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Memories of Michael

Childers

By: Dr. Leon Hallacher

Michael "Mikey" Childers, a

long-time participant and mentor in the Marine Option Program at UH Hilo and statewide, passed away at home in March of this year after a lengthy illness. He will be missed by all. Mike was a unique and wonderful person.



Michael grew up in the Motor City (Detroit). On the way to finding himself at UH Hilo as a “nontraditional” student, he did some interesting jobs; being a ‘roadie’ with rock bands including MC5, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Aerosmith, Rush, Kiss, and David Bowie, working on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico off of Texas as a galley hand, then roustabout, and finally as the rig’s cook. Mike enrolled at UH Hilo in the late 1980’s and graduated with a BA in Marine Science a few years later. Fortunately for us, Mike and his wife Teri fell in love with Hawai’i and decided to stick around. After graduating, Mike earned a Captain’s License and skippered the Sea Smoke , taking tourists and locals on cruises out of Anaehoomalu Bay on the Big Island’s Kohala Coast. He returned to UH Hilo a few years later when he was hired as an Instructor in the Marine Science department. His duties were split between being Captain of the



department's catamaran

Four Winds, keeping the department's smaller vessels up and running, and teaching

oceanography laboratory classes. While working at Hilo, Mike also went on to earn a

Nau'i Scuba Instructor Certification and a Masters degree in Educational Technology

from UH Mānoa.

Those of you who knew Mike will agree that he was one of the finest and funniest people

we have had the honor to know. Mike was absolutely honest with people, friendly, and

just fun to be around. During his career at UH, Mike

participated in just about everything

MOP and the Marine Science Department did: captaining the Four Winds on laboratory

and class field trips, helping with MOP/NMFS tagging of green sea turtles on the Big

Island, teaching Quantitative Underwater Ecological Surveying Techniques (QUEST)

with other faculty and staff from around the state as well as being in charge of the course

for a number of years, helping with the department's summer school classes,

participating in MOP overnight camping trips all around the Big Island, captaining whale

watching excursions on the Four Winds for many different kinds of groups, being a

member of the scientific party on research cruises aboard the research ships RV Moana

Wave and RV Wecoma, and even worked as a Safety Diver on the set of the movie

Waterworld while scenes were being filmed off Kawaihae on the Big Island. Mike's

colleagues enjoyed working with him because he was funny, he worked hard and

effectively, and he went out of his way to help others. Students

absolutely adored Mike.

It seemed like he had them smiling and laughing all the time.

Some of the things Mike did became almost legendary at MOP statewide and on the Hilo

campus. Perhaps his most notorious gig was Mike's "Pirate Cruises". Around Halloween

he, his crew, and some of the students in class dressed up in pirate costume for field

trips on the Four Winds, flew a Jolly Roger, and generally had people staring in disbelief

and laughing their heads off. Of course there was also Mike's sound system which he

built for the Four Winds that kept everybody rockin' and rollin' on cruises. On one of the

QUESTs at Hapuna Beach, where faculty and staff slept on cots jammed into the dining

facility, Mike showed up with a rented camper where he slept in style to the envy of the

rest of us. Mike was also a die-hard University of Michigan Wolverines fan, to the extent

that he drove a yellow Jeep with a huge blue M painted on the side. Go Blue! What a

character! One final "Mikey" adventure merits reflection.

Oceanography labs onboard the

Four Winds went on, rain or shine, big swell or small. One day while the class was

working inside the Hilo Bay breakwater, a rare thunderstorm

kicked up way off to the

south. Captain Mike and the instructor, Walt Dudley, monitored it and hoped it would

move away, or at least not come any nearer. It didn't move off.

Instead it headed toward

the bay and the Four Winds. And...it was moving quickly. Mike cranked up the engines,

throttled down, and rushed the boat toward its Radio Bay slip where students and crew

could be offloaded as quickly as possible. As the Four Winds entered Radio Bay, a lightning bolt struck near the end of the breakwater. Moments later, as one of the student crew members was tying up the mooring line from the dock, her hair stuck straight out and then “ka-boom”. Lightning had struck the mast of a sailboat only a few slips over. Walt, the students, and crew heard Mike yell something very loud. Turns out, he’d been at the helm holding the metal wheel when the lightning struck nearby. An electric arc had shot from his elbow to the deck! He was a little shook up, but he was fine. Captain Mikey was one tough son-of-a-gun. Alas, Mike is no longer here to keep us all laughing while getting whatever the job was done. He was a remarkable human being and, again, he will be so missed. Perhaps he and another departed MOP legend, Sherwood Maynard, are together somewhere, mischievously keeping the angels laughing. Rest in Peace, Michael.

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