

Michael Manove, Emeritus Professor of Economics, passed away in May 2026. I spoke for a few minutes at a memorial for him, held about a month later. The following roughly corresponds to those few minutes of a memorial speech.

I am going to tell you one or two things about Michael, but it's really about Michael and myself. The Beginning, the Middle, and the End. It's going to be forty years of a friendship, in a few pages.

1 1986

I met Michael Manove in 1986. I was a graduate student at the London School of Economics; he was a professor on sabbatical there. We were put in the same office due to space shortage. A chance encounter because graduate students and visiting professors seldom share an office.

We got to talk economics, I recall. But the most impressive first experience with Michael was that he used a floppy disk to install his highly customized word processor in about 20 public computers. This was how he could work on his file any time anywhere. (Laptop didn't become popular until 10 years later.)

Fast forward about half a year to the winter of 1987. I already got most of the thesis ready. But my supervisor had given me the ultimate advice: "You won't find a job here." He meant that a Chinese wouldn't be able to find an academic job in the U.K. There were zero Chinese economists in the U.K. then, and I wasn't going to be the first one.

Somehow, either he heard wind or I told him about my predicament, at some point Michael said to me, "You have no future here. Consider coming to Boston. You have nothing to lose. For a year. If we like you we'd try to keep you. If we don't we fire you, but it's a big country, and there are jobs elsewhere." Then it was a short phone call with the chair at the time, Larry Kotlikoff. A few weeks later, I joined a long queue in Kensington, London to apply for a visa to come to Boston. A few months later, I took the fateful Northwest Orient flight for Boston. That was the beginning of many things.

But I had no idea at the time that "this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Did Michael run a charity? Did Michael spot someone who was good enough for an 87th ranked department? Did Michael want to teach the UK folks a lesson about DEI? Or did Michael "randomly" give people

opportunities? Was he thinking or not thinking? I never did ask him any of these questions.

2 Over the years

Over the years, Michael and I became close friends. We clicked, I guess, because we felt safe together. For years, he had been correcting my English openly, even in seminars or meetings. Well, I just ignored him. And he always complained that I didn't smile; in response, I gave him a longer face. Every time he spilled something, he blamed me for installing bad desk-chair combos in the seminar room; I blamed him for agreeing to install an A/C unit that would drown out seminar speakers. And we teased each other so often that some other colleagues were offended! It's not unlike adolescents playing in the school ground! But school boys we were, respecting each other nonetheless.

Michael of course was out spoken and implemented his own justice and political correctness. He once told the BU President that "If Harvard was interested in education, it would have gone bankrupt 250 years ago." The President gave him some faculty slots to strengthen research.

I once parked my minivan over two parking slots. At the end of the day, I found a note on the windshield. It read, "You should not park your van over two spots. Signed Michael Manove." I took the note back to his office and said, "You are a dead man. You can leave a note saying whatever. But you do not sign your name to a stranger!" He was rather speechless when he realized that he left the note to me.

Michael absolutely refused to use the word "pass or passing." He would always say "die or death." He also refused to use the word "partner." Our department web page had an extended directory and everybody's significant other was noted. When he saw that Elvira was turned into a partner, he was totally outraged. He had Elvira changed back to "wife."

On economics, we did write a paper together, something only one other colleague in the department managed to out-perform. Kevin Lang wrote multiple pieces with Michael.

3 "The problem is 74" and "We are all waiting"

It happened about ten years ago. He said "The problem is 74. I am 74 years old." I guess his health had been good, no obvious debilitating illnesses. But time and aging spare no one. Various ailments must have

cropped up. Michael knew that but said, “you either go to others’ funerals or let others come to yours. The former is still better.” Our conversations now were more about the past than the future. Many social activities became less frequent; no more Friday afternoon gatherings in his office to raise a glass or two.

Michael often said, “I just want to drop dead.” I asked, “How often do you see your doctors?” He answered, “Once every few weeks.” I replied, “You won’t drop dead. Doctors’ job is to stop you from dropping dead. You see them too often.” He sighed a big one. He and I had always been open about most things, especially life and death matters. His motto was, “whatever will be, will be,” in no less Doris Day fashion of “que sera sera.”

The pandemic wiped out all social interactions. He would be over 80 years old when Covid was over.

Early March 2023, he called me from a hospital when I was in Florida presenting a seminar. He had a stroke; it was not that serious—he was able to call me after all. A couple weeks later, he suffered a serious stroke. I didn’t get to see him again until late June! He would never be the same. The stroke wiped out his language and higher cognitive functions. He was lucky to hold on to mobility.

After that I hadn’t managed to see him as much as I had wanted. What with a six-month sabbatical the second half of 2023, another four-month away in 2025, and various trips in between. His health condition was like a Super-Martingale: random but with a downward trend. During one visit with a lunch outing, he would be happy; during another he would not be. Sometimes he would still tease me, “You look old.” because I dyed my hair grey. But other times, he would simply say, “We are all waiting.”

By spring this year, I had realized that his days were numbered. I am glad that my wife and I could visit him for the last time, just a few hours before he died. He was unconscious at that point, but we surely hoped that messages got across. Less than a week before his death, a few of us had Chinese takeout lunch with him. He was happy. After that, I never managed to find him conscious.

Frankly, I started missing the origin Michael right when he got ill, way back in 2023. The gradual decline was heart-breaking and cruel. The brutal battle of life could not be won; he knew it, I knew it.

He owed me a final tease. It perhaps would go like this: “You old fucker finally died.” He would reply, “Yeah, so long suckers.”