IN MEMORIAM

As this issue of the law review was being finalized, we received the sad news of Michael Crichton’s death. The shock was intensified by the fact that he’d been larger than life. His six-foot-nine-inch frame housed a man whose talents seemed to know no bounds.

Everyone has been touched in some way by Michael Crichton’s writing. His books were translated into thirty-six languages and thirteen became films. In fact, he was the only person to have had a number one movie, number one television show and number one book at the same time. He won an Academy Award for Technical Achievement, an Emmy and Peabody for his television show ER, and numerous awards for his books.

Not to mention having being named to People magazine’s list of the 50 most beautiful people. And having a newly-discovered dinosaur named after him, Crichton’s ankylosaur.

But you may not know that, in addition to being America’s preeminent storyteller, Michael Crichton was at heart an intellectual, a scholar, a researcher. He graduated summa cum laude from Harvard College, received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School, and was a postdoctoral fellow at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. He taught courses in anthropology at Cambridge University and writing at MIT. He published scholarly articles in scientific, medical, and anthropological journals.

Before he delved into writing a novel, he did incredible amounts of research and mastered the scientific – and in the case of Next– the legal basis for his storyline. Just as Marlon Brando in On the Waterfront “could have been a contender,” Dr. Crichton could have been a professor. But instead – lucky for us – he used his gifts to entertain us, provoke us, and educate us about emerging scientific technologies.

I was honored and humbled by the good fortune of working with him on various projects during his last five years. We sat in his kitchen and wrote a bill that was introduced in Congress. When I attended a U.S. Supreme Court argument for a case for which I’d written a brief, he flew to D.C. and joined me, offering intellectual and moral support. He worked his way through my casebook on Genetics and Law, mastering each new legal concept, and he generously gave me advice on one of my mystery novels. He was witty and uncommonly gracious, a man with personal integrity and a joyous intellect. He asked me remarkable questions and answering them
made me a better writer, a more compassionate lawyer.

John Wells, executive producer of ER accurately observed, “No lunch with Michael lasted less than three hours and no subject was too prosaic or obscure to attract his interest. Sexual politics, medical and scientific ethics, anthropology, archaeology, economics, astronomy, astrology, quantum physics, and molecular biology were all regular topics of conversation.”

And director Steven Spielberg provided a fitting tribute, “Michael’s talent out-scaled even his own dinosaurs of ’Jurassic Park,’ . . . . Michael was a gentle soul who reserved his flamboyant side for his novels. There is no one in the wings that will ever take his place.”

Lori Andrews