

STACY DEE BLAIR

Man of Faith, Loyal Friend, & Trumpet Virtuoso
(1954 - 2010)



We were in the midst of a gentle giant...

"There is nothing as strong as gentleness, and nothing as gentle as true strength." ~ St. Francis de Sales

(By D Chris Payne, formerly Diana C Keyes)

Blind from birth, Stacy's lifetime accomplishments were legendary and would take pages to discuss. They included winning the Maurice Andre International Trumpet Solo Competition in Paris in 1979, being inducted into the International Hall of Fame for Persons with Disabilities in 1998, and countless others. Stacy often stated that his most meaningful achievement was becoming an Eagle Scout in 1971. However, the true measure of the man was not found in his resume, but in his heart. This tribute is meant to shine the light of day upon the man behind the resume.

Back in college, when I first met Stacy, I recall noticing that he was kind, gentle, humble, caring, and funny. My deepest understanding today, 37 years later, is that he was kind, gentle, humble, caring, and funny.

Stacy never allowed fear to diminish his life. He traveled the world alone for years, conducting and playing with the world's finest orchestras. When he finally acquired a guide dog, it changed his life forever. From that day forward, he went to organizations and schools to teach others about service dogs. He was consistently one of the top donors for the Guiding Eyes for the Blind organization. Stacy wanted others to experience the same joy and independence that he found with his precious dogs, Guthrie and Kellogg.

Stacy's disability was readily apparent and he was sometimes smothered with well-intentioned helpers. Waiters would occasionally ignore Stacy and ask others what they would like to order for him. Recently, we discussed non-threatening ways to educate people on such things. We chose to enter restaurants, arm in arm, walking in such a way that they were unable to tell who was leading whom, both of us wearing dark glasses. When the wait staff came to the table, Stacy took charge and they assumed I was the one who was blind. When it was time to leave, Stacy would say something like, "Well, since I'm blind, you'd better drive." He was a master at reaching people's hearts in a gentle, yet memorable way!

Stacy was a good shopper. He knew exactly what he wanted and knew how to get help to find it. There were physical challenges involved in taking Stacy to the grocery store, once he started using a wheelchair, but he always found a way to rise above it by creating new and fun adventures. The

stores are well-equipped to handle mother's with children or wheelchair bound customers. One thing they were never prepared for was a customer who was both wheelchair bound and blind. Allowing Stacy use one of those motorized grocery carts alone would have been a true disaster waiting to happen. We put our heads together, thinking of various ways to overcome the problem. We found that if I pushed his wheelchair, he could push one of the smaller carts. We tried using one of the motorized carts with him in the seat and me on the running board to steer it. Unfortunately, the steering was awkward and the grocery store aisles were often too narrow and cluttered with obstacles. One day I said, "Hey Stacy, let's try running this thing backwards, steering it like a boat. What a solution! It beeped like a trash truck in reverse, so everyone knew to get out of our way and we could negotiate the tightest corners with ease! We laughed and cruised through the store without a problem, hoping the management wouldn't see fit to run us off. They never did...

Stacy was in a deep coma for 3 weeks in January. As the days stretched into weeks, the doctors were unwilling to give any type of assurance that Stacy would ever wake up, let alone go home. Through the days and weeks that followed, I stayed with him in the hospital, talking to him, retelling funny stories, stroking his hands, combing his hair; anything to engage his mind and let him know we were there and anxious for him to come home. Stacy was not easy for the staff to care for because of his size and the multiple complications that had to be juggled with care. There was an attendant in his room 24 hours a day because of the real danger of choking. It seemed important to get them involved, on a personal level, so he wouldn't be just another difficult assignment in a long day of overwork and underpay. I made sure to get to know each attendant on a first name basis, spending at least one full shift with each one, sharing funny or amazing details of his life and making sure they heard his music. By the time he woke up, they all felt like they knew him. They couldn't wait to talk to him and, of course, he didn't disappoint. Stacy hadn't had solid food in weeks and when he finally started relating to his surroundings and regaining his ability to speak, one of the first things Stacy said was, "Wow, I would give anything for some Brussels' sprouts. We laughed, since most people held captive in a hospital setting crave things like double bacon cheeseburgers, or pizza, or hot fudge sundaes. How naïve we were. Stacy was already setting us up for the joke! He said, "But I *like* Brussels' sprouts. You know, that's what people in Belgium call their kids." He always sensed when people were concerned about his well-being and he was a master at diffusing fear by turning it into fun. Stacy knew the names of his attendant's children and kept up with their concerns. He always checked to make sure the staff had had a chance to eat before he would agree to eat his own meal, and he always saved his desserts for them. It wasn't long before Stacy's attendants, as well as those from other floors, started coming in before their shift to bring him cans of his favorite soft drink, which was always in short supply! Stacy was a giver; he cared about people and he knew how to share. Stacy was fun and funny in the midst of adversity. He handled what many would consider humiliations with grace. Stacy lived with gusto, and touched many lives. We were blessed to have known him.

Most people keep expensive worldly goods in a safe. Stacy's treasure was very different. Upon opening Stacy's safe, I found it filled to the brim with precious cards and letters he had received over the years. It didn't matter to Stacy whether it was the next door neighbor, or a head of state; Stacy just loved people. There was also a mold of his teeth! A trumpet player's teeth are vital. When Stacy broke one of his front teeth, he told me it was the most important one and called it his "Brandenburg tooth". He had prepared for just such a crisis—the mold was ready! Yes, people and music, two of Stacy's greatest treasures—in that order.

Although we are left to grieve his absence, Stacy was a strong man of faith and it was time for him to go home. He had an unshakable confidence in the joy of his eternal future, when he would receive his sight and be free of pain. Since time on this earth is growing short, Stacy was summoned to prepare for the greatest engagement of all. On that day, when Gabriel blows the final trumpet, Stacy will be there, filling the heavens with an antiphonal response—an octave higher, of course—with both the sensitivity and the power to stir all of God's creation!

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Dr Payne was Stacy's friend and is now his heir.
She may be reached at (972) 790-2167 or StacyBlair@Safe-mail.net for information about Stacy's many charities or the purchase of his recordings.