prize winning President Obama to spend a trillion dollars modernizing our nuclear weapons, or about our inability to find a few dollars here in Worcester to support conflict resolution training — practical peacemaking — in our schools. Mike took it for granted that most of us want to do better than that. That confidence in the rest of us was and remains a gift for which we who knew him are forever grateful.

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