

June 23, 2009

My Love

First off, in the true David Todres tradition, I'd like to ask everyone to silence their beepers and cell phones, if possible.

I especially would like to thank Dr. Ron Kleinman and the department of pediatrics for the lectureship and conference room in David's honor—and to also thank Dr. Michael Epstein, Dr. Mark Rockoff and finally, Dr. Robert Truog for being the first lecturer. Happily, David knew about the lectureship and conference room naming before he died.

This quote from Helen Keller was a favorite of David's: "What we have once enjoyed

We can never lose

All that we love deeply,

Becomes a part of us."

Today, I would like to share some of my personal, heartfelt feelings and thoughts about David---who, indeed is and will always be a part of me.

I am grateful for the hundreds of letters and cards I received from physicians, colleagues, nurses, students, patients, chaplains, social workers, technicians, administrators---the thousands of people David taught, worked and interacted with and passed in the white lobby during the 37 years he spent at Mass General. I'd often tease him and say it was

impossible to ever walk through the hospital lobby with him without meeting and greeting at least one person he knew.

Each card and letter I received echoed David's unique qualities—his kindness, compassion, wisdom and thoughtfulness. As a physician, you are all familiar with these unique qualities that David possessed—those very characteristics permeated his practice and teaching—whether it was to calm a sick child, talk to distressed families, listen patiently to a physician or colleague, or gently reconcile any number of difficult, tense or life-threatening situations. David embodied the ideal of the humane physician—the practice that Sir William Osler (another favorite of David's) referred to as an art, a calling—in which your heart is exercised equally with your head. He must have had David in mind.

Very few of us are able to combine humor, wisdom, care and concern in both our professional and personal lives. Still fewer who inspire us, by example, to be the most ethical, humane and compassionate people we can be—David was one of these few special people.

A loving and devoted husband and father, David expressed his kindness, calmness, patience and loving nature to Hillel, his grown children, and myself everyday. I always knew when I had really gone too far or 'crossed the line'—it took a lot for David to become unhinged. He loved me and he loved all his children and he knew we all loved him.

As many of you know, almost 25 years ago, David and I met at a pediatric conference in Newport, RI. David was lecturing at the conference and I was just beginning my doctoral studies at Tufts. A friend and colleague told me to bring copies of my recently published cookbook, 'The Romantic Vegetarian' which she put out on the Wyeth pharmaceutical table. During a coffee break, David came over to the table, picked up my book and my friend said 'If you want to meet the author, she is standing right over there.' David said, "oh, this looks so interesting"—he mentioned he was always interested in vegetarian cooking and yes; he did buy a copy of the book, which I inscribed. Needless to say, David never cooked after that day—with the exception of Sunday pancakes—a family tradition.

We always knew, after many years of being unsettled, that we had found in one another, the love of our lives—a true love, if you will. We loved wholly and deeply and did not take our love for granted. We complemented one another, making the other a better person and delighted in each other's company---blessed to have found a kindred soul and create a life and home together. David always told me: "Before I met you, my house was just a house—now it is a home." Not only did we share similar views and values in friends, family, travel, art, music and literature but also we shared an enthusiasm in experiencing life to the fullest.

Of course, David embraced this life-affirming attitude throughout his long struggle with cancer. In fact, many people didn't even know he had lymphoma. In the beginning of

his illness, soon after he lost all his beautiful curls, I got him French berets to cover his baldhead in the winter, which he loved to wear. He would come home and laughingly say “Judith, everyone comes up to me and says they like my new style—wearing different berets!”

Throughout 3 years of living with lymphoma, David endured treatment after treatment, including a stem cell transplant, with courage, dignity, grace and humor--and without complaint. David embraced and enjoyed life until the end—in many ways, he was never sick—because he never gave into his illness. His charm, enthusiasm and loveliness outshone his illness. He was an inspiration to everyone and for me, personally, an honor to care for.

Generous both in spirit and deed, David saw the good in people and brought out the best in others. No matter what age, race, religion or occupation—he could carry on a scintillating conversation equally well with a Serbian waiter or a Harvard professor. Always modest and underrating his accomplishments, David would extol the virtues of others. I became a “world class swimmer” in his eyes after competing in an international swimming event. He admired my writing or editing as great works of literature and when he generously shared the cookies and bread I baked with others—he’d usually preface it with “You must taste these—they are the best you’ve ever had!”

Small or large accomplishments of any family members, David made certain to proudly tell others about them rather than to ever speak of his own many, outstanding

achievements and accomplishments. With great admiration, he spoke of Jonathan's passion for children's rights law, Nadia's photography and Hillel's golf.

David was always open to learning and trying new things—hence, the interest in vegetarian cooking. I only have to look around at our bookshelves to see his enthusiasm for learning pouring out onto titles of books-- puppy training tips, overcoming phobias, hypnosis, computer typing skills, or learning Chinese in ten easy steps. It was not only the new things that interested him personally, but he would selflessly try new things with me and Hillel—just to make us happy. Since I am a competitive swimmer, David spent most of our married life trying to conquer his fear of the water—taking swimming lessons with a college coach up until the time he became ill. Whether roller-skating along the bike path in Santa Barbara, snorkeling in the Caribbean—even though he was petrified of deep water, jet skiing in Florida with Hillel, although both the water and speed frightened him, horseback riding in France, playing golf with Hillel in between cancer treatments, water coloring, learning a new language, studying literature, computer skills, drawing—David was always enthusiastic and open to learning. Even on our last family vacation together just 2 months before he died, David was on the tennis courts hitting the ball with all of us—and then he and I went in a hot air balloon over San Diego because it was something he had never done.

Although the pain of loss is still raw, I am so deeply moved by the legacy David has left in the thousands of children's lives he has saved, in the physicians, colleagues, and scores

of students he has mentored who hear his words, and inscribe his teachings in their minds and hearts and so continue to keep David's memory and name alive forever.

Finally, I'd like to conclude with a beautiful blessing from the Sidur, or Jewish prayer book: "It is hard to sing of oneness when the world is not complete, when those who once brought wholeness to our life have gone, and naught but memory can fill the emptiness their passing leaves behind. But memory can tell us only what we were, in company with those we loved; it cannot help us find what each of us, alone, must now become. Yet no one is really alone; those who live no more, echo still within our thoughts and words, and what they did is part of what we have become."