

## **Eulogy for Stephen Boelter -- by Calvin Hofer**

If there is such a thing as a perfect evening for a memorial service for Stephen, it would be Winefest! I am to speak this evening about Stephen and Music, but I hope you can indulge me in a few stories, as I cannot talk about Stephen and Music without talking about friendship.

At the beginning of June, my wife Margaret, Kirk Gustafson and I flew to Madison to spend one final time with Stephen...to say goodbye, as if there is a proper way to do that. Stephen asked us if there was anything we wanted to say. I was still in denial, so I couldn't find the words. And I told Stephen that when we were hugging goodbye.

I wanted more time with Stephen to say the things I wanted to say, as we have been through so much together. What does a person do in this situation? Well, if you ride a Harley Davidson motorcycle, you ride. I called it my "Meaning of Life Ride". When we are faced with the death of a loved one, it is normal to question your own mortality and to find meaning in your life.

I rode for three days searching for answers. When I arrived, Stephen said, "Karen tells me you are on a meaning of life ride". I said,

“Yes”. He asked, “have you found the answer?” I responded, “No”. He gave me his answer, but I will save that for later.

I met Stephen in the spring of 2000. He discovered that we were fraternity brothers from Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, a music fraternity at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, albeit 15 years apart. After a concert he had attended at Mesa State, he approached me as I was greeting people and introduced himself. I was being cordial and I guess I didn't appear too impressed by his presence. Knowing Stephen as I do now, that did not sit very well with him. In the past few years, Stephen told this story of how I “blew him off”. Each time he told the story, it became longer and more dramatic, and he laughed louder and louder. I know he was not trying to make me feel bad, or maybe he was.....but I did, for I did not know at the time the friendship that would ensue.

Later that year Stephen joined the Wind Symphony as a clarinetist, pursuing his passion for music. Little did I know that his presence would turn into a friendship.....one of the best kinds. There are a handful of people who come into your life, and touch it in such a dramatic

fashion. Some people are just flickers of light. For me, and for many of you I suspect, Stephen was a glowing ray of light.

In the spring of 2001, I asked Stephen if his business would be willing to help bring in a guest conductor for the select band event that I had started in 2000. This event, now known as Best of the West began with one band and one guest conductor. The festival now hosts two bands, two guest conductors, a guest artist and a guest composer from whom we commission a new piece of music.

As we built Best of the West to where it is today, we didn't set out with the present model in mind. It happened quite serendipitously. There are many stories of how this event came to be, but the one that Stephen loved, was when we had the BOTW 2004 guest conductor, Alan Lafave out to Stephen and Karen's house after the concert. We began discussing who the next year's guest conductor would be. I think this is about the time Karen grew weary of Stephen and I hogging the event, so she boldly spoke up and said, "I think it is time for a female conductor". We agreed. Alan said, "I think Paula Holcomb would be a good choice". I said, "I know Paula from when I taught in Iowa". Alan said, "I think she

is now the Director of Bands at the State University of New York at Fredonia". Stephen said quite excitedly, "My brother is the Director of the School of Music at Fredonia". We chose Paula. Additionally, we commissioned a new piece of music from Stephen's brother, Karl, a composer. The event was a success, but more importantly, Stephen and Karl grew closer as brothers, and now Karl is a dear friend of mine. I would be remiss in not mentioning that during BOTW 2005, I met Stephen's mother, Esther. I fell in love with another Boelter. I'm not the only one. My wife Margaret, asked Esther to adopt her!

So, Stephen said when I arrived in Madison, "Karen tells me you are on a meaning of life ride". I said, "Yes". He asked, "have you found the answer?" I responded, "No".

We'll get to that.

In April of this year, Stephen received a Distinguished Alumni award from his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. While other recipients spoke of their professional accomplishments and their families, Stephen spoke of his passion: his musical experiences in

life and the Best of the West Music festival. He was most proud pulling together this family of students, faculty, composers, conductors and performers. Through Best of the West and his numerous philanthropic projects, Stephen has touched so many lives in unseen ways.

During his time in Grand Junction, Stephen became a board member with KAFM and the Grand Junction Symphony. His proudest accomplishment with the Symphony Board was his work on the Venue Planning Committee, for which you have seen the results of his efforts in the news recently with the Avalon Theater. A few years ago, after the symphony's performance of Mahler's second symphony, he said to me in a fervent tone, "Calvin, I never want to hear Mahler 2 again in that auditorium, EVER".

Stephen continually pushed everyone to have passion, vision and to take a chance. He was an inspiration to everyone around him. When he walked into the room with his boundless energy and confident, six-foot four frame, you just knew that everything was going to be OK.

Stephen taught me a lot:

Stephen taught me not to be scared to ask for financial support if there is vision and passion. I taught Stephen how to write checks for large sums of money.

Stephen taught me that when you first meet someone, assume they are going to be your best friend. I taught Stephen how to stay with someone after they have blown you off.

Stephen taught me about great wine. I taught Stephen that, yes, someone can actually ask about a large cabernet glass, "Aren't you going to fill it up?" He should have sent me home after that one.

Stephen taught me that with a great bottle of wine, you don't tip it all the way up to empty it in case there is sediment. I taught Stephen that you shouldn't be wasteful.

Stephen taught me how to live. I taught him the patience he needed to teach me how to live.

Stephen taught me that speaking to someone face to face is better than electronically through email. I taught Stephen how to text. One day late June, our mutual friend John Tuinstra was with Stephen as he rested. When Stephen awoke, they struck up a conversation, and John said, “So, Calvin tells me that he taught you how to text”. Stephen laid there quietly for a moment and somehow mustered up the strength to say, “It gives me great comfort knowing that I don’t have to talk to Calvin”.

When I arrived in Madison, Stephen said, “Karen tells me you are on a meaning of life ride”. I said, “Yes”. He asked, “have you found the answer?” I responded, “No”. Stephen said..... “Sometimes the answer is right in front of you”.

I left Stephen on the morning of June 23. I played the recording of our world premiere of “Grand Mesa” and I told him that was his gift to

the world. How many people do you know can leave a beautiful piece of music as a gift to the world? Stephen and Karen do it every year.

Stephen's legacy will live on, in new music, in the excitement of Best of the West, in a new performance space for the Grand Junction Symphony, in his beautiful design work, but most importantly, in the hearts and souls of us all.

In a unanimous decision by the Mesa State College Board of Trustees, I am proud to announce that our instrumental rehearsal room in this building, has officially been renamed: the Boelter-Combs Rehearsal Hall. We will unveil this at Best of the West 2009.

The day I left Stephen, he texted me one final time: He said, "Thanks for being with me. Friendship and Love go in the same heart and soul.

As I was riding a secluded county road west of Madison to bypass road construction on Highway 14, I realized I still had not found my answer to the meaning of life. Deep in thought and quite unaware of my surroundings, I suddenly came face to face with a deer that jumped out

of the ditch. I slammed on the brakes, and through the squealing of the tires, the answer became clear.

The meaning of life .....is death. WE ALL DIE.

So, Live your life so it is worth dying for. Live your life so it is worth dying for. Give away as much love as you can.

Stephen lived a life worth dying for, and With Heart and Voice, he gave away as much love as anyone I know.