Michael Jesse Bennett

April 29, 1929 ~ December 31, 2019

Michael Jesse Bennett passed away peacefully, in his sleep, on the morning of December 31st, 2019, the day after his 51st wedding anniversary, at the age of 90.

Born in Salt Lake City, April 29th, 1929, the third of eight children, to Emily Higgs and Harold Harper Bennett. Michael grew up in the Gilmer Park neighborhood of Salt Lake City, attending Emerson and Roosevelt schools, and graduated in the class of 1946 from East High School. He enjoyed sports, particularly racket sports and basketball, drawing and painting, music and drama. He loved to write, and had many poems, books and articles published.

At his core, Michael was driven by tradition, a strong sense of honor and integrity. He often sub-ordinated his own comfort, in order to serve others. That service was quietly given, and always, he gave faithfully, enthusiastically, sincerely and with great attention to detail.

In 1946, Michael enrolled at University of Utah, to earn his undergraduate degree. His studies, however, were twice interrupted. First he served a two year, LDS Mission to England, during which time, both the New Era and the Millennial Star bought and published several of Michael's articles and poems. In the year after returning to University, he married Florence Marie Gates and started a family that would ultimately grow to seven children (later divorced). School was interrupted a second time by his draft into the U.S. Army, where he served in country during the last eight months of the Korean War. Among the military honors he received were two Bronze Stars. He was acting Sgt. Major for the 37th Field Artillery Battalion, while also performing his church priesthood calling as Group President, serving all LDS members of the 17th Field Artillery Army Regiment. In 1954, after an honorable discharge, Michael graduated with a B.S. in Market-ing.

Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Michael pursued a promising career in Retail. He was accepted into New York University Graduate School of Retailing, where he earned several honors: President of the Class of 1955, graduated 3rd in his class, and he was awarded membership in Eta Mu Pi,Äîthe national scholastic and honorary retailing fraternity,Äîand received the "Arnold Constable" cash award, for top achievement in his studies on Person-nel and Supervision.

Steadily advancing his career over the next 23 years, Michael worked with several department stores in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Salt Lake City, always increasing organiza-tional efficiency and profits. In 1954, among his many notable accomplishments he pushed for and hired,Äîagainst the national backdrop of high racial tensions,Äîthe first African American em-ployed by Lord and Taylor in New York City.

In 1968, while attending church service in Pittsburgh, he met Janet Petrey and quickly realized that she was the love of his life. They married in December of 1968, and for 51 years remained madly in love. With a combined family of ten children, together they moved back to Salt Lake City, and bought a home in Michael's old

neighborhood of Gilmer Park, where they've lived for 48 years. The rest of the story is that in 1978, he left career in retail to do what he had always wanted to do: He became a professional actor.

From that time until his death, Michael became one of the most recognized actors from Utah. From 1978 until 2009, when he stopped keeping track, Michael appeared in over 100 films, shown on big screens and televisions, from networks to Disney. He performed in 30+ profes-sional theatre productions, including dinner theaters across the country, several seasons as a performer and Seminar Director in the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and three seasons as Artist-in-Residence with the Grand Teton Mainstage Theater in Jackson, WY. Michael also narrated several performances by notable artists, including the Utah Symphony and the Utah Chamber Artists.

Perhaps he is best known for researching, writing and performing one man stage shows, which he has taken to 182 communities in 20 states. Into his last year of life, he continued to perform some of the favorites from his repertoire: A Man of the Mountains, showcasing the mountain man era of the 1800s (24 years), Patrick Henry (30 years,Äîearning the 1996 George Washing-ton Award from the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge), Christopher Columbus (30 years) and his personal favorite, Charles Dickens (56 years). Altogether, he has given over 1400 perfor-mances for over 230,000 people, including 485 shows for 116,000 school children. Michael has narrated more than 70 productions, including Copeland's Lincoln Portrait with the Utah Sympho-ny, and he's recorded over 700 voice overs, TV and radio ads. Notably, for many seasons he was the voice of Lehi at the Hill Cumorah Pageant. Michael also has dozens of theatrical writing and directing credits.

Michael gave his all in everything he did, volunteering for every opportunity and accepting every calling. He was always the one to stop and help a stranger, feed the hungry, repair the squeaky door, and build the bookshelves. He loved music and performed solo, in duets, quartets, chorales and choirs. With great flair and comport, Michael conducted music for his ward and stake, and choirs everywhere he went. During his 90th birthday celebration, he conducted the Sunday Ser-vices choir, comprised of most of his children, their spouses, his grandchildren, and even some great grandchildren.

No matter what else was happing in his life, Michael put his family and faith first. He served a full time proselytizing Mission, a Stake Mission, and,Äîtogether with his wife Jan,Äîan inner-City mis-sion. Michael served as LDS Army Group President, Bishopric Counselor, twice a Branch Presi-dent, Choir Director in every one of his Wards, Gospel Doctrine teacher, and Gospel Essentials Teacher. He took great pleasure in researching his responsibilities and each of his class lessons. He was a lover of learning and reading, and built a library of over 3000 books, and was never at a loss for the right word, phrase, or insight.

Michael was active in the community, being a lifetime member of the Mills Branch of The Sons of the Utah Pioneers, where he served a term as President, and ran for the National Presidency. He often coordinated the programs for their monthly dinner meetings, sometimes performing his one-man shows by request, and contributed articles to the National SUP Magazine. He and Jan were active members of the Ensign Club, where he served as President Elect for the 2018-2019 term. Michael was deeply disappointed that his stroke prevented him from serving as this year's President. Together they were members of Bonneville Fork and Knife Club, and Michael was a founding member of the Babcock Readers Theater, dedicated to sharing traditional story telling and dramatic readings with the community. For a time in the early 1960s, Michael was a mem-ber of the Ute Rangers, a horse drill team that performed in parades and rodeos.

Michael was a man of great character, charity, intellect, empathy, and humor, and had a laugh that filled the room and shook the very atmosphere around, until everyone within hearing laughed with him.

Michael will be sorely missed by his family, everyone who loved him, his associates, and those who loved to watch him perform. He was preceded in death by his parents, as well as six of his seven siblings, John Bennett, Mary Elen (Dean) Belnap, Rose (Richard) Jenkins, Ann (David) Lowden, Peter Bennett, and Susan (Nathan) Winters. He is survived by his dear wife, Janet; his brother, Stephen (Susan) Bennett; his children, Michele Bennett, Mark (Jacque) Petrey, Christo-pher (Angelika) Bennett, Karee Petrey (Scott) Cannon, Hal (Claudia) Bennett, Rose-Marie Ben-nett (Gordon) Smith, Franklin (Alison Barker) Bennett, Nick (Jen) Bennett, Creighton (Tricia) Petrey, Geoffrey (Tiffin) Bennett; 35 grandchildren; and 61 great-grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held on Tuesday, January 7th, 2020 at 11 am at the Yale Ward building located at 1431 Gilmer Drive, Salt Lake City, UT. Viewings will be on Monday, January 6th from 6:00 , 8:00 pm at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 E. 1300 S. and on Tuesday from 9:30 , 10:45 am prior to the service. Interment at Salt Lake City Cemetery.