

Mike Skinner's Introduction for the "Howie the Harp" Arts Award by Ed Pazicky:

Michael's story of Triumph over Tragedy is indeed a remarkable one and despite all of the losses in his life, including the suicides of two of his brothers and two friends, he still shows hope and promise of what life can be. He shares part of his painful past but it is a message of hope, motivation, and inspiration that compels him to share in his speaking and singing to others--that life is to be lived and enjoyed, and to acknowledge that many in life are survivors of painful experiences, but he wants to share how to learn and to thrive, and not just survive.

For most of his life Michael kept all of the pain, sorrow, and shame locked inside, and found relief through music and his endeavors as a professional musician and later on as a manager and talent agent in the music business. He found great joy and accomplishment from being happily married and the proud father to five wonderful children. Sadly, his past was to come back and haunt him and change his life in a most profound way and not one that he wanted or expected.

Mike composes and sings songs reflecting the hope for those who have experienced childhood trauma. He has recorded three CD's, "Train of Tears," "Pirates," and "Waitin' for a Train." Of his music, Michael states,

*"Music has been one of the most important pieces in my healing and recovery from a lifetime of trauma and abuse. I have come to believe that it helped save my life and I don't say that lightly; ...if I didn't have music in my life, I know that life would have been a whole lot different for me."*

Mike is the recipient of numerous awards both as a Musician and as a Mental Health Advocate and Speaker. He has spoken before the National Press Club, Legislative bodies and numerous hospital and medical staff as well as student groups across the country. He tells his personal story wherever he speaks and is applauded for his ability to talk of the physical, emotional and sexual abuse he has endured. Through his public speaking and his recordings, he has affected the lives of many people.

I am especially proud to count Michael as a very special friend and confidant. He has helped me to find meaning and hope in my life.