In Loving Memory of Michael “Mr. Mike” Sullivan

Town Grieves Sudden Loss of Library Director Michael Sullivan

By Tom Clow

A snowman that stood outside the Village Kidz Academy in North Weare holding a heart-shaped sign that read, “We miss you Mr. Mike” may say more about the legacy that Michael Sullivan left to the Town of Weare than any other words can express.

Mr. Mike visited the daycare center once each month bringing his guitar and a handful of storybooks. He folded his large frame into a kid-sized chair and entertained the children with songs and stories.

Each Tuesday morning children from the daycare, along with their caregivers, visited the library before it opened to the public, where they again enjoyed music and stories and learned that the library was a safe and friendly place in the community. Daycare owner JoAnn Kasper said that Michael told her, “The kids give me more than I can ever give them.”

Michael Sullivan died on December 10, 2019, little more than three years after assuming the job as Director at the Weare Public Library on August 15, 2016.

In an interview for the Weare Community News, after being selected for the position, Sullivan said that he was attracted to Weare because he loved small towns and small-town libraries. He added that he wanted to see what the library was offering electronically, and that he definitely would start a chess program.

He did start a chess program, offering lessons at the library as well as beginning and instructional programs at the middle school.

Assistant Library Director, Thelma Tracy, said that Michael was an excellent chess player, loved the game, and could probably have played at a competitive level.

Technology was another of Michael’s strengths. Under his leadership, the library converted from desktop computers to laptops that could be used anywhere in the building. Using the laptops, he gave computer instruction to senior citizens and others who needed the help.

The purchase of large-screen televisions for the main floor of the library and the Sawyer Room allowed for expanded instruction and the advent of family movie nights.

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“We Miss You, Mr. Mike”

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Programming at the library went beyond chess and technology. Sullivan offered group guitar lessons to all ages from ten years old to senior citizens. He loved origami and gave lessons in creating paper animals and making holiday gift boxes. He continued the community coffee hours on the first Thursday of each month, a practice started by his predecessor Chris Hague, and often invited guest speakers to events.

Michael joined the Weare Lions Club and became president of that group in 2019. The current Lions President JoAnn Kasper said that through the Lions Club Mike set up dates and times to do eye screenings at the public schools, as well as reaching out to local daycares. She said that he even helped with the eye screening once at the Village Kidz Academy, towering above the little ones. She couldn’t help but add that the children and staff enjoyed seeing his little blue car pull into the parking lot and “out popped big Mr. Mike.”

Students at the Weare Village Kidz Academy decorated a snowman in honor of the man they knew as “Mr. Mike.” (Tom Clow photo)

Michael Sullivan was also an author of both children’s fiction and professional books and articles. A series of his children’s books feature Escapade Johnson, an eleven-year-old fifth grader as the main character. Among his professional books are The Fundamentals of Children’s Services and Connecting Boys with Books: What Libraries Can Do.

Although he was not officially a member of the Weare Writers’ Guild, Mike often accompanied the local authors to fairs and community events where he helped set up displays of their work, adding his own books to the display. He also helped man the booth and sometimes entertained with his origami skills.

Weare in the World was a weekly news publication of the Weare Public Library. It was created and maintained by Mike Sullivan and was the town’s only local news publication after the Weare Community News stopped publication. He set a Monday deadline for news articles and announcements, and brought everything home with him on Monday nights to put the paper together.

On Tuesday, it was printed on the library copiers and then distributed to local stores and other sites. It was also uploaded to the library website so that it could be read online. It was another example of Mike Sullivan’s multitude of skills and his overwhelming commitment to the community.

Although he never talked about his educational background, Michael Sullivan held a Bachelor of Arts in History from Harvard University and a Master of Arts in Library and Information Science from Simmons College in Boston. He also taught in the Simmons College library program.

Most of his library work was done in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. He was the librarian in Kingston, New Hampshire prior to coming to Weare.

To say that Michael Sullivan’s passing leaves an enormous void in the Weare community is a vast understatement. Where in the world would we be without Weare in the World? A group that includes several members of the Weare Writers’ Guild, with the support of the Weare Library, is responsible for this issue. The group hopes to continue the publication in some format.

Michael ran a chess club at the library, teaching children and adults the game. (Courtesy photo)
Sullivan’s Impact Extends To Schools

Michael Sullivan came into town with a mission: make the library a place everyone wanted to go and spend time. One of his first objectives was to get to know the young people of Weare, and he took on that task with gusto by engaging early and often with Center Woods Elementary, Upper Elementary, and Weare Middle School students.

At Center Woods, he managed to get the whole school to get library cards and talked to students about the importance of reading and problem solving. He attended events at Weare District schools and was a favorite judge for the Invention Conventions.

“He was exactly the kind of role model our students needed,” said Center Woods Elementary Principal Jess Potter. “He was kind, passionate, and committed to our community and to our children,” she continued.

At the Upper Elementary and Weare Middle School, he was most notable for his skill in playing chess and his generosity in teaching hundreds the strategies of chess and share his love and passion for the game.

After Michael’s passing, fifth-graders Chloe Boswell and Leah Brouillet wrote a tribute to him.

Mike was our best friend and he still is. Mike worked at the Weare Public Library and was a great help and comfort to us when we would get there. He would do so much for us. He would sing to us, he would read to us, he would welcome us into the library. He cared about kids more than he cared for himself. All of us really miss Mike. We miss how he would greet and welcome us. The library won’t be the same without you, Mike.

Tributes From Library Staff

Mike Sullivan was like a superhero to the town of Weare. He was very active and worked hard in trying to bring the community together. The biggest and the most talked about way was by publishing the Weare in the World newspaper each week and highlighting the different events that were happening within the town. He was always up for new ideas for programming and trying to make the library a better place for everybody. If there was a program happening at the library he would always be on top of making advertisements for it. He had a huge heart for kids and tried to offer programs that were for everyone. As a director, he was very accommodating to the needs of his staff members. He was funny and always willing to lend a hand if needed.

There were certain things that he was a real stickler for and one of the things that sticks in my head every time I’m at work is making sure that displays for the New Fiction, Large Print and DVDs are filled. He was a very organized, energetic and really helped to bring up a level. He will definitely be missed by all of us who knew him but I am at least very grateful for the opportunity to work with him.

- Aroostine Brown

Michael Sullivan was more than a boss to us at the library. He would let us grow and learn and if we made mistakes along the way he would never get upset instead would teach us how to do the task. I am grateful to the three years of experience and growth. Mike knew so many things and would share his knowledge and history until you got it. We miss him terribly.

- Dena Ventiere

It was such a pleasure to work with Michael on a daily basis. He had such enthusiasm for all things in the library world. His knack for creating new space out of our cramped facilities was magical. He loved displaying materials to make them more appealing to the public often walking around the building several times a day to put up new selections. He initiated many programming innovations such as guitar lessons, origami, and this weekly newspaper. Michael developed a sense of community in our town well beyond the library walls. Children and adults were drawn to his easy-going manner. A humble and hard-working man, he often covered circulation desks as the regular staff was needed elsewhere for programs, interlibrary loans, or other behind the scenes duties. His days sometimes started at 8 am with chess at the middle school. He shared his love of chess with the entire community and sometimes would play a game if someone stopped by his office. And as I recall, he never lost! When the several middle school classes visited weekly, they were always greeted at the
door and some of them mentioned that as their fondest memory of Michael. As an author of both adult and children’s books, he energetically promoted reading and literacy. Personally, I shall miss his smile, his humor, his little blue car (that I am still not sure how he fit in), his ever-present coffee cup, and his willingness to share his vast knowledge with each and every one of us. - Thelma Tracy

My first introduction to Michael was on May 23, 2016. He was the instructor for a class for the Para-Librarian Certification Program, titled “Reader’s Advisory for Youth.” I remember that he had gone into some detail about the importance of book talking. His concern was how to get middle school boys to read. “How do you make them want to read? By making a book sound interesting,” he said. I had the privilege of attending two more of Michael’s classes.

“Children’s Programming” was a two-part class (8 hours total) where he tried to impart an understanding of how to engage the children into storytime, or to manage them as a group – without singling anyone out.

I was able to apply those principles at the Sullivan Public Library the very next week after that class. The last class that Michael offered was called “I’ve Weeded! Now What?” I learned about the different vendors that are available as well as a few other tools through the class about what to do after you’ve weeded the collection.

His passion for books became more evident as he went through the materials he wanted us to cover. The more that I interacted with him, the more I came to realize that even though Michael held an MLS degree, he understood that college was simply not in the cards for everyone.

He wanted to do whatever he could to impart his knowledge onto others. Armed with this knowledge, they would be able to navigate their own journey toward making the library their career.

In October 2019, we attended the Para-Librarian Mini-Conference with several other familiar faces, and we ended up discussing our respective libraries. He had mentioned that he was looking for a bit more help at the Weare Public Library, someone to fill in as needed.

Long story short, I took the position and I really enjoyed working with Michael as well as the rest of the staff. He was patient, especially with the kids, and he had a way of making you feel at ease in his presence.

It’s true I only worked with him for a total of five days before he passed, but in that short time, I was able to observe his work ethic, his passion for the library, his love of the children that came in and his joy in teaching computer classes and origami classes.

He looked forward to doing those things, even though it made his day incredibly long. I still hear his voice in my head: reminders to keep reading and sharing information about the books I loved, and those I didn’t, so I could have a productive book talk with others, no matter their age. And there is always that constant nagging in the back of my head to make absolutely certain that all the empty spots on the display areas are filled. I am so thankful for the opportunity I had to be able to learn from him and work with him, even if only for a few short days. - Paulette Tuttle

Mike Sullivan was the Director of the Weare Public Library for only 3 short years. While he was by no means done, what he accomplished in that time is amazing. He had a positive impact not only on the library staff and its patrons but on our entire community. Mike had a huge impact on the life of the children of Weare. I remember telling more than one child, disappointed that it wasn’t chess day, to just go ask Mike to play. As long as he wasn’t in a meeting, he would take the time to play chess with that child. He made them feel important. He worked at the circulation desk in the children’s department during my morning programs. At first a lot of the kids were intimidated by this new big guy with a deep voice. Within a few weeks fist bumps with Mr. Mike was a staple with toddlers and preschoolers! He shared his love and knowledge of music, I attended his summer guitar class and I intend to learn to play the ukulele to continue his practice of sharing live music with kids. We worked “Stories at the Lake” together, stories and music at Lake Horace which was a huge hit with families. He even taught himself to play Baby Shark after he learned it was one of my staple summer songs. His absence will be felt for a long time. - Karen Metcalf

Sullivan taught a wide variety of skills to library patrons, from guitar to origami, and everything in between. (Courtesy Photo)
A favorite Michael Sullivan memory was watching him interact with the youngest of our patrons. Bending to make eye contact, softening his voice, and his ever-patient responses to their questions. He was a director who understood the important role a library can play in a young child’s life. - Patricia Koski

Choosing Mike Sullivan as our Library Director brought new ideas and programs to benefit the community and the library. He will be missed by everyone. - Roberta Spitze

Weare Remembers “Mr. Mike”

We were so sorry to hear of Mr. Mike’s passing. He was such a great addition to the library team and will certainly be missed. We loved the songs and music he contributed to the kids programs and his Weare in the World Newsletter. - Amanda, Justin, Julian and Bowie

Dear Mr. Sullivan, Thank you for teaching us about news. I really liked the presentation. Now I know how to write a news story with no problem. I want to write stories when I grow up. I really like Weare in the World. Articles are interesting to read. - Mikey

Dear Mr. Sullivan. Thank you so much for coming into my classroom and helping our class with writing news reports. - Leland

Mr. Mike had a distinct baritone voice and a somewhat goofy laugh that invited others to laugh with him. He was kind and friendly whenever we ran into him in the children’s area. - The Lovett Family

I was out of work and trying to navigate today’s computers (I am 55). Mike was always there to help me navigate the laptops and all the stuff that I never grew up with. He was very smart, kind, helpful. He will be missed greatly. Be proud of his legacy.

The entire New Hampshire library community is mourning his loss.

When beloved librarian Michael Sullivan, author of the “Escapade Johnson” series of children’s books, chess player, juggler, teacher, origami guru and more died, it was sudden and sent shock waves throughout the many communities he served.

Mike was a great addition to the Weare Area Writers Guild, especially at the craft fairs. His “Escapade Johnson” series were an instant draw for children and their parents to our booth. When not talking about his books, he would sit and make origami objects and give them away to children, awed by the process. His height and long arms made setting up our booth tent a piece of cake. Mike, we will miss you. - Marge Burke

I am so sorry Ms. Carrin for Mr. Mike’s loss. Love, Isabella.

Original drawing by Isabella
Across
2. In the summertime, Mr. Mike sang and strummed at this park.
4. He had a skill for this tossing game.
8. Middle name.
11. Number of Sullivan siblings.
13. Assisted this group of Weare writers.
14. Professional focus: “Connecting ______ With Books”.
16. Spearheaded effort to offer this screening at local schools.
17. Number of years as library director.
18. His favored game of knights and rooks.

Down
1. Fine Japanese art of folding paper.
2. Cherished drink.
3. He was a member of this feline-named club.
5. Received a BA in history from this Ivy League school.
6. Name of Mr. Mike’s literary website: “Tales Told _______”.
7. Author of one of Mr. Mike’s favorite children’s stories: ________ Cuyler.
10. He was the library director in this town before coming to Weare.
12. Town of residence.
14. Color of Mr. Mike’s car.
15. Coworker from the library children’s room.

Remembering Mr. Mike
Karen Lovett and Alyssa Small

Mr. Mike’s collection of guitars.
(Courtesy photo)