

American Trailblazer, Mentor, and Friend

by Mary Claire Birdsong

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The author is one of the high school students who founded the Go Nuclear! blog (<http://gonuclear.net/>). Her essay is reprinted with permission.

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One summer ago, I backpacked 40 miles of the Appalachian trail with my dad, sister, and dog. One of the first things I learned on this family adventure, even before a single step down the trail, was that others had gone before me. Kind, thoughtful, more knowledgeable others set packages of dried food and other necessities at the trailhead. They left notes about the condition of the trail. Mildly surprised, I proceeded down the trail, only thinking of these helpful gifts now, over a year later.

Dr. Michael Fox was born some 10 miles and 60 years separated from my birth at Fort Lewis, Washington in 1994. As a youngster, I attempted to climb the steep stone steps of Saint Martin's college, which Dr. Fox ascended many times during his years studying math and chemistry. Our paths would nearly cross in 2005, as Dr. Fox moved to Honolulu and I departed Hawaii for Georgia.

Finally, in 2010, Drs. John Shanahan and Bob Schenter introduced us, as I researched medical isotopes and nuclear energy. At the time, I did not realize Dr.

Fox and I shared so much in common. I eagerly anticipated our meeting for the Go Nuclear! scientist interview project.

Because Dr. Fox's correspondence reflects such a tremendous intellect and a sharp wit, I felt optimistic that his disease that recently resurfaced would be beaten. I realize that a sharp mind, even one keenly aware of the best medical treatments, has little to do with conquering such an illness. I now understand the gravity, the impatience at times, embedded in the messages Dr. Fox shared. He offered to help me continue to tell compelling stories of people whose lives were cut short due to the lack of a medical isotope treatment. Sadly, I am reminded of the truth in the title of my keynote nuclear energy presentation last year, "Time Waits for No Man."

Dr. Fox mentioned his personal battle a few times, in the context of responding to requests for information about varied isotope treatment options or a history lesson on the isotope shortage. The dominant tone of his numerous messages to

me and to others reflected compassion and perseverance, knowledge and leadership. Fox bubbled with information. The right information. Clever insight. His unique combination of professional and personal experience helped the isotope issue come alive to me, personally. Dr. Fox inspired the Go Nuclear! team because of his passion to assist others in need, even through his illness.

I hoped Dr. Fox would continue with the nuclear isotope campaign alongside Go Nuclear! for some time. With the news of Dr. Fox's passing, Go Nuclear! is profoundly disappointed by our loss.

Dr. Fox's efforts to produce domestic radioisotopes and to educate the public can continue. I am starting to learn just how. As the students of the Go Nuclear! team examine the experiences of a mentor and friend, we realize the treasures we possess.

We can still learn from advice. We can echo heartfelt words. Dr. Fox's favorite, often-repeated phrase, "Everybody is entitled to his own opinion: no one is entitled to his own facts" will live. The published papers, interviews, and numerous articles and emails remain—strategically placed at the trailhead of a nuclear medicine renaissance. Those who follow in the footsteps of Michael Fox celebrate this life of accomplishment and service.



Mary Claire Birdsong



climateconference.heartland.org/michael-r-fox/

Dr. Fox speaking at the Heartland Institute International Conference on Climate Change in July 2011 on "Global Warming Politics and the Lessons from the Nuclear Industry."

Dr. Fox was a friend and inspiration to Go Nuclear! Inc. students working to promote public understanding of nuclear energy and nuclear medicine. He assisted the students and management in learning about the many benefits of nuclear energy for electric power and nuclear medicine. Michael was one of the first seven nuclear experts the students were going to interview for professional documentary purposes and education of other students and the general public nationwide. The Board of Directors and students at Go Nuclear!, Inc. will miss Michael and send our deepest condolences to his wife, Jennifer.