

Walter Joseph Michels – Husband, Father/Grandfather, Musician, Teacher

Former students/friends say: “We knew he cared; he believed in me,,, I could believe in myself; he saved my life; I had a more challenging musical experience with Doc than I did in college; a Minister said: if God doesn’t sound like Walt Michels, I’ll be disappointed; he filled a room; one of a kind.” This is a sampling of the loving testament that Walt ‘Doc’ Michels promoted excellence and had a profound influence on many lives.

Walter Joseph Michels ‘set sail’* to be with God on February 8, 2022 in Woodstock, GA. Son of Joseph Michael Michels, a German immigrant, and Barbara Lowitz Michels, Walt was born on August 19, 1930 in Philadelphia, PA. A gifted boy soprano, his elementary school education was at the renowned St. Peter’s Boy Choir School, Philadelphia, where he had many enriching experiences, such as singing in Carnegie Hall with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy. At Lower Merion High School, he was on championship soccer and gymnastic teams, and on a semi-pro soccer team for the German-Hungarian Club. He earned Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Westminster Choir College, Princeton, NJ, and later a PhD in Music at North Texas State University, Denton, TX.

After serving in the US Army in Korea, he began his teaching career in 1957 at El Dorado Junior High School and El Dorado High School, El Dorado, AR., with a six-month leave in 1959 to tour in Africa, with a select group of Westminster Choir College alumni, for the State Department. While teaching in El Dorado, he served as Minister of Music at First Christian Church. He also met and married his wife.

He served as Professor of Music at Arkansas Tech University, Southwestern University in Oklahoma and, in 1973, Sprayberry High School, Marietta, GA. He also served as Minister of Music for the Michels’ church home, Sandy Springs Christian Church, Atlanta, GA.

He devoted his life to providing enriching, even life-changing, experiences for young people, such as two choir tours in Europe where some were inspired to music and international business careers, trips in the US and valuable lessons in music and in life. He celebrated the accomplishments of his children and his students.... careers as international opera stars, Broadway, film/television performers, vocalists, pianists, choral directors, business leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, parents and more.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Frances Gilmore Michels of El Dorado, AR, son Stuart Michels (Ruth) of Marietta, GA, and daughter Stephanie Michels (Roger Haber) of Studio City, CA, four grandchildren, Andrew and Garrett Michels, and Trevor and Sydney Haber, one sister, Elinor Michels Steigerwald, and three nieces of greater Philadelphia.

He will be missed and remembered as a Brother/Father figure to a little sister; loving, supportive and engaged Husband, Father and Grandfather; loving Son, Son-in-Law and Uncle; Musician.... member/soloist with the Robert Shaw Corral and Atlanta Symphony, and ‘The Voice’ of Sandy Springs Christian Church where he sang his last solo on his 90th birthday (with NO wobble!); and Teacher who not only taught musical excellence, but love, laughter and discipline in all areas of life; gardener extraordinaire...and lastly, as a resident of Holbrook Woodstock Community where he always expressed gratitude to the staff that supported Fran in giving loving care in these last months.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Sandy Springs Christian Church on July 31, 2022 at 2:30 p.m. Gifts of celebration may be made to Sandy Springs Christian Church Music Ministry, 301 Johnson Ferry Road NW, Sandy Springs, GA 30328-1819, or at sandyspringscc.org.

*‘The Ship’ by Victor Hugo