

Tribute to Stan Silverzweig

(1936 - 1998)

Note: I delivered a Tribute to Stan at the February 1998 National Grocers Association Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, following his death on January 11, 1998. It also includes some musings about good friends Nick D'Agostino and Tom Wenning. My spoken Tribute was edited into this written Tribute on April 25, 2008, using my speech notes.

From Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet.....

You would know the secret of death. But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life? The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light. If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond; And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the Shepard when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honor. Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king? Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun? And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountaintop, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

I am here today to remind you of that dancer, Stan Silverzweig...of his wonderful...and special...and too short life.

About ten years ago, Nick D'Agostino and Stan were sitting in a hot tub in Jamaica, and over several drinks, shared their dream for an Entrepreneurial Seminar for Family-Owned Grocers...a seminar to help these business men and women avoid the many problems faced by so many family owned business as they attempt to perpetuate their businesses from generation to generation.

This was the origin of the D'Agostino-Silverzweig Entrepreneurial Seminars, sponsored by the National Grocers Association. Thirty-seven five-day seminars were held around the United States over the next ten years, and every seminar was started with this story told by either Stan or Nick. Tom Wenning and I were on the original staff (Tom

for his legal expertise and me for my psychological knowledge) and we attended every seminar. We regularly tease their telling of this meeting as the drinks they were drinking at this historic event seemed to change every time they told the story...one time it would be margaritas, one time a beers, one time Jack Daniels, and to our more gentile audiences, Cokes. Tom and I believed that maybe they had had too much to drink on this historic occasion and didn't really remember what they had to drink!

Joining Stan and Nick and Tom was one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life.

- Stan, a New York Jew...the son of a grocer
- Nick, a Manhattan Catholic...who grew up in the grocery business
- Me, a protestant farm boy for the Ohio
- And, Tom, an attorney (of all things) from Ohio

Three religious guys and attorney! What a team! We conducted thirty-seven five-day seminars all around the United States, and during that time we became Colleagues...then Friends....then Brothers. They became the brothers I never had.

We took long walks nearly every one of those nearly two hundred days we were together. We walked:

- In the Grand Canyon in AZ
- Along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis

- Through the streets of Manhattan
- Up the eighteenth fairway at Interlocken, where Bobby Jones skipped a three wood over the lake to win the U.S. Open in 1935, the year I was born.
- Around the Alamo
- Along the Rio Grande in Del Rio, TX
- Around the White House in Washington, D.C.
- Through the campuses of Cornell University, St. Josephs' University, University on Minnesota, University of Southern California, and Western Michigan University.
- Along the Pacific Ocean in Los Angels; the Gulf of Mexico on Captiva Island; the Atlantic Ocean in Atlantic City and Hilton Head Island; on our North Coast on Lake Erie; on tow paths of the Erie Canal and around the lake on which Ruth and I live.

We:

- Boated in the bayou country of Louisiana and around Manhattan with our wives for Stan's sixtieth birthday.
- Bought cowboy hats and boots in Norman, Oklahoma.
- Watch albino deer in Ithaca, New York.
- Played golf together, talked on the phone three or four times each month, listened to Nick give his teary-eyed invocations about our families at every final banquet.

They:

- And they heard me tell the rye bread joke thirty-seven times!

During this time we helped over two hundred families. During these vocational, avocational and recreational times:

- We discussed our own problems...and discussed our goals and dreams
 - We helped one another...and proved that a Jewish guy, a Catholic, a Protestant and an Attorney can love one another, as adult men, and not be ashamed to say so in public.
-

Stan had a great career. He:

- Was a business consultant for over thirty years
- Was the owner of a successful video production company, and recently,
- Was the co-owner and president of Payback Training Systems Company, doing six million dollars in its second year.

These were some facts about Stan, but I want to tell you some other things about Stan.

When Nick called me at 5:00AM on January 11 to tell me that Stan had died, I was stunned. Nick had just recovered from prostate cancer and we were worried about his health, but Stan had just moved to Park City, UT and was skiing every day with his kids after school. This was the new Stan, who announced that he wasn't going to be spending large

amount of time away from home any longer. He loved his new life in the West.

Eileen and Nick and Ruth and I went to Park City that day and along with Dave Brumley and a number of Stan's Payback colleagues to lend support to Mary and the kids...Zak, 14; Joe, 12; and, Rebecca, 9.

Stan would have loved his Memorial Service. It was a little disorganized - just like Stan. It was the first service to be held in this ski lodge-looking Catholic Church at the base of the mountains. There was a section of clear glass in the middle of every stained glass window so one might see the large mountains that dwarfed the church.

The service was conducted by a Rabbi and a Priest, and the comments by Nick and I were so filled with tears that about the only message the congregation got was that this Stan, who almost none of them knew, was important to us, we loved him and that we were really going to miss him. Stan would have loved that so many children were present – to support his children...and lots of new neighbors to support Mary. These strangers in their own city embraced those of us who were the real strangers, and made us know how Stan could call this new place in Utah home after only a few weeks.

The day following the memorial service, something happened that Ruth and I will never forget. Mary arranged a dinner for those of us still in town in a private room at the Gamekeepers Grille in downtown Park City. Those attending

included Mary, Zak, Joe, Rebecca (Stan's daughter Jen from his first marriage), Joe (Mary's father), Ruth and me. Mary insisted a place be set for Stan...that made some of us a little uncomfortable. Then, after dinner, Mary (Like Nick did one night in Cornell with amazing success) asked each of us to say something to, or about, Stan.

Rebecca wanted to start and much to our surprise, had brought and read, the lyrics of Stan's favorite song, "Where Cowboys Go to Die," by Michael Martin Murphy. While she read this, my mind raced back to Norman, Oklahoma to the night at an Entrepreneurial Seminal banquet when Linda and Tom Goodner taught us that song and we sang it over and over...under the direction of a tee-totaling minister, Jim Williams, while he stood on top of a restaurant table. Stan fell in love with Michael Martin Murphy that night and bought all of his albums. Rebecca concluded her part with a personal letter to her Dad that was so loving and endearing that none of us could speak for ten minutes.

Just when I thought nothing more would be said, Joe, 12, the boy who loves to do magic and read while standing on his head when he gets bored with the three or four books he reads each week, said, "My Dad was gone a lot, but he was always there when I needed him." Don't you hope your kids will say that you were always there for them when they needed you?"

Zak, 14, said, " He was my best friend and I don't know what I will do without him."

Jennifer, Stan's thirty year-old daughter told a story about how Stan, although not expected to do so, was there for his first wife, both personally and financially, when she dies of cancer several years ago. That's the way Stan was.

Ruth mentioned how Stan would call every six months or so and tell us that he had just found the perfect place to move and that they would be moving to Maine or Virginia or Florida or New Mexico...and finally, Utah. When they did decide to move to Utah, they took exactly ten days to decide, enroll the kids in school, get a house and move.

They sold their house to a man (who they had never seen before) who walked up the driveway as the moving van was leaving for Utah...this after the house had been for sale for five years. In many ways, God just seemed to love after Stan!

Mary's father said that after three daughters, Stan was the son he'd never had and told a touching story how Stan had asked if he could call him Dad.

Mary's stories were great...she told of how Stan had taught her how to be less combative-more mellow, less impulsive-more contemplative, and, less reactive-more and more proactive. She said that Stan had been a warm and positive influence on each of their lives.

Stan had all of the qualities that every Boy Scout strives to achieve...except being thrifty! I believe that flaw in his character will be over looked because of his largesse nature.

Stan was loyal, creative, kind, laid-back, intense, funny, flexible, caring and loving. He beat the cancer that invaded the walls of his body cavity twenty years ago, but wasn't able to defeat the perforated aorta that went undetected while he laid in a cardiac care unit for eighteen hours on a Saturday night. Simply put...Stan was a great guy!

Recently, I have given much thought to love in death, but what older man or woman hasn't. What is larger than love or death? The former I have known first hand and the latter I have known because of loss. Sometimes it seems to me that I've spent a disproportionate number of hours in my life attending funerals.

It started when my best friend, Bobby, died when we were both twelve. My Mother and Father are dead. One of our sons died when he was eighteen. Two of my sisters and a bother are dead. One of my golfing friends died in boating accident last month in Costa Rica. And now, Stan is dead.

And yet I persist in the belief that it is all of value. That is not to say that I value all the problems and dying. I don't. Rather, I value all the living that preceded the dying. All the living...all the caring...and all that love.

Stan's legacy will be one of caring and love. We can contribute to his legacy by hating others less and love others more. But I leave you with this warning – Making a commitment to loving others more will be expensive, it will

cost you your life...but when you stop and think about it, why else do we live?

Written January 1998; Edited April 2008

Personal Note to Stan:

Ruth and I got to see your family when we visited Mary recently. You would be (are) so proud of them. Nick and Eileen were there. Besides your kids, Jim and Debbie and Mary, they were about the only folks we knew before hand. Nick is still the same...hasn't changed a bit...and it was great catching up like the three of us (and Tom) used to do. Those discussions remain one of the things I miss in my life.

Zack and Joe are so handsome and smart and fun. Becky looked like a teenage Mary. Jen was lovely, as were your grandchildren. She seems to have become Becky's East Coast mentor. Amy was full of energy and we enjoyed meeting her for the first time.

Mary is still the same beautiful and energetic woman you married.

Your whole family seems to be so much smarter and better looking than you!

The influence you had on your children, in those too few years, remains strong. You were a lucky husband and father...but your family was luckier to have had you.

June 2008