

Michael Charles Pearo

Burlington - 79 - undertook his eternal journey on January 28, 2020.



A long-time teacher at Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington, Mike introduced thousands of students to the world outside Vermont through his travel programs and his World History, Contemporary History, and Religions of the World classes. He was a football, basketball, baseball coach and introduced field hockey during his years at Rice.

Mike was born on November 3, 1940, in St. Albans, VT, the son of Elmer F. Pearo. Abandoned by his mother, he spent the WWII years at St. Joseph's Orphanage with his sister, Judith. After the war, the two went to live with their father and his new wife, Alice Coleman.

When his father, also known as 'Mike', was killed in a logging accident in January, 1947, and, after a short placement in foster homes, Mike was sent to Don Bosco School on North Avenue in Burlington where he stayed until his graduation from Cathedral High School in 1958.

During these young, formative years, he encountered many good men who helped shape him: Father Joseph Pray and Father Forrest Rouelle; his high school coach, Bill Landers; and Bernie Cieplicki, Robert Noonan, John Varricchione, Lloyd Hulburd, Brent Tremblay, and Joe Quinn...all friends and fellow coaches.

Four women who also influenced him greatly were Sister Catherine Poirier of Santiago, Chile; the late Sister Monica Rock, RN, Sisters of St. Joseph; Mrs. Judith Ring of Burlington and Rice Memorial High School; and Susan Cutting of the Ave Maria Community Home in Richford, VT.

Mike went on to graduate from the University of Vermont in 1962. He earned his Masters degree from St. Michael's College in 1968. In the process, he spent the summer months working at the Weeks' School in Vergennes, VT.

Mike developed a strong interest in life-long learning and tried to satisfy this thirst by studying at Oxford University, The University of Tel Aviv, Kyoto University, Beijing Normal College, The University of Hawaii, and Champlain College (VT). In his latter years at Rice High School, Mike worked with the Vermont Refugee Agency, and he enjoyed his association with the organization.

While at Rice, Mike established a popular European Comparative Cultures Program. He later extended the program as an outreach to Peru, Chile, Venezuela, and Russia. Hundreds of students traveled under his guidance, for which he was acclaimed a national leader in international education.

A voracious reader and adventurer, Mike traveled to 113 countries. He was deeply indebted to the Passports Educational Travel Company of Spencer, MA, for the encouragement and friendship given him while planning these many adventures. One experience he thoroughly enjoyed was working with orphaned children in India.

Mike had many interests, ranging from sports to opera and, in his later years, he developed a keen interest in comparative religions. He was an avid movie fan and was always ready to give his critique of current cinema.

During his career as teacher and coach at Rice High School, Mike was the recipient of dozens of awards. His favorites were the naming of the Rice baseball diamond as the Coach Mike Pearo Field, as well as his induction into the Vermont Principals' Association Hall of Fame and the Cathedral-Rice Athletic Hall of Fame. Mike was twice named Best Teacher by Reader's Choice sponsored by the Burlington Free Press, and another as Runner-

Up. In addition, he was twice nominated as National Catholic Teacher of the Year.

Mike leaves behind his sister, Judith A. Pearo of Swanzey, NH, and her children, Roger, Amber, and Erin, and six nieces and two nephews; his grandniece, Adrianna Pearo; and his stepsister, Gloria Jean Burney of Amarillo, TX; and the Paul Mayer and the Alfred Key families who accepted him as one of their own. Mike was predeceased by his niece, Nicole Pearo; his very special friends Dr. J. Ward Stackpole, Steven and Joan Limanek, and Al Senecal, who (along with their families) extended numerous kindnesses to him over the years; and many of his students and colleagues at Rice High School.

Mike wanted to express a special thanks to John Varricchione, a fellow teacher and coach, who committed himself to Mike's social and financial welfare in his final years. When the former baseball coach was asked about his approaching death, Mike said to tell people "he went down swinging."

There will be a Mass of Christian burial at Christ the King Church in Burlington, on Saturday, February 15, 2020, at 12 noon. Immediately following the service, a gathering will be held at Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Michael Pearo '58 Rice Memorial Scholarship Fund, in care of Rice Memorial High School, South Burlington, VT. Arrangements have been entrusted to the care of Ready Funeral Home in Burlington. To place online condolences, please visit www.readyfuneral.com Published in The Burlington Free Press on Feb. 1, 2020.