




IN LOVING
memory



Michelle Laurice Goulevitch

11 June 1971 ~ 19 August 2021

An Angel to Many

I sincerely hope this tribute helps people understand a little more about Michelle, who has been referred to by many as an angel, and with her edgier more adventurous / mischievous side, sometimes even a 'badass angel', but an angel, nonetheless.

I came to know Michelle in August 2020. We shared regular close contact for one year thereafter, often on a daily basis. During that time, I came to know one of the most incredible, loving, caring, compassionate, intelligent, selfless people you would ever wish to meet.

Incidentally, I also had the privilege of sharing a close relationship with the late [Prof. Heather Ashton](#) over many years, known as The Angel of the North. I cannot help but think of Michelle as our Angel of the South. I feel blessed to have been touched by both these wonderful souls.

Meaningfulness

May Michelle's beauty of spirit and legacy never be forgotten and may her suffering and efforts to help others never be lost in vein.

May doctors, both in New Zealand and globally, understand the horrific suffering that prescribed drugs, such as benzodiazepines (Xanax etc), can cause.

May the media, who continue to turn their backs, move towards protecting the public by ceasing their continued failures to report these stories and the truths behind the suffering.

May the politicians, cease their negligence and inhumane ostracising of innocent members of the public from whom they receive money to serve.

Michelle has made much of [her story](#) public in the hope it will spare others the same unnecessary suffering.

While upholding her beliefs, this tribute reflects on Michelle's publicly shared experiences in remembrance of her legacy and in the hope that she can one day get the recognition for herself and the validation for others she so desperately sought.

Growing Up

Michelle was born on 11 June 1971. She grew up in Raumanga, Whangarei, New Zealand – known for the Raumanga Falls. Coming from a small family, both Michelle and her brother were raised by their mother alone. As a kid, she use to love goofing around and playing games with her late younger brother, Sandy, with whom she was close.

The family spent weekends at nearby Ngunguru Beach, an idyllic seaside village area, where the ambient sounds of the waves can be heard gently lapping at the shores. Michelle shared fond memories of rowing out around the estuary together with her brother, where they went fishing for sprats before releasing them back into the glistening waters.

Schooling

Michelle attended Raumanga primary and intermediate schools, later studying at Whangarei Girls High. Her lifelong friends remember her as an exceptional student who was always allocated into the top classes at school. While excelling at her studies, Michelle also had an adventurous side, where occasional mischief was all part of the adolescent experience of growing up.

During her secondary education, Michelle moved with her family to Auckland. She enrolled at Rangitoto College, where she excelled in the fields of math and science before enrolling at Auckland University. With a love for animals, she studied zoology and psychology, graduating in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in science.

Early Career and Young Adulthood

Sometime after graduation, while slightly contrasting with her degree, Michelle entered the cooperate world, later working in the field of telecommunications as a Senior Learning and Development Consultant.

As a young lady, she was happy with her job and career prospects. She loved life and enjoyed jogging, going to the gym, going to parties, reading books and shopping with friends.

Turning Point

Following a viral infection in 2002, at age thirty one, Michelle began suffering from ME/CFS or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. She talks about her experience with this invisible and largely misunderstood illness during an interview on [Equality Matters](#), explaining how it can be so severe that some people require feeding tubes.

For Michelle this proved to be a turning point in her life, where she would later decide to help support others who are more challenged in society.

Mid-Career and Marriage

The above illness had forced Michelle to resign from a successful career. Although recuperation was challenging, she had been making steady progress over time.

While working outside the house had become difficult, Michelle began making jewellery as a hobby to occupy herself during the day. She soon discovered a hidden talent and become successful enough to open a jewellery business, simply named “Gorgeous Jewellery,” now trading under [Ativa Jewellery](#).

Later in 2008 Michelle got married, and while spending time with her husband, she kept busy by growing her new jewellery business.

In 2011, her range became successful enough to enter the retail sector with displays at Kelly Bridal House and Trousseau Bridal Shoes in Newton, Auckland.

Supporting Local Businesses

Wanting to help small businesses thrive and encourage people to reach their potential, while overcoming barriers and discrimination, in 2012 Michelle created [Network NZ](#), now operating as [Collectively NZ](#), also on [Facebook](#) and supported by [Admin Army](#).

As part of this initiative, while giving credit to her colleagues for conceiving the idea, Michelle established a New Zealand Small Business Awards, covered in an online [article](#) by The New Zealand Entrepreneur, with the awards now held as [Collectively Business Awards](#).

Running her businesses from home, while supporting others in the same capacity, this new endeavour had a positive impact on Michelle, as seen in this [interview](#), as well as other members of the business support community.

Personal Struggles and Suffering by the Medical System

Michelle made no secret of the struggles that confronted her in life. She has openly and publicly shared her experiences in the hope that others may never be subjected to the same level of inhumane suffering. Sadly, the biggest struggle would come from a place that she needed trust most – the doctors and the medical system.

While Michelle had been making an initial recovery from her previously undiagnosed ME/CFS, no suitable treatment had been forthcoming.

Doctors had instead been prescribing multiple drugs long-term, including antidepressants and benzodiazepines, without any observation of the 2-4 week recommended maximum prescribing period, drug interactions, adverse effects, including neurological injury, or warnings of serious withdrawal reactions; in other words, there was no informed consent nor was there sufficient observation for the medical code of ethics.

Over time this would cumulate in the most inhumane suffering that only those who have experienced it could ever begin to imagine with a vast array of excruciating symptoms that Michelle has described openly in [her story](#).

The medically induced drug injuries were followed by a range of other complications including seizure causing chemical sensitivities to synthetic fragrances, eating disorders and later electric magnetic sensitivities, all resulting in further unnecessary suffering.

Coinciding with the medical injuries, Michelle has also talked openly about the emotional scarring of childhood molestation, later sexual abuse, loss of her dearest brother to suicide, loss of her unborn child that she so dearly nurtured, together with yet another layer of suffering from otherwise invisible narcissistic experiences – a topic she was extremely well-versed in.

During her struggle, relationships were strained resulting in marital separation. While her body had become its own torture chamber, due to prolonged polypharmacy, Michelle had been left mainly housebound and bedridden, reliant on her mother for support, feeling isolated and struggling for help and understanding.

A Friendship Meant to Be

While her suffering had been unknown to me, I had reached out to Michelle back in August 2020, well before she had entered a state of rapid decline.

I was on the lookout for help with World Benzodiazepine Awareness Day (W-BAD) when I was drawn to a support group that Michelle had established, [Benzo Warrior](#), in particular the logo on their [Facebook Page](#), symbolising “Integrity” and “Compassion”.

At the time of our first call, we hit it off immediately. Michelle said, “I was so proud when I found out it was a New Zealander who’d set up W-BAD.” We talked for about two hours, and we would talk again almost every day for a year thereafter.

Michelle would later ask, “How did you know to call me?” and before I had a chance to answer, she said, “You just know these things, don’t you.” As we came to know each other more and more, and while looking back on our coming together, she often said, “It was meant to be....”

Helping With W-BAD

Michelle had been a big supporter of W-BAD in previous years. When I asked if she would like to become involved, she said that it would be an honour. Like many others, she had concerns over the recent largescale dismantling and dehumanising of the platform, which had people talking among themselves in the support groups.

Following through on requests from the community, and with Michelle’s help, I submitted a reform proposal, and although it resulted in my ousting as founder, there was no giving in.

She told me, “I knew from the time we first spoke that you had been manipulated and psychologically abused.” She was very supportive in helping to move things forward.

Sharing a strong sense of community, together with Michelle’s incredible insight and vast knowledge, she helped identify the dynamics that had been undermining W-BAD, as I set about having this global initiative resurrected for the people in the late Professor Heather Ashton’s honour, while at the same time maximising harmony and integrity within the wider groups – something she strongly believed in.

Creating Memories

During this time, we developed an incredible friendship based on mutual trust and respect. I soon fell in love with Michelle's spirit – in a way that we soon became soulmates – with her stuck at home and me stuck away from home, ironically, both situations arising from following doctors' orders.

With Michelle having become mostly bedridden and housebound, while using messenger, I would take her out on mini tours around Matsumoto in Japan, stopping by to say hello to people along the way. She always enjoyed the village shops, the cherry blossoms, the shrines and the castle.

We shared many stories. Michelle was always amused whenever I quoted my friend Ed, a registered lawyer, former soldier and grandson of the late Sir Āpirana Turupa Ngata, who used to double up on his sayings for emphasis with expressions like, "Hold your line soldier – hold your line!" She often used to say, "I love Ed!"

A Beautiful Mind

With a background in science and incredible intellectual capacity, Michelle diligently studied the drugs that she had been prescribed as well as the subsequent medical conditions that had caused her suffering, arguably learning significantly more than many doctors, as she continued to discover that much of her pain had been iatrogenic, or medically induced.

Many others have commented on how articulate Michelle was, and indeed, that was incredibly so, as well as she was extremely literate. She later told me that, although she comes across as functional, she was often heavily relying on experiences and skills previously learnt, as the prescribed drugs had been causing her significant cognitive impairment, so much so that we can only imagine just how truly amazing she really was.

A Beautiful Heart

During the midst of her struggle, Michelle continued to help others. It was often difficult to get hold of her, but in between her waves of suffering she was always either busy with online support sessions through Zoom or posting in the support groups with distractions and encouragement for others.

A Beautiful Soul

As well as her incredible insight and intuition, Michelle often gave positive reinforcement, which I am sure was the same for everyone.

She would often say, “You’re a man of principle Wayne.” When I messaged her saying, “Thank you for believing in me Michelle,” she replied, “It’s easy to believe in you Wayne, you have integrity and compassion – two fundamentals that make a decent human being.” She often ended her voice messages with “Take care my friend,” “Sending you love from New Zealand...” and others.

Sense of Humour

Michelle still maintained her sense of humour. She told me about some of the things that she had done while in the worst part of withdrawal, things like putting her phone into the refrigerator. I said, “Suppose it gives a new meaning to the word ‘cold calling’...” she laughed, “I suppose it does...”

We shared many jokes, which were made even funnier using the same Kiwi lingo. Her friends also commented that they had laughed many times about their brain lapses while suffering withdrawal, showing again how Michelle’s spirit continued to shine.

Lovingness

It was easy to see Michelle’s loving nature: the way she cared for animals, the way she cared for people, the way she cared about society, the love she shared for her unborn child and the love she held for her late brother, Sandy. Anybody would agree that with her later maturity, Michelle’s voice was incredibly soothing and down to earth, articulate with such grace and poise, reflecting the loving soul and humility that lay within.

Community Work

During her ordeal Michelle gave so much of herself to numerous support initiatives. Below are some examples.

- [Network NZ](#) / [Collectively NZ](#) (Founder / Director)
- [Benzo Warrior](#) / [Facebook Page](#) (Founder / Director)
- [Benzo Recovery Group](#) (Admin)
- [Healing from Abuse and Trauma](#) (Advocate)
- [Equality and Motivational Support](#) with [MUV Talks](#) (Advocate)
- [Suicide Awareness](#) (Advocate)
- Myalgic Encephalopathy / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (Advocate)
- Sexual Abuse (Advocate)
- Narcissistic Abuse Awareness (Advocate)

SOS

Michelle described her struggle with medically induced drug damages as nothing less than “barbaric torture” absent of any plan for hospitalisation given her special needs.

Following a short period without our usual regular contact, the deterioration and apparent aging struck me instantly.

Becoming increasingly desperate and fragile, Michelle put out an [SOS](#) on Facebook.

Some of her friends contacted medical workers, the press and even government ministers. I too contacted several members of the press. Nobody lifted a finger.

Michelle told me that a female free-lance journalist was the only one who even looked like doing something, but when Michelle explained to her that she would need to be fragrance free due to the seizure causing chemical sensitivities, she cut the call, ending all contact and what little hope remained.

I began working on a plan to help Michelle set up a website, so that her plight could be better heard. She replied, “Thanks Wayne...I feel like I’m drowning and I’ve been screaming for help and no one is really listening.”

While I was trying to encourage her with one small step at a time, Michelle simply began responding through messenger with love symbols on each of my attempts to help, which I can now only interpret as, *thank you for caring.*

Boundless Compassion

Even in her darkest moments of adversity, Michelle's spirit continued to shine through. People have talked about how she still showed concern for others right up till the very last moments. They commented, "Typical Michelle always compassionate without a single ounce of ego."

Upon Passing

On 19th August 2021, Michelle's years of suffering came to an end, when she sadly passed alone at home.

I recall the exact day, time and location when I learned of Michelle's passing: sitting outside a friend's café in Matsumoto about to drink a coffee. When I viewed the message from Geraldine, it hit me like a train, the impact forcing me to do a doubletake on the name, *Oh my God – not Michelle!*

After talking to friends for a bit, I headed to a local swimming pool, seeking the solace of a cold shower and cold swim. I then called into a church that has been helping me. It was Sunday, 22nd August. There had been no service that day due to the coronavirus. The sun had just set. We went upstairs to the church for a special service: only the priest, Michelle and I present.

The night was long and sleepless. I stared up at the ceiling wondering what I could have done, later discovering that Michelle had asked herself the same question about her brother, accepting the fact that there is nothing we can do apart from honouring them and treasuring their memories.

Days later, I spoke to Holly for about an hour. I've only cried four times in my adult life and that was number four, struggling to hold back the tears for days thereafter.

Although Michelle has left us, her legacy lives on in all those she has touched with her love and generosity of spirit. She longed to be with her brother and unborn son, and I trust they are now together in peaceful comfort.

Her Legacy

Michelle has left us with many things to be forever grateful: encouragement for those who are challenged in our society, through her pioneering work in establishing the New Zealand business support network; comfort for those in need of help, through the many support groups she has established; remembrance and validation for those who have fallen victim to the negligence of our political and medical systems, helping people reach their potential – to feel equal and accepted, while reminding us about the importance of working together with integrity and compassion.

I recall Geraldine telling me that Benzo Warrior is one of the best run benzodiazepine support groups there are with a great administration team – that is Michelle, her amazing integrity, heart, organisation and people skills, empowering others to carry the torch.

Due to the initial shock, I never got to see the tributes flow in for Michelle on the Tributes part of her Facebook page, which now appears unavailable – I can only image how heartfelt they all were.

Honour

When I first met Michelle she told me that it would be an honour to be part of W-BAD. I feel the honour is all mine, and it is my intent to honour her alongside the late Prof. Heather Ashton, as both the Angel of the North and our Angel of the South are eternally remembered for their compassion and dedication to the cause.

The Cup of Tea

While in communications with Michelle, and while setting out on what is essentially an impossible feat in terms of my own personal goals, Michelle gave reassurance, saying that I would succeed and someday make it back home to my hometown of Auckland. She said, “You’re going to do it Wayne; I believe in you. You’re going to make it back, and we’re going to have that cup of tea together...”

I promise you Michelle that when the time comes, I will find you in spirit, and we will have that cup of tea.

Eternal Spirit

While reluctant to include this at first, I have decided to share the following about writing this tribute.

I had printed out the first few pages with Michelle's photo on the cover, carrying it around with me for notetaking.

I showed it to an English guy at work, and he began to tear up. I said, "Are you alright?" He replied, "Yeah, I dunno, I don't even know her, but there's just something about her eyes..." I said, "Oh, you can see that too...?!"

When writing at home I often had the printout on my desk in constant view. Every now and then I would glance down. I couldn't help seeing expressions in her eyes, much like the Mona Lisa painting, sometimes looking happy, sometimes looking sad, even weeping.

Nearing completion I showed it to a close Nepalese friend at an Indian restaurant – one that I have frequented for ten years – a place where I had previously shared conversations with Michelle through messenger.

I saw him react without saying a word. I asked, "What do you think of the photo?" In his broken English he replied, "Still looks here." Somehow understanding what he wanted to say, I asked "I think I know what you mean, there's usually something different about photos after people pass, don't you think?" "Yes, she is now come – she is watching, no?"

After realising two completely different people had similar feelings, I asked him whether I should include it in the tribute. He replied, "She is special person – write from your heart..."

Remembrance

May we never forget Michelle and all that she stood for. Whenever I venture out around Matsumoto on my bicycle I still take her with me, still sharing the same spots where we sat and talked and the same views while driving through the mountains on my way to work each day.

Something I have always admired in people is “Heart” and “Character”. Michelle had both those in abundance, her life meant something – something special, it still does and always will. May she rest in everlasting peace, knowing that she matters.

Below are some words she has left.

Love here on earth
Love beyond the grave
There are no roads
My love for you cannot pave
-T. Sachs

“Do or do not - there is no try” Yoda
Wise words they are haha

May your spirit be forever free Michelle – may your spirit be forever free!

With eternal love and respect,

Your friend,

Wayne