

Brother Michael Fuhrmann

December 2nd is the anniversary of the death of Brother Michael Fuhrmann. Paul Fuhrmann, third oldest in a family of eight children was born in Centralia, Oklahoma, March 26, 1920. He was still a child when his family returned to north Texas, settling on a farm northwest of Lindsay. He received his elementary and secondary education at St. Peter School in Lindsay, graduating with the class of 1937. Because of his unselfishness and unassuming good nature he was always elected as an officer in parish organizations to which he belonged.

By the age of 15, Paul Fuhrmann was putting in a full day's work driving a tractor on the family farm. During his high school years he also hauled approximately 15 children to school from North Lindsay in his father's Model T truck, a distance of three to five miles for the students. After graduation he continued his work on the family farm until October 22, 1942, when he was drafted into the United States war effort. He rose to the rank of sergeant in the 394th Bombardment Squadron of the Army Air Force stationed in the Pacific.

As an airplane mechanic he followed right behind the island-hopping troops, helping to build airfields in the enemy-infested jungles from New Caledonia to Guadalcanal to the Dutch East Indies and then to the Philippine Islands. Typical of his dedication to "get the job well done," he neither asked for nor received a furlough during three years of military service. Instead, he chose to comfort his parents and siblings with almost daily letters and poems that he wrote to uplift their spirits at home.

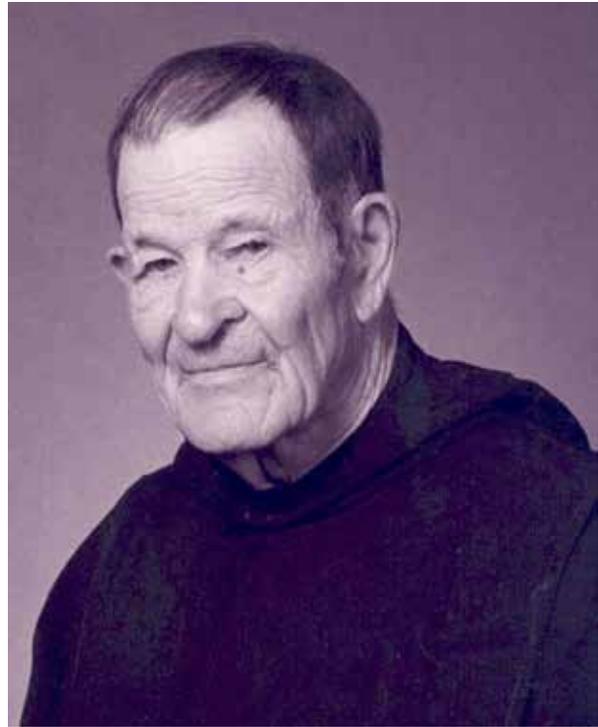
He was honorably discharged from the army on October 31, 1945. For his participation in World War II, Sgt. Paul Fuhrmann earned one Service Stripe, four Overseas Service Bars, an Asiatic-Pacific Theater Campaign Medal with eight Bronze Stars, Philippine Liberation Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and one Oak Leaf Cluster with Distinguished Unit Badge.

As a civilian he returned to his work on the family farm in Lindsay, Texas, where he knew he would have time to discern his future. Two of his uncles, a younger brother, and several cousins were monks of Subiaco Abbey. Trusting in God's faithfulness, Paul Fuhrmann came to Subiaco in 1948 as a candidate for the monastic life where his talents in farming and mechanics were put to good use. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on March 19, 1950, receiving the name Michael.

He worked as an assistant mechanic with the electrical and heating systems of the abbey and in 1956 he was also assigned to the farm and dairy. He helped build the stock pond southeast of the abbey that bears his name: "Michael's Pond." In the early 1960s he was appointed abbey forester and sawmill operator, an occupation for which he became well known among the local populace.

A wise and careful forester, Brother Michael had a great respect for God's natural resources, practicing discreet forest maintenance as he took timber from the abbey's land on the ridges, converting it into lumber for manifold uses of the carpenter shop, major construction, and for sale to the public. His craftsmanship is still admired in the wooden beams that grace the foyer of the Performing Arts Center.

In September 1971, Brother Michael was assigned to be one of the three founding monks of Santa Familia Monastery in Belize, Central America. He spent much time clearing the area of bush and brush with a tractor and bush hog. He was always willing to help any of the monastery's neighbors with their work as well.



The day before he was scheduled to return to Subiaco in the autumn of 1973, he had a tractor accident in which he badly injured his stomach and pancreas. He was given as much medical attention as possible in Belize and flown to the United States for medical care at the V. A. Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana. Later, he was transferred to the V. A. Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas.

After he recovered, Brother Michael was once again forester and sawmill operator at Subiaco. Later, two more responsibilities were assigned to him, namely manager of the laundry and swineherd. He was also vintner for a time. By 1980 he was relieved of the laundry management and in the early 1990s he was relieved as swineherd manager when it became impractical for the abbey to maintain a hog farm.

During the course of the 1990s, Brother Michael no longer worked in the ridges, but he remained as sawmill operator. He believed in frugality; a wristwatch was superfluous for his needs. He seemed to be on "God's time" because he was always at prayer or work at the appointed hours. He also took time to visit the elderly in area rest homes and lend a helping hand where needed.

From early childhood Brother Michael's favorite outdoor pastime was fishing. There was nothing more restful for Brother Michael than Sunday afternoon fishing. For decades, he—along with other fisher-monks—regularly provided an ample supply of fish for the monastic tables.

During evening recreation Brother Michael was often on the winning end of a card or domino game, and especially enjoyed taking on any challenger for a game of chess where, to the chagrin of his opponent, he could "fell timber in the shape of chessmen!"

Brother Michael was admitted to the monastic Health Center in 2002, but he continued to work at the abbey sawmill with the help of his sibling, Father Bruno Fuhrmann. In these latter years of his life, Brother Michael experienced the aches and pains of aging but he never allowed this to interfere with his strong Benedictine belief in prayer and work (*ora et labora*). It was not until the final weeks of his life, when cancer was ebbing away his strength that Brother Michael was no longer able to follow the Benedictine schedule that he had so faithfully carried out as a monk of Subiaco Abbey since the late 1940s.

Thus for more than half a century Brother Michael quietly and earnestly exemplified the deep, joyful spirit that characterizes a Benedictine monk who is "truly seeking God."

Strengthened with the sacraments and the prayers of his brother monks, Brother Michael died peacefully in his room in the monastic Health Center of apparent heart failure at 7:45 a.m. on Friday, December 2, 2005.

A Christian Wake service was held at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 4, 2005 with Father Nicholas Fuhrmann, a double-first cousin, presiding.

On Monday, December 5, Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant for the 10:30 a.m. Mass of Christian burial and performed the final obsequies.

At the time of his death, Brother Michael was 85 years old and had been a professed monk for 55 years. He is buried in our cemetery.