

Dr. Leon Pachter

Eulogy for Dr. Stephen B. Colvin
March 10, 2008

“Man is like a breath, his days like a passing shadow.

In the morning it blossoms and by evening it is cut down and brittle.

The dust returns to the ground as it was and the spirit returns to the Lord who gave it.”

All of us are gathered here, at this somber moment, to grieve, pay our respects and recognize the contributions that Steve Colvin made throughout his life. We are dazed, we are feint, we are rendered numb by the realization of an immeasurable loss and the void left that will be nearly impossible to fill. Since the tragic event-on Saturday night all that kept reverberating in my mind was a line from one of Shakespeare’s tragedies **“Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight.”** I had the privilege of knowing and working closely with Steve for nearly 40 years. Steve was a Maverick, he was larger than life, but distilled down to the very core of his being he was a flame both illuminating and incendiary. He could illuminate with his vast medical knowledge and his surgical wizardry in the or play the role of the incendiary by challenging those around him to elevate themselves to the next level of excellence. Steve was indefatigable, he could be found at the hospital at any hour of the day or night- out working and showing more stamina than his residents and Fellows 25 years his junior. **In the words of William Wordsworth ‘He was a man of self sacrifice and a laborer, albeit a highly skilled**

one, without pause.” We did not always agree but there was a mutual respect between us and I am honored to have been considered his friend.

Steve’s life was cut short. Cut short professionally as he had so much more to give to his patient, to his residents and his colleagues, and cut short personally because he had so much more to live for. Our hearts go out to Helene, his children Sean, Mikela, Laurel, Heather, his grandchildren, his sons-in-law and his brother Jodi, his family and all of those whose lives he touched in so many different ways.

One can make little sense of Steve’s death at this period in his life- but it is said that when individuals are taken before their time the Almighty, as best as we can understand, requires their services. I suppose Heaven was in dire need of a unique, highly innovative, minimally invasive, brilliant valvular reconstructive cardiac surgeon.

As complex as Steve seemed his life was simply structured and revolved around three basic principles:

1. His Family
2. His Patients
3. His Friends

I was always struck by Two of Steve’s characteristic attitudes with which he faced any new opportunity. First: The sense of dedication to the task in which he confronted any challenge and Second his unquestioning confidence in his power and ability to fulfill it. Carrying on in the footsteps of Dr. Frank Spencer, Steve took the Division of CV surgery and transformed it into a Department where he served as its first Seymour Cohen Professor and Chairman, and until the time of his death his talents were utilized to their fullest as the Director of Cardio-Thoracic strategic initiatives.

For all his brouhaha and bluster, and given on occasion to outrageous hyperbole and declaration of absolute truths, Steve was an extremely shy and sensitive individual. Ask anyone who tried to thank him – he just wouldn't have it. Red faced and embarrassed he merely brushed you off- would not let you get in a word edgewise and let you know in no uncertain terms that the conversation was over. Steve was a persona that existed in multiple dimensions who best fit **Winston Churchill's description of the Soviet Union- Steve was a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.** He was an implacable foe, but the most loyal friend you could ever imagine. His friendship was a stronghold against which the gates of hell could not prevail. There was an absolute quality in his loyalty known only to those safe within its walls. Their battle was his battle. He would concede not an inch of ground, nor the smallest point against them. In a friend he could defend the indefensible, explain away the inexplicable and even forgive the unforgivable. We weep not so much for Steve but more so for ourselves because of the realization how bereft we are without him. **In Marc Anthony's funeral oration of Julius Caesar he said "the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones."** I submit to you that to the contrary- the good that Steve did, all the patients he saved, all the Fellows he educated and trained, all his colleagues whom he bailed out of desperate situations and the innovations he conjured up will not be interred with his bones. They will live on and give testimony and remembrance to his children and grandchildren as to who he was and what he accomplished on this earth.

If you cannot bring yourself to shed a tear on Steve's behalf, shed one because you did not have the opportunity to know the essence of the man

"May his soul be bound in the Bond of Life"