

Dr Michael Slazenger

Speaking at Michael Slazenger's funeral last month, his son-in-law Mr William Micklem quoted from the marvellous speech by Prospero in *The Tempest*. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

Now let me have my quotation. "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel." Michael was truly a friend to bind to oneself with steel.

Michael and I met at the first physics lecture in our pre-medical year. We filled up the theatre on the wooden numbered benches in front of Prof Ernest Walton in a haphazard manner and Mike and I ended up near the left hand side of the second row. Prof Walton had a very efficient method of taking roll calls at his lectures – he was not a Nobel Prize winner for nothing – we each had to sit in front of a number. He told us he had pinned up a list in alphabetical order outside the door and we were to sit as numbered at the next lecture.

And thus because of Prof Walton's liking for order Michael got to sit beside the stunning blonde in the class, Noreen Smith, who was clever as well as beautiful and who became his wife.

I suppose it is because one is longer in medical school than in any other disciplines that class friends become so important to one and frequently life-long. Michael and Noreen were to dinner with us a few weeks before his untimely death and truly he and Noreen never changed.

Ralph and Gwen Slazenger, his parents, came to Ireland in 1951. They bought Durrow Abbey, where as well as pursuing their business interests, they began farming. Soon after Michael came to Trinity they bought Powerscourt in County Wicklow and expanded their interests there. Gwen had a prizewinning Aberdeen-Angus herd which was internationally renowned.

Michael and Noreen and

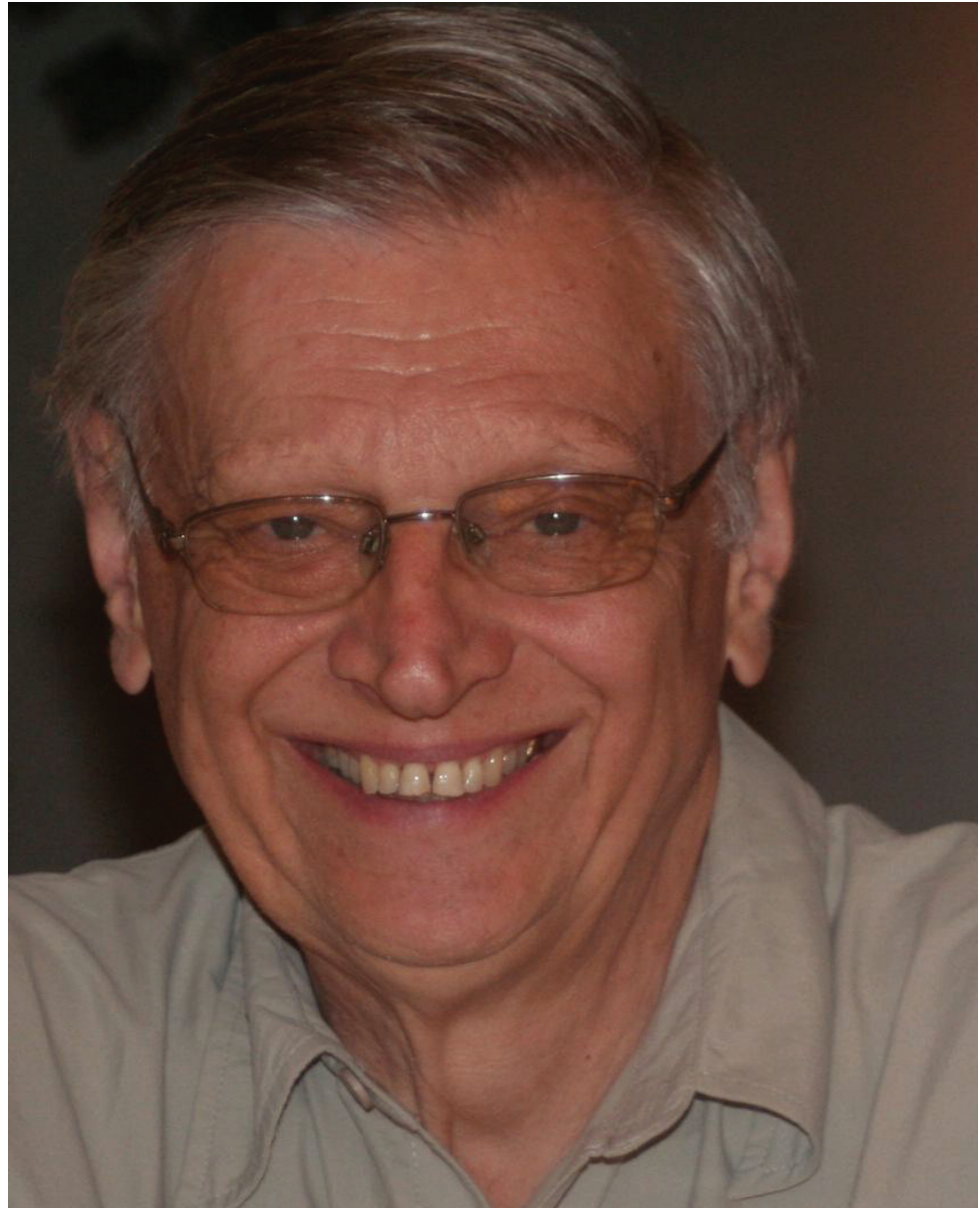
their three daughters lived in Wellington Place and their hospitality was enjoyed by so many of their friends. Mike had a glider in a garage (or should I call it a hangar?) at the end of the garden. In college and afterwards, flying and gliding were his great hobbies, very exotic to most of us. He represented Ireland internationally in gliding competitions, went down the Cresta run on a bobsleigh and skied with great enthusiasm.

But then Michael was one of those people who did everything with enthusiasm. It didn't apply just to his hobbies. He loved the area of medicine in which he chose to practice, anaesthesia, and was always interested in progress and innovations which might improve patient comfort and outcome. He also loved new gadgets. When my husband and I got married he brought a Polaroid camera, very new then, to the wedding and presented us with photographs outside the church.

He had to bring his energy and enthusiasm really to the fore in the 1990s. Following an incident in which his parents were held up one night by armed intruders, Ralph and Gwen decided to leave Ireland for the Isle of Man. Powerscourt House had been accidentally burnt down some years before and I suppose enough was enough. Mike and his four siblings were to run the estate.

From being a beautiful garden and tourist attraction with a large farm, the estate was changed into a golf course of great importance and the old house was re-roofed and a restaurant, shops and other facilities installed. Over the next few years a second golf course was added and then a Ritz Carlton hotel was built with wonderful views over the gardens.

Michael and Noreen had been living for some years in a house near the famous Powerscourt Waterfall. His skills in innovation were put to good use – Deerpark, the house, was self sufficient in energy



from a water wheel. He was an incredibly practical man. He kept a fold-up bicycle in the boot of his car and used to cycle off around town on his business. My husband was always impressed with Michael's energy saving and engineering skills and went to great lengths to get a similar bike.

Michael was always smiling, always in good humour. He was the same the last night I saw him as he was at that first physics lecture. In great good humour. I asked him that last night if there were many farm animals at Powerscourt now, remembering his mother's famous cattle. "Not one," he said.

We met another mutual old friend at his funeral who had started in college the same year as Mike and I did. He's a farmer who lives nearby and had been one of the "Ags" (agriculture students) who caused such uproar in our

combined chemistry lectures. As we came away from the reception in the Powerscourt Golf Club he said, "If Mike hadn't done what he did here, there would be three people employed on the estate instead of 350."

How he managed to put so much work into getting the Powerscourt project off the ground as well as devoting himself to his busy hospital practice in St Vincent's University Hospital, Elm Park, and St Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire, I don't know. To quote from William Micklem's address again "Everything was laced with humour". Apparently he used to say to the nurses "I have the body of an 18-year-old; I keep it in the fridge!"

The Slazenger family have a profound Christian faith and this shone out at the service of celebration for Michael's

life in St Patrick's Church, Powerscourt. When his sisters Wendy and Joanie read from the Bible one knew they had great familiarity with the texts. The prayers said by his daughters Marianne, Sarah, and Liz included those for all the nursing and medical personnel who had looked after Michael in Tallaght and St James's Hospitals. His eight grandchildren also took part in the service. One of them was in the Children's Gospel Choir which sang a hymn the chorus of which begins "Here I am Lord. Is it I, Lord?"

Michael was there in his life for so many people. Not just for Noreen, his patients, his siblings, children, and grandchildren. He was there for a huge circle of people who had "tried" his friendship for many years and found it firm indeed.

Dr Mary Henry