

LIVES LIVED

Veteran and poet Andrew Guy Mulcahy was committed to humanism

THELMA FAYLE

INCLUDES CORRECTION

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This article was published more than 3 years ago. Some information may no longer be current.





Andrew Guy Mulcahy.

HANDOUT

Andrew Guy Mulcahy: *War Hero. Engineer. Atheist. Writer. Born Aug. 3, 1922, in Victoria; died Jan. 31, 2019, in Victoria; of complications from COPD; aged 96.*

For decades, Andy Mulcahy was a thoughtful, smiling face of humanism. Like many Canadians, Andy tread an honourable path because he felt it was the right thing to do. He never held stock in the promise of some fancy version of an afterlife – in exchange for being a good person.

But it took a World War to turn him into a humanist.

Andy grew up in Esquimalt – a lower-income neighbourhood of Victoria – known for its family-friendly community, staggering natural beauty and rich First Nations history. As one of five children, he had a busy mom and a dad who worked at sea. “We had fun,” he said.

In 1935, Andy and his high-school pals studied their history and agreed that spending money on weapons instead of food would be stupid. The catastrophic losses of the Great War were still viscerally remembered. But in 1939, along came the ads offering free travel, adventure and excitement. Most of his classmates signed up – often lying about their age, as Andy did.

Although he earned medals with the Canadian Scottish Regiment on D-Day (his fighting days ended six months later when he was hit by a bullet); grown-man Andy viewed the war through a fuller lens. He would recall the transformative moment: One long walk into a rain of enemy fire, surrounded by bloodied stumps of groaning bodies. He described every day since then as, “a beautiful bonus – like winning a daily lottery.” Not long after the war, it occurred to him that there was no such thing as God.

Andy spent five decades married to the gal he fell in love with – Pearl, the pretty one who worked at the dry cleaners. After the war, he worked in the dockyards and as a Bamberton cement steam engineer to care for his young wife and stepson, Rich.

When he retired at 65, Andy read their entire set of Great Books purchased from a

persuasive salesperson years ago. He then took up writing and plain-spoken poetry. Andy only slowed his writing efforts at 80, when it came time to nurse Pearl.

After her death, Andy continued to embrace life and writing, and became outspoken about social-justice issues and his profound disdain for religion. He compiled and paid for the Victoria Secular Humanists' newsletter for nearly a decade. A few years into his life as a widower, Andy was charmed by the sharp mind and bright-eyes of Joanne Manley; they married and shared a commitment to humanism.

In spite of a two-pack-a-day habit from his military days, followed by the loss of a lung, Andy spent his passion well until his 96th year when he began to slow down. But even then, he still found energy to applaud the actions of younger humanists and atheists in his large circle of friends. He left envelopes stuffed with hundreds of newspaper clippings of letters to the editor and opinion pieces he had written on issues of the day.

"Life is a marvellous process," Andy once wrote. "We are born, we consume, we die and decay. ... We are all part of this great dynamic, this surging dance of life."

Thelma Fayle is a friend of Andy's.

Editor's note: (April 1, 2019) An earlier version of this article incorrectly said his fighting days ended six years later when he was hit by a bullet. It was six months.

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