

Obituary: Hugh Manes

By: Robert Berke

Ironically, almost quietly, one of CACJ's past lions passed away on Saturday, June 20, at the age of 84. I first met Hugh Manes in the days when I was a college protestor and we got him to speak at Pomona to talk about his return from North Vietnam. Out of his ill-fitting and bulky trousers (little did I know that this was somewhat of a trademark of his), he pulled what was nicknamed a "pineapple bomb," a bomb that would explode with shrapnel, designed to tear skin when it exploded and hit the ground. Even back then, Hugh seemed old and a little gravelly. A few minutes into his talk, he had us transfixed. He had us in the jungles of Vietnam. Fire and brimstone, moral outrage, glistening eyes, crescendos of words, hand pounded hard on the table, a voice that pled for understanding, a passion and a feeling of the importance of peace - Hugh brought all this to the small meeting room at Pomona. When Hugh stopped speaking that day, we were almost too stunned to ask questions. He was a life force and had a knack of almost assuming we would be just as outraged as he was and, by his intensity and his dedication, made it so.

Over the years, I saw Hugh many times. Hugh brought police misconduct cases in the 1960s, when only a handful of people would take them. His first verdict was on behalf of a black teenager, beaten in the back of a police car. He represented people before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Japanese Americans interred during World War II, and, in 1965, took depositions in the South to document the disenfranchisement of black voters.

I am proud (for our organization) to say that, for years, Hugh was a member of CACJ's Board of Governors. When I first became a member of CACJ's Board, I would look around the room and see Ephraim Margolin, Paul Fitzgerald, Charles Garry, Barry Tarlow, and the other legendary giants. Amidst these redwoods was an everyman, the Peoples' lawyer, Hugh Manes, who sat at the table and waited until just the right time at the meeting to put his finger on the

pulse of a moral issue which deserved debate. Hugh would start the debate with his rumbling voice. When I became President of CACJ, Hugh told me he was leaving the Board since he was not doing CACJ justice since more of his cases were civil and police misconduct than criminal defense. I argued with him and, predictably, lost.

Hugh was so self-effacing and modest yet combined these traits with the certainty of his convictions. Years later, in a still-rumpled suit, Hugh won his first seven-figure verdict in a police misconduct case. In front of a transfixed jury, after over six months of trial, in his final argument, Hugh brought a copy of the Constitution with him, showed it to the jury, tore it up, threw it on the ground, stomped on it, and said to the jury, "That is what they did out there, ladies and gentleman," and sat down. I heard about it and did not need a video to know what it looked like. In another final argument, conducted after lunch, Hugh asked the jury if they had a good lunch and then told the jury that he had lunch with his client, who had to eat with his face down in the bowl "like a dog" because of his injuries at the hands of the police. Then Hugh sat down.

The world is quieter without Hugh. When I heard Hugh had died, for a few minutes while I absorbed it, I felt as if everything had stopped and become silent. When I want to, I can hear his voice ringing in my ears. I know Hugh would want me to tell you to not lose sight of why we are here, who we have to protect, and who needs us.

Hugh's Memorial Service will take place on Sunday, July 26, at 3:00 p.m. at Temple Beth Am, 1039 S. La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035. I hope those of you in the Los Angeles area can be there. I'm sure Hugh will be there early...