

Michael J. B. Allen, distinguished professor, engaging teacher, accomplished scholar, dynamic raconteur, avid hiker, and loving family man, passed away peacefully in the early morning rainstorm of February 25, 2023 in his Santa Monica home after experiencing progressive heart failure. His family had been at his bedside in close presence in the days leading up to his passing. 81 years old at his death, he is survived by wife Elena, sons Ben and Will, sister Patricia, daughters-in-law Claudia and Melanie, grandchildren Paloma, Moses, and Ezra, and dog Wiglaf.

Michael was born on April 1, 1941 in Lewes, East Sussex, England to Frederick “Jack” and Ena Muriel (nee Bridgman) Allen, who imparted to him a love of learning, history, literature and the countryside. Michael contracted polio as a young boy, an ailment that impacted his arm strength for the rest of his life. Nursed back to health by his devoted mother, Michael excelled in school, was one of the top students at Lewes Grammar School and a Queen Scout, eventually enrolling at Wadham College, Oxford University, where he earned his Bachelors (1964) and Masters (1966) degrees in English. Many years later, in 1987, he was granted a distinguished D.Litt. in history from his alma mater in recognition of his exceptional academic and scholarly work.

Allen made his way to the United States, teaching at Ohio University before enrolling in the English Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan, earning his doctorate in 1970. It was in Ann Arbor where he met Elena, with whom he would share the rest of his life. Their first date? A movie theater visit to see “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.” When Michael received a job offer to serve on the faculty at UCLA starting in 1970, he and Elena made their way west together and settled in Santa Monica. They were married in Los Angeles in 1972.

Deemed in a recent academic article as having had “one of the most productive and consequential scholarly careers in the last half century,”¹ Allen distinguished himself as a teacher and scholar, making past worlds and perspectives come alive in lectures, courses, tours, and books. His teaching focused on the range of English literature from the Anglo-Saxons to Milton, and especially Chaucer, Donne, and Shakespeare. His research focus, however, turned toward the philosophical, theological, magical, and

¹ [Monfasani, J. \(2022\). Review of: Michael J. B. Allen, *Studies in the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico*, Routledge, London–New York 2017 \(Variorum Collected Studies Series,1063\). XIII + 348 pp., ISBN: 9781472448385. *Mediterranea. International*](#)

mythological issues explored by the fifteenth century Italian Platonists, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Allen's perhaps greatest contribution to scholarship was in opening up new access to and analysis of Ficino for the modern era.

Professor Allen's many prestigious honors included a Guggenheim Fellowship; the Eby Award for Undergraduate Teaching (UCLA's top teaching honor); UCLA's Faculty Research Lectureship; numerous international guest lectureships; the Commendatore decoration from the Italian Republic (2007); the International Galileo Galilei Prize (2008—for his work on Florentine Platonism); election as Fellow of the British Academy in London (2012); Scholar in Residence, American Academy in Rome (Spring 2013); and the Renaissance Society of America's Paul Oskar Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award (2015).

In addition to inspiring generations of UCLA students through his legendary English 10A course, where he taught a cross-section of English literature from Beowulf through Milton, along with popular Shakespeare and Chaucer classes, Allen served as a faculty lecturer with UCLA Travel for many years, enthraling alumni travelers with funny, engrossing, and sophisticated but accessible lectures on historical, philosophical, and literary topics relevant to the places they were visiting. His love of travel, adventure, and interesting places, literatures, and cultures was infectious. He also was a fixture at the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare summer school, and then later at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, where he held seminars focused on the plays that were being performed that season. Member of the English, Italian, and Comparative Literature Departments, his title upon his retirement from UCLA was Distinguished Research Professor of English and Italian Renaissance Studies.

Allen also took on many leadership roles through his career, serving as Director of UCLA's Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies (CMRS) (1988-93); Senior Editor of *Renaissance Quarterly* (1993-2001); Phi Beta Kappa National Visiting Scholar (2007-08) and President of the Renaissance Society of America (2006-08). He was a sought-after lecturer, and his dramatic readings of Pepys' journals of life in 17th-century London at CMRS dinners became the stuff of legend.

He wrote or edited some 21 books, some of his authoring highlights included: *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, University of California Press (UCP-1984); *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's*

Sophist, (UCP-1989); Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's Republic (UCP-1994); Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation. Olschki Press, 1998; Marsilio Ficino: Platonic Theology, 6 vols. with James Hankins, Harvard University Press (HUP-2001-2006); Marsilio Ficino: Commentaries on the Phaedrus and Ion (HUP, 2008); and Marsilio Ficino: Commentaries on the Mystical Theology and the Divine Names of Dionysius the Areopagite, 2 vols. (HUP, 2015).

Michael was a devoted family man and environmentalist who loved jogging along the beach and hiking with family and friends, both in his beloved South Downs of East Sussex and the Santa Monica Mountains of Southern California. He developed a keen eye for local flora and fauna and would read extensively about ecology, botany, and other scientific topics. While generally a talented cook, he was infamous for poorly-cut and exceedingly simple cheese sandwiches that he would serve to fellow hikers. He coached his sons in soccer, winning the Santa Monica City championship with a red-uniformed pre-teen team he had evocatively named "The Blood Demons" in 1990. He was a dear colleague and friend, serious weekly darts player with fellow professors Al Braunmuller, Reg Foakes, and Alan Roper, academic collaborator with friends professors Fredi Chiappelli (who became godfather to Ben), Jim Hankins, Brian Copenhaver, Deb Schuger, John Monfasani, Kenneth Muir, Valery Rees, and others. He was a devoted son, bringing his family to spend summers in his beloved hometown Lewes with his mum and dad, with long walks on the Downs with father Jack and son Ben. Michael was proud of his sons' academic and career achievements, seeing Will go from earning his doctorate in public health policy to a Directorship of Research with Los Angeles County's Department of Public Health. He played an important role in Ben's successful campaign for the California State Senate in 2014, charming friends old and new at events along the campaign trail, while giving advice and strategy. He was also a devoted grandfather, a true *pater familias*, a funny and deeply wise and comforting presence and father figure for the extended family of Nicholas, Allen, and Bautista in-laws and others at family gatherings and celebrations. His lifelong loving marriage with wife Elena, a teacher and artist, leaves all who knew them with a shining example of love, affection, partnership, and commitment. He will be remembered for his wit, intelligence, dynamism, integrity, vivacity, kindness, approachability, his love of storytelling, and perennially sunny disposition.

The family will hold a private funeral ceremony soon, followed by a memorial likely on Sunday, April 2—the day after what would have been Michael’s 82nd birthday—in beautiful Royce Hall (Room 314) in the hall where his 2012 retirement symposium was held on the UCLA campus he loved so much. For more information and opportunities to share your memories of Michael, please visit www.michaeljballen.com. Those interested in making a contribution in Michael’s honor are asked to donate to a fund in his name at UCLA’s Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, a fund to sponsor a bench for him in his beloved Santa Monica Mountains, or a donation in his name in Lewes through Sussex Past / The Sussex Archaeological Society. More information will be provided soon on the website.