Michael Conrad Kovacs

Released from this earth and called to be with his Lord, Michael Conrad Kovacs died in Victoria on May 9, 2020. He was 99 years of age, a compassionate psychiatrist with a listening heart, an avid gardener, a keen chess player, an astute participant in the financial markets, a determined poker player who was affectionately known to his family as “French”.

Beloved Husband of the late Margaret Blanche Kovacs, a loving and generous Father to Michael Leslie Kovacs, Robert William Kovacs (Kathleen Caldwell), Colin Matthew Kovacs (Max Reidel), Colleen Margaret Kovacs (Michael Peachey), Mark John Kovacs (Heather Hawthorne), Paul Conrad Kovacs (predeceased) and proud Grandfather of Jeffrey Alexander Reimer.

He served with the Royal Canadian Armoured Corp during the Second World War. He rarely spoke of his war time experience, yet the will, strength, and determination he evidenced to endure the hardships of the Italian Campaign and the horrors of war equipped him well for the balance of his life.

Albert Einstein once remarked that “only a life that is lived for others is a life worthwhile”. Dad’s whole life was one of service to others. He worked tirelessly as an advocate in mental health. A lifetime in mental health requires a heart of compassion, much courage and an ability to encounter the human condition in a multiplicity of forms. He served as Medical Director of the Selkirk Mental Health Centre (in Manitoba) for years and played a pivotal role in guiding the Hospital in its fundamental reforms.

He championed a comprehensive Bill of Rights for patients which codified, for example, the right to privacy within a patient’s room, the ability to keep and display personal property, the right to communicate with people outside the Centre, and the right to exercise their vote and to have

accessible polling stations during Federal and Provincial elections. As the Hospital transitioned to community care he authored the following plaque on the original building with bars on the window. It read in part:

"This building was erected in 1886.It does not reflect current concepts in the care and treatment of the mentally ill…This relic of the past is destined to be demolished. May it be soon. May the crushing blows of the demolition hammer be symbolic of a victory for the rights of our mentally ill to be cared for and treated in settings commensurate with their needs."

When Dad first travelled to Victoria for a richly deserved retirement, he soon found himself (but six weeks after the arrival) working at the Victoria Mental Health Centre (Out Patient) and the Swift Street Medical Clinic. On Monday mornings he volunteered and attended to the homeless population on downtown Victoria streets. Behind the wheel of his Oldsmobile he headed to the Johnson Street Bridge, Victoria Cool Aid Society, St. Andrew's Cathedral Soup Kitchen and PEERS to make a "house call".

At 88 years of age, he concluded his medical endeavors and he was then happiest plodding about the garden. Dad delighted in naming each of the hummingbirds (George or Georgina) that returned daily to the feeders. Often twice a week, up to the age of 93, he trundled to the Oak Bay Recreation Centre with a bright blue gym bag displaying the logo "Surfer Dude" for a personal training session followed by a swim and sauna. The night before he died, in a moment of cognition, he requested a beer, sought to play a hand of poker, and inquired as to the performance of the daily markets.

"Grief never ends…But it changes. It is a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith…It is the price of love."

French, you are loved deeply and will be dearly missed.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at Holy Cross Parish, 4049 Gordon Head Road, Victoria, B.C. for the immediate family. Condolences may be offered to the family below.

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