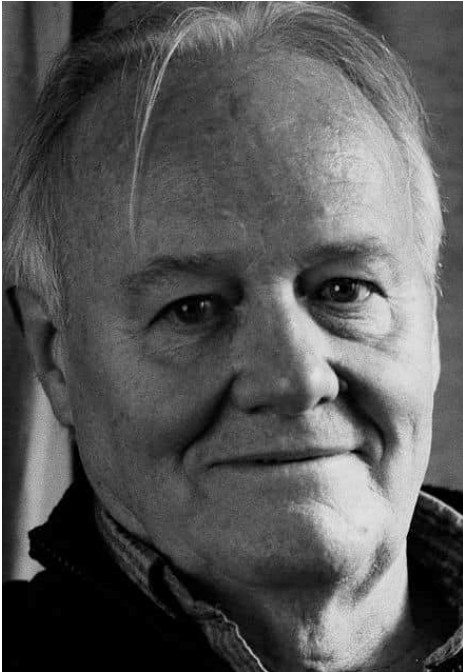


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Michael Bawtree (photo by Richard "Dick" Groot)

On Saturday, August 24, 2024, Michael Bawtree died peacefully in his sleep, the day before his 87th birthday. Though his loss is felt keenly by his family and friends, his accomplishments and achievements are a testament to the force of nature that was Michael Bawtree. News reports immediately following his death drew upon those who had known Michael since his arrival in Nova Scotia in 1990, four years before he, his partner Colin Bernhardt and three other friends acted upon a shared vision to create an Atlantic Theatre Festival. But Michael was more than the founding Artistic Director of that Festival. He was a writer, dramaturge, actor, director, playwright, literary critic, and fundraiser with a Midas Touch when it came to garnering money for projects about which he developed a passion. Once Michael envisioned something, nothing could dissuade him. And when a project ended, Michael moved on, ready to lend his talents to the next one.

Born in Newcastle, Australia, Michael moved to the UK when he was two – or, as he said, his parents moved and he just went along (probably the last time he ever just went along with something, rather than being the initiator!) He attended St. Peter’s College, Radley from the age of 13. Though raised with an appreciation of “fine arts” and regular piano lessons, he credits his time at Radley with developing his appreciation of Shakespeare and deepening his interest in music. After Radley, he attended Worcester College, Oxford, where he completed his BA in English Language and Literature, then his MA. National Service was still a requirement when Michael was a young man, and he joined the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in May 1956. As a 2nd Lieutenant, he served in Cyprus in 1957-58. During the Second World War, the Ox. And Bucks. L.I. was instrumental in the capture of Pegasus Bridge during D-Day in 1944, an act later captured in the film *The Longest Day*. Michael wrote a one-man play about the event, “The Pegasus Bridge Show!”, performing it in several UK venues in 2008, donating proceeds to The Veterans Charity.

Michael sailed to Canada in 1962 after Bill Glassco told him that interesting things were happening in Canadian theatre. He intended to remain for one year. The opportunities that arose kept him here for the rest of his life. Here, he worked in theatre, penned a column as principal book critic for the Toronto Telegram, co-hosted two CBC-TV educational series for schools, lectured at the new Laurentian University, and founded the theatre program at the nascent Simon Fraser University. He was Director of English Theatre at the National Arts Centre, Associate Director at the Stratford Festival, founding Artistic Director of COMUS Music Theatre of Canada, and Founder and Artistic Director of Banff Music Theatre Training Ensemble. His work with Michael Langham at the Stratford Festival developed into a lifelong friend/mentorship. Decades later, both Michael Langham and his wife, Helen Burns would direct plays at the Atlantic Theatre Festival.

Michael's career took him around the globe: Colombia, Peru, the Soviet Union, the UK and the US. In Finland, he founded a music theatre company with Pirrkoliisa Tikka who remained a dear friend and colleague for the rest of Michael's life.

He moved to Wolfville in 1990 for a one-year contract to teach theatre at Acadia University. After two years, he became director of the Theatre Studies program and remained there until his retirement in 2003. During his time at Acadia, Michael and his partner, Colin Bernhardt influenced, challenged, and encouraged students. Many who graduated from the program stayed in touch with him for the rest of his life. He showed keen interest in learning about their progress and projects, and welcomed them when they turned up for a visit.

Michael's energy and passion wasn't confined to theatre. Community was important to Michael, and he was happy to lend his talents to projects. He founded the Joseph Howe Initiative, a one-year project of more than twenty events and ceremonies to mark the 200th anniversary of Howe's birth, and Howe's contributions to Nova Scotia as a journalist, politician, and public servant. Michael wrote a stage version of Howe's famous 1835 libel defence speech, which he performed in Halifax, Ottawa, Boston, and London, England.

He gave his energy and talents as a board member of the Wolfville Historical Society, helping to create events and summer programming. He spearheaded events for "1914 – War Comes to Wolfville", not to glorify war but to portray its impact on communities. He coordinated a theatre piece, "The Pity of War", which raised funds for the Historical Society.

His final project was to assist with the renovation of the Dr. C.B. Lumsden Branch #74, Royal Canadian Legion building in Wolfville. An extensive project, he solicited the talents of architect Mike Harvie, who had transformed a 1920s hockey arena into a 514-seat thrust stage theatre in 1994-95 for the Atlantic Theatre Festival. The Legion building transformed from one to two storeys, with a lounge, named in Michael's honour in July, that boasts the best views of Wolfville's dykelands out to the Minas Basin.

Among awards and honours he received are the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal, an honorary doctorate from Acadia University, and the Valley Arts Award.

Michael wrote and published two volumes of his memoirs: *As Far As I Remember* (2014), and *The Best Fooling* (2017). He was working on the third at the time of his death.

Michael's obituary could read like a Who's Who of notable literary, theatrical and academic figures. Some became lifelong friends with whom he kept in touch up to his death, among them Christopher Ricks, Jonathan Harlow (who, though separated by an ocean, met with Michael and a few friends online every week to work on The Guardian crossword), and Jeremy Gibson.

When Michael began to have challenges with his mobility, he initially thought he had sciatica. He attributed this to age and began to use a cane. By 2023, he traded the cane for a walker, and sought medical advice. Tests and examinations led to a diagnosis of MND in March. Soon after, he needed a wheelchair. On June 5, he received his final diagnosis: ALS. He was philosophical about his diagnosis, and sought approval for MAiD. Though he set the date for December 31, he stopped taking his heart medication in the hope that he would die in his sleep – a wish that was granted on August 24.

He is predeceased by his partner of 45 years, Colin Bernhardt and by his parents Kathleen "Tessa" MacEacharn and Raymond Francis "Ben" Bawtree. He is survived by his sisters Jo and Jenny, his nephew, Nicholas, dear friends, and an extended "chosen family" for whom, though not related through blood, he was a brother, father, uncle.

Cremation has taken place, and a small graveside interment will follow, with a larger celebration of life planned to coincide with the release of the final edition of his memoirs. In lieu of flowers, Michael requests donations be made in his memory to the Wolfville Legion and the Wolfville Historical Society.

"I have been extraordinarily blessed in Canada...finding great things to do, a wide circle of friends and colleagues from east to west, and above all an abiding love." (Michael Bawtree)