

Dr. Robert Press

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

Since Helane asked me yesterday to say a few words at the service today, I have been thinking of how to capture the essence of Steve in the few minutes that I have to speak. I thought of several words that describe Steve and may help to accomplish this.

The first is excellence. Steve demanded the best—both professionally and personally. From a professional standpoint, he provided state of the art care and required that from all the other members of his team. From a personal standpoint, he required the best as well-- whether that meant the best fishing boat and equipment, the best food, the best wine, or the best furniture in his apartment. Nothing less would satisfy him.

The second word I thought of was innovation. Certainly in cardiovascular surgery, Steve was an innovator. Where would minimally invasive mitral valve surgery be without Steve? He was truly a pioneer in the field, and helped develop some of the techniques as well as some of the rings and bands that are used. Steve was also well-known among colleagues for his ability to deal with the unexpected in the OR, and to quickly devise solutions to serious problems that were encountered during surgery. He was able to save countless lives as a result of this ability.

Third, we should mention the word drive. Steve was truly driven, especially when it came to cardiovascular surgery. It was this drive that made him refuse to give in to excruciating back pain and to insist on continuing to operate up to two days before his death. He estimated that he had performed over 10,000 heart operations, which is undoubtedly accurate. His drive extended to his other interests, including fishing, wine

and food. It was not at all unusual for Steve, after a full day in the OR, to arrive at home at 9PM and proceed to kitchen to cook a meal.

Fourth, we cannot discuss Steve without mentioning the word generosity. He co-founded Project Kids Worldwide, which provides life-saving cardiac surgery for indigent children from third-world countries. Steve himself performed countless numbers of operations on uninsured children who required cardiac surgery. And who could forget his generosity to his staff, with his yearly holiday party in Freeport for all of them and their families—a tradition that he continued even when he stepped down as chair. His generosity applied to his friends as well---it was next to impossible to pick up a check when you went to dinner with Steve, and he insisted on ordering the best food and wine on the menu.

Loyalty is the fifth word I've chosen to describe Steve. There is no one of whom I can think that was more loyal to both family and friends than Steve. I consider myself privileged to have been included in that group. There was nothing that Steve wouldn't do to help a family member or friend in need, and I am sure that many in this room have benefitted from this trait. If a "friend of Steve" or "relative of Steve" was admitted to the hospital, within minutes a team of those doctors that Steve considered the best in their fields was assembled to care for that individual. Steve was like a conductor, who orchestrated their care.

Finally, one could not fully describe Steve without mentioning the word frustrating. For any of you in the audience that had an office appointment or even social appointment with Steve, you know what I mean. There was real time and there was Steve time, and

frequently hours separated the two. In addition, Steve was not one to blindly obey authority. One example I remember was when a previous administration of the hospital constructed a barrier that blocked an entrance to the cardiovascular ICU that they thought would help control a cluster of Serratia infections. They had not consulted Steve before erecting the barrier. He felt that it was ill-advised, so he proceeded to the ICU with one of the OR personnel—I believe Marcus—and they knocked down the barrier.

That was Steve, and, in the words of Rob Applebaum---you've got to love him. And we all did---and I am sure that we in this room are but a small portion of those that loved Steve. It is difficult to make sense out of his premature departure. Steve was one of those rare individuals who was larger than life. And, being larger than life, I have to believe that, although he has left us here, he has only moved on to a new venue. I closed my eyes this morning and was sure that I saw him in this new venue above, with his good friend Peter Pasternack, another larger than life individual who left us prematurely and we eulogized just eleven years ago. I could see the two of them eating pizza, reviewing cath films on patients who were undergoing surgery the following day. After their review I saw them discussing fishing together, with Steve instructing Peter on where and how deep he should drop the line to catch a tuna. The two of them were happy, with Steve reassured in the knowledge that, as difficult as it will be, we will be able to go on without him, fortified with the memories that he has left us and the foundation that he has built. I hope that when you close your eyes you can see the same thing, since it will make it easier for all of us to cope with this loss.