The Holiday Herald

19 December 2020

Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountains of California, Nevada and Oregon

2013
Crooked Creek
Chiloquin, Oregon

Because I can't travel this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this 2020 holiday newsletter is illustrated with pictures from my travels in previous Decembers. This year's story begins on the third page.

Breakfast with Emily

2015

Wagon Wheel Café
Truckee, California

For everything there is a season

Michael Howe

Teacher • Musician

Born
December 17, 1941

Retired
October 8, 2017

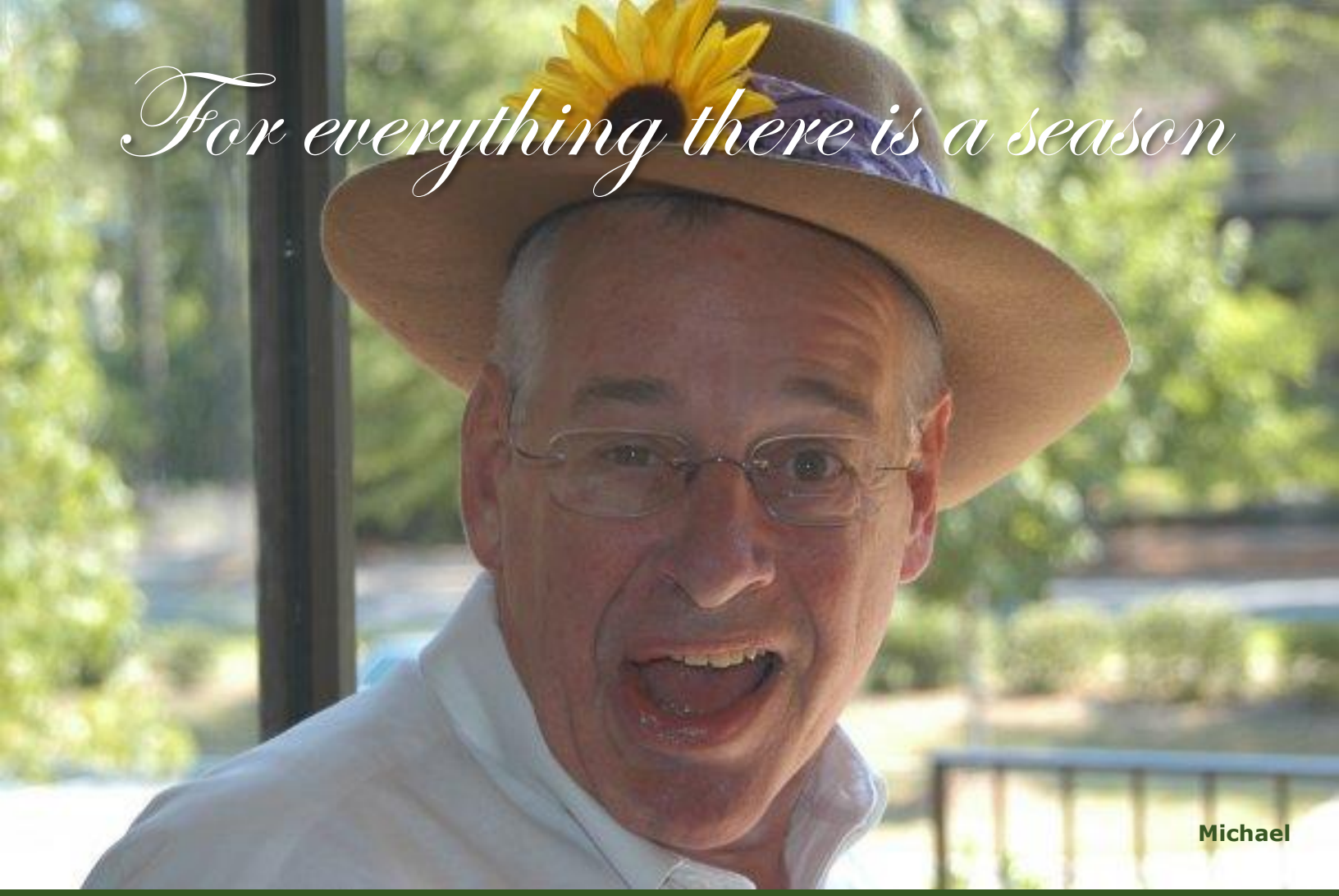
Died
December 19, 2020

2010

Brownson Memorial Presbyterian Church
Southern Pines, North Carolina

Photos from Michael's Facebook page

For everything there is a season



Michael

Michael Howe died this morning, two days after he turned 79 and two days before winter.

He was important enough to me as my high school teacher and chorus director, and later as a friend, that my remembrance of him should replace the holiday message I planned to write for this newsletter.

But I should begin with the three Christmases – my last three in high school in Hamlet, North Carolina – when he was the director of the school chorus. That's when I began learning from his example that obedience to convention simply made one conventional.

He had just returned to our hometown and was barely a decade older than the singers he led. After our first Christmas concert, he scrapped the black robes the chorus had been singing in for years and dressed the boys in tuxedos and the girls in long, black scoop-necked dresses. The last Christmas, the dresses were long and red.

"Bosoms up, ladies," he'd say before we took the stage.

He played our church organ the only way he was capable – beautifully – at my mother's funeral in 1993.

A few weeks later, I returned to Hamlet and stayed with him a few days while I was doing interviews with him and others from my high school days. We talked about the collection of model train locomotives he was accumulating on the closet shelf in my room and what it was like to be a gay teacher.

"It wasn't something people would talk about."

On my last visit, he took me to the church in Southern Pines where he was music director. He had two pipe organs to play there, and he did Bach and Buxtehude for more than hour – the way he used to do for me in high school – while I listened. When we parted, he gave me a couple CDs of organ classics that I played on the four-day train ride back to California.

I will always remember him at the keyboard, hands and feet flying, and music filling the room. He is safely home.

2010

Chestnut Street
Mount Shasta, California

Mother and child at a sledding party

2015

Spooner Lake – Lake Tahoe State Park
Lake Tahoe, Nevada

2017

Donner Pass, California

2010

Lassen Peak Highway
Lassen Volcanic National Park, California

2010

Siskiyou Lake
Mount Shasta, California

2010

Pasture on South Weed Boulevard
Weed, California

Horses at breakfast

2015

River Ranch Lodge
Tahoe City, California

Mount Shasta volcano in California is the tall peak in the background, elevation 14,180 ft / 4,322 m

2013

Klamath Lake
Klamath Falls, Oregon