

Editorial

CRI DE COEUR

Sheila Williams

When Michael Bishop died on November 13, 2023, our field of fantastic literature lost one of its most treasured authors. Mike's career began in 1970 with a short story sale to *Galaxy Magazine*. By the time he sold his first tale to *Asimov's*, Mike's fiction had already received at least five Nebula and four Hugo nominations. That first sale to us, "Cabinet Meeting" (Summer 1977), was a novelette that appeared in our second issue!

The first of Mike's stories that I worked on was "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis (or, the Astrogator's Testimony)," a novella that was our November 1983 cover story. That tale was a finalist for the Nebula Award. It was also one of our most controversial publications, which meant that we received a few letters of complaint from our readers. Mike was a practicing Christian and inspiration for the story had come from his faith. In an editorial on "Religion and Science Fiction" that Isaac Asimov wrote for our June 1984 issue, the Good Doctor described the story thus:

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["The Gospel According to Gamliel Crucis"] dealt with a sensitive subject—the coming of a savior, or, in effect, the second coming of Christ.

What makes it even more effective as a science fiction story is that the savior is an extraterrestrial, and not a particularly attractive one to our human eyes since she (!) is a giant mantis. This is entirely legitimate, it seems to me, since if there is other life in the Universe, especially intelligent life, one would expect that a truly Universal God would be as concerned for them as for us, and would totally disregard physical shape since it is only the "soul," that inner intellectual and moral identity that counts.

Isaac added that, "The result was a tour de force which we obviously considered quite successful, or we would not have published it." With Isaac's permission, the entire editorial was reprinted as the Introduction of Mike's 1986 short story collection, *Close Encounters with the Deity*. The book also included Mike's Hugo and Nebula Finalist, "A Gift from the GrayLanders," which appeared in our September 1985 issue; the collection's near title story, "Close Encounter with the Deity," which was published in *Asimov's* in March 1986; and "Alien Graffiti (A Personal History of Vagrant Intrusions)" from our June 1986 issue.

The 1992 World Fantasy Convention was held in Mike's hometown—Pine Mountain, Georgia—and that's where I got the chance to really get to know him. After spending time with Mike and his wife Jeri, they invited me, and a couple of other people, over to their beautiful home. They gave us a tour of their house, which I believe had been owned by Jeri's family for a few generations. They also regaled us with stories about their son Jamie and daughter Stephanie, who were both away at college.

My oldest daughter was born in 1993, and I tentatively included a photo of her in a few of our authors' holiday cards. Mike's response to the photo and his sincere interest in my family encouraged me to continue to include these photos in cards and to expand on the number of people who received them. [I know some authors were perplexed, but I was delighted that eventually many started sending photos of their kids and/or pets back to me.] As I told Mike years later, I also tried to emulate the loving home life for my kids that he and Jeri had provided for their own children.

Mike's ninth story in *Asimov's*, "Cri de Coeur," was our September 1994 cover story. This moving novella about the journey on a generation starship was also a finalist for both the Hugo and the Theodore Sturgeon Award. There was a twelve-year

gap between Mike's tenth *Asimov's* story in 1996 and his eleventh in 2008. During that time, Mike and I mostly stayed in touch via holiday cards.

On April 16, 2007, Mike and Jeri experienced one of the most terrible tragedies that can befall a family. Their thirty-five-year-old son Jamie, now an instructor of German at Virginia Tech, was murdered in the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history. Mike's next tale for us, "Vinegar Peace, or, The Wrong-Way Used-Adult Orphanage" (July 2008), was the painful story of a society that sends adults to orphanages after their last child dies. It, too, was nominated for a Nebula.

In February 2015, we published Mike's powerful novelette about "Rattlesnakes and Men." This story was partially inspired by the use of rattlesnakes in certain religious services and Nelson, Georgia's 2013 ordinance that required that every head of household own a working firearm. Like "The Gospel According to Gamliel Crucis," the tale generated some controversy, but it was also another Nebula finalist.

Unbeknownst to all of us, the appearance of "Gale Strang" in our July/August 2017 issue drew Mike's forty-year publication history with *Asimov's* to a close. Yet, he and I never stopped corresponding. Alas, the pandemic made it impossible for me to include a photo of my daughters with the 2021 holiday cards. After Mike lamented this absence, I journeyed from my home in NYC to our Connecticut headquarters to make sure that I got a photo into the 2022 card.

It broke my heart to learn that Mike had entered hospice care this past June. But I knew that he'd been suffering and that this was a well-thought-out decision. That knowledge didn't make it any easier to learn that he'd died on the day after his seventy-eighth birthday. Lately, I've been rereading his tales, and I'm grateful that the magazine and I both benefitted from our relationship with this remarkable man.