

Celebrating Mike
By Gareth Mann
Elgin Poet Laureate 2022-2023

Part One

It's the giving in the living
That's what made Mike Alft so great
Yes, giving in the living
Was his natural state

As those who knew and loved him
We celebrate and smile
We're grateful Mike chose Elgin
And stayed here quite awhile

Mike never had a real hometown
Before Elgin stole his heart
Where he chose to firmly hang his hat
Recording our history from the start

Work was scarce when Mike was young
He was raised in the Depression
His family moved so many times
Ten schools for Mike's education

Never time to settle in
With roots strong and secure
Mike's childhood with such challenges
Made him wise and mature

It's no wonder Mike craved permanence
When he chose Elgin as his home
He embraced the joy of staying put
No longer would he roam

Part Two

There was once a man called Elmer Charles
Whose father took the blame
For giving his son this absolutely
Horrendous and horrible name

One day Father Alft decided to change
Pushing "Elmer" to the side
"From now on I am "Chuck" and you are "Mike"
So you can live your life with pride"

Of course young Elmer was grateful
To rid himself of the curse
He became E.C. Alft the historian
And "Mike" for better or for worse

In his personal life Mike was happy
His new name suited him to a "T"
But he honored his family heritage
With E.C. Alft on books of history

With his new name Mike grew confident
Ready to greet the world
His new name gave him lots of courage
When he spied the perfect girl

Now Mike spent time in libraries
Much more than the average man
It was there that Mike was smitten
With a sweet young woman named Fran

Mike's instinct to pursue her
Was intense right from the start
He filled out a library call slip

In order to win her heart

It was a novel type of courtship
To ask for a date that way
But Fran thought it was endearing
This game Mike wanted to play

Fran took Mike up on his offer
The rest is history
She became his wife and shared his life
Living so blissfully

They were such a perfect match
Fran's patience was amazing
She accepted Mike's quirks and his life's work
While their children she was raising

Fran was a natural mother
Soon their brood numbered four
She was committed and contented
This was so worth living for

Fran respected Mike's use of his time
Knowing well her supportive role
Made it possible for dear E.C. Alft
To uncover Elgin's soul

Part Three

Mike spent his time and talent
Working long into each night
Purpose driven in his living
Mike sought to make things right

Facts and figures were his friends
He wallowed in their wake

His meticulous nature loved to find
Even more notes to take

Obsessed with books and numbers
Mike counted as he read
Recording every title
And author live or dead

Mike's quest for knowledge never waned
Learning was his pleasure
As his shovel dug into Elgin's past
Each discovery was a treasure

With a photographic memory
And attention to details
Mike's life's passion blossomed fully
As he related Elgin's tales

Part Four

To look at Mike you'd never ever know
A consummate performer was he
Entertaining his students was his delight
His methods as unconventional as could be

A stand-up comic in his classroom
He never missed a chance
To use his sense of humour
While his students he entranced

Whether standing up high on his desk
Or singing songs and ditties
Screaming "I'm melting" like the bad witch
In the land of the Emerald City

Mike's imprint on these young minds

Would remain throughout their lives
Their memory chock full of stories
Of a teacher beyond sublime

And so we celebrate this man
Who gave his life to learning
Generations taught to be “cheap not cheat “
And to save what they were earning

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