



R. Michael Marker

October 20, 1951 - January 15, 2021

Michael Marker, known to his many friends as Mike, left this world on January 15, 2021. He was a force of nature, and will be dearly missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and musical co-conspirators.

Mike was born in San Diego to Bob and Jean Marker in 1951. The family relocated to Spokane shortly afterwards, where Mike spent his childhood and young adult life. He cherished time with his grandparents on their farm in the Spokane Valley near the Colville Reservation, growing up with a love of the outdoors, music, and a strong inherited work ethic. Both his mother and grandfather sang and played music. When he was in high school, he saved up his own money for a banjo, and his mother paid for five lessons. Soon he was playing his first gigs at Shakey's Pizza.

For the first decade of his adult life, Mike's passion, and talent for music, especially as a tool for social justice, led him to become a successful touring folk singer. When Expo '74 came to Spokane, he met Utah Phillips and Larry Hanks. Both became lifelong friends. He was also strongly influenced by his many mentors, including Malvina Reynolds, Pete Seeger, and Mike Cooney. He dedicated the better part of his life to social justice, believing in the power of music as a political and social tool. He toured extensively, also writing and performing songs for countless local protests and community events.

Mike was an incredible performer and storyteller. Throughout his life he continued to improve upon his already impressive musicianship. He was constantly writing new songs and arranging old ones. His gigs at Mama Sunday's (now the Underground Coffeehouse at WWU) were legendary, and his pajama concerts for the Roeder Home and Bellingham Public Library were beloved across generations.

In 1984 Mike married Cecilia Morales. They have three children: Yonina, Nakos and Miska. His family was his first priority and his pride and joy. He seamlessly included them in all aspects of his life and work. He began his teaching career at North Beach High School on the Washington coast. His irreverence to authority and his devotion to his principles made for an interesting teaching career. After several short-lived high school positions, he found himself at Northwest Indian College NWIC, where he helped to found Lummi High School. Mike's work in the Lummi community extended well past the High School, and his passion to help further First Nations pursuit of higher education led him to pursue a PhD at the University of British Columbia. He wrote his dissertation about the experience of the Lummi community during a time of racist backlash as a result of fishing rights victories in the US.

Mike was passionate about the value of education. His intense intellect, courage, curiosity, and gift as a storyteller allowed him to enter spaces off limits to most educators. He completed his PhD in only four years and soon after he was offered a position at UBC. He accepted on the condition that he fulfill his commitment to develop Oksala, a teacher education program at NWIC. UBC agreed and offered him a position in the faculty of Educational Studies. Even after he left for UBC, he remained in close contact with the Lummi. He worked with Bill James on preserving Lummi language and he continued to mentor Lummi students pursuing higher education. He was always ready to talk with higher educational institutions on behalf of indigenous students.

He was one of the original directors of the Ts"kel program at UBC. He wrote countless papers that focused on the concept of place, and its importance to both teaching and learning from an Indigenous perspective. His work with Indigenous people extended beyond the Puget Sound. He traveled to Australia and New Zealand to visit and learn from the Maori. He also spent time with the First Nations communities in Nunavut. He was always eager to listen to tribal elders, and firmly believed that we must make spaces in our modern educational system for Indigenous learning and teaching practices.

Mike's work as a musician and educator, and his passion for social justice made him a vital member of a broad international community. And he always brought it back home where he was an integral part of the Bellingham musical community. In addition to his previously mentioned regular gigs, he could often be found playing an impromptu gig at one of many local brew pubs or sitting in on a music circle (invited or not). He was a wealth of old songs and was happy to share the history of all of them. For many years he was music partners with Larry Hanks, and in 2009 they recorded their studio album, *The Truth for Certain*. Later, Mike performed with his son Nakos under the moniker "Doc and Nak." Mike was immensely proud of his son's talent and skill, and it brought him great joy for them to share a stage. Most recently, during the pandemic, he was performing in virtual festivals as far-reaching as Australia.

Mike is survived by Ceci, his wife of 37 years; his three children, Yonina, Nakos, and Miska; and his brother, Terry.

Nakos has organized a comprehensive archive of Mike's recordings. They will be available for free, as Mike firmly believed art should be. Contact Nakos at namarker@gmail.com

Mike's legacy continues forward in the countless students, faculty, friends and family he touched. Everyone who met him has a story to remember him by. He would want us to slow down and continue to listen and learn from Indigenous peoples.

Due to the pandemic, there are no current plans for a memorial. A public wake will hopefully be held over the summer, as Mike deserves a party as legendary as he was.

Tribute Wall

RJ

“ *Condolences to the family. Dr. Marker helped me understand how to navigate the world as a first Nations person of colour. RIP Dr.*

Rick joe - March 14, 2021 at 12:00 AM

HR

“ *Dear Cecelia,
My heart goes out to you and the children. I met you several times at conferences that you attended with Michael. He was such a strong advocate for Indigenous learners. He will be missed very much. Condolences to all of you.*

Helen Raptis - March 03, 2021 at 12:00 AM

AK

“ *Such a wonderful Man, So glad to have known him over many years. He enriched my life and that of the whole community. He will be missed.*

Andy Koch - February 26, 2021 at 12:00 AM

AC

“ *Mike brought joy to those he was around and raised an amazing, beautiful, and loving family. Thank you for the many memories playing around in the recording studio, bike rides around Bellingham and being a passionate role model and the many valuable life stories you passed on.*

Ava Craig - February 07, 2021 at 12:00 AM