IN MEMORIAM

David Stanley Precious (1944-2015)

“they give me all of these medical cocktails to treat the leukemia. I have had their cocktails and I have had red wine, and I like red wine much better.”

—David S. Precious

Our profession lost one of its most gracious champions earlier this year when David Stanley Precious, DDS, MSc FRCDC, FRCS passed this earth on February 3, 2015. David Precious arguably did more than any single individual in history to shape the modern day version of oral and maxillofacial surgery (OMS) in Canada. His leadership is eclipsed only by his impact on family, friends, and the community in which he lived most of his adult life: Halifax, Nova Scotia. For his distinguished service to his country and lifelong contributions to dentistry and medicine, he was admitted into the Order of Canada, one of the highest civilian honors in the British Commonwealth. “Desiderantes meliorem patriam” —longing for a better country— is the motto of the order. I have known no one more deserving of this recognition than David Precious, who was the consummate gentleman, scholar, humanitarian, community leader, and ambassador for his nation and profession.

David was born and raised in Ottawa, Ontario. After graduating Glebe Collegiate in Ottawa, he enrolled in Dalhousie University, where he played football and basketball, graduating with science and dental degrees. He remained in Halifax for his oral and maxillofacial surgery training and in 1972 received a medical research grant to study with Professor Hugo Obwegeser in Zurich, Switzerland. Returning to his alma mater, he joined the Dalhousie University faculty in 1973 and became Chair of the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Sciences in 1985.

Under David’s leadership, the OMS Department at Dalhousie grew into one of the world’s great OMS units. Building a formidable service for the academic medical center as well as the dental school, David recognized the importance of surgical subspecialization and was one of the first chiefs in North America to recruit subspecialists within his department. OMS at Dalhousie gained international recognition for excellence in cleft lip and palate surgery, orthognathic surgery, management of obstructive sleep apnea, oral, head and neck cancer, temporomandibular joint disorders, traumatology, and implantology. Like all visionary leaders, David had the foresight to recruit, mentor, and retain the best people, who in turn were inspired by his own dedication and work ethic.

In 2003 David was named Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry at Dalhousie. During his tenure as Dean, he continued to operate locally and abroad, contributing to the advancement of cleft lip and palate surgery, his greatest professional passion. He travelled extensively to provide volunteer cleft lip and palate surgery to children in Vietnam, Tunisia, India, and Brazil. For more than 20 years, these annual sojourns became as much a part of the man as they were for those young people who benefitted from his expertise. He delivered more than 250 international lectures and authored more than 200 peer reviewed publications and abstracts, 15 book chapters, and 8 books on various subjects of interest.

David helped to shape Canadian oral and maxillofacial surgery as it evolved from a dental specialty of primarily exodontia, to one whose members were trained in both medicine and dentistry and provided comprehensive surgical care to patients with severe maxillofacial trauma, congenital, developmental, and acquired craniofacial deformity, and head and neck cancer. As President of the Canadian Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and President of the Nova
Scotland Dental Association he helped establish new training and professional standards for oral and maxillofacial surgeons in Canada. As President of the medical staff at the Victoria General Hospital and Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Dentists of Canada he contributed to the integration of OMS services into hospitals and health systems and ensured that its trainees were equipped to provide the highest level of care within their scope of practice. As Regent of the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the International Cleft Lip and Palate Foundation, and Registrar of the Royal College of Dentists of Canada and was an ambassador for OMS and a global educator. He also served on the editorial boards of four leading national and international scientific journals, including, most recently, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Editor of TripleO.

David recognized that physicians and dentists should not forget their obligation to serve the communities in which they live. He enriched his fellow citizens and personal passions by volunteering his time and leadership skills to local arts and educational organizations in and around Halifax. He served on the boards of the Neptune Theatre, Shakespeare by the Sea, Scotia Festival of Music, the Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, and Canadian Parents for French.

David received numerous awards in recognition of his professional contributions, in addition to the Order of Canada. He received the Canadian Dental Association Medal of Honour, the William Harrigan Award, the Harry Archer Award, and the Humanitarian Award from the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. He was an honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in England and received honorary degrees from Laval University and Dalhousie University.

As David’s immediate successor on the Editorial board of TripleO, it has fallen on me to pen this memoriam in honor of the man I so greatly admired. I would be remiss, however, to not include remembrances from his contemporaries who knew him best and worked so closely with him for many years. It is my hope that young people reading this might take measure of the man, how he structured his extraordinary life, and the impact he made on his colleagues, friends and the world he worked to make a little better:

"The Vitruvian man was conceived by 14th century mathematician and architect Vitruvius. His studies and measures were transformed into graphic detail by da Vinci. These works are referred to as the “canon of proportions." This was a cornerstone of Leonardo’s attempts to relate man to nature. He believed the workings of the human body to be an analogy for the workings of the universe.

Many make deliberate effort to ideally proportion their lives; vocationally, personally, spiritually and pleasurably.

Does such an optimally balanced individual exist? Not likely. However, in my lifetime Dr. David Precious, of all I have known, most closely replicated the Vitruvian man.”

Bruce N. Epker, DDS, MSD, PhD

The thing I admired personally about David was that he was so kind and such a gentleman in scientific discussion. He spoke with enormous knowledge and gravitas built from detailed understanding and experience, yet he did so without ever seeming complacent or smug, because he knew that his reach was limited and there was ever great knowledge to come.

His knowledge, experience, and contribution on growth and development and sequence of treatment in the cleft palate/alveolar patient was truly important work that influenced clinical practice so that his reach will truly exceed his grasp.

I will miss his great laugh, Canadian wit, and deep affection for his colleagues.

Leon A. Assael, DMD

A true leader and excellent friend. Working with him through so many years in the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons was always a blessing. He was optimistic, brought new ideas, and made everyone comfortable in the board meetings, courses and annual congresses.

He was a wonderful surgeon, and I doubt anybody would have better results on Cleft Surgery. Those children were very lucky to have him performing with finesse the most delicate surgeries. He followed them carefully and made sure the multidisciplinary team would deliver throughout the years. Always smiling, a wonderful Canadian ambassador in so many countries, and a great father and husband. I truly miss him.

Cesar Guerrero, DDS

Of all the brilliant things that David did and said, the thing I remember most is his fabulous Canadian wit and sense of humor.

I asked him how he was doing last year and he replied, “they give me all of these medical cocktails to treat the leukemia. I have had their cocktails and I have had red wine, and I like red wine much better.”

Charles Hasse, DDS, MD

I offered up a note of thanks for having known David, and a small tear for his passing, and for our loss.
We all agree that David was larger than life—his intellect, his vistas and how he acted upon them, his knowledge, his human warmth, and the ease with which he seemingly always said and did the right thing. My wife capitalized it well—he was Precious…

Michael Kinnebrew, DDS

He was outstandingly gentle, considerate and respectful person at all times…David’s vision in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery not only marked his own environment locally but internationally as well. His persistence and productivity to contribute to the profession, train and spread his experiences in the field of facial deformities, in particular cleft lip and palate was enormous. …I was fortunate to meet a man of generous heart, an unsparing mentor, and patient teacher, and above all, a good friend with whom I will remember many memorable and “Precious” moments.

Reha Kisnisci, DDS

At an AAOMS annual meeting in Montreal David ran what was known then as a surgical roundtable session. His topic was quite unique, that being a review of wine. I assumed I would glean some didactic knowledge about wine and, knowing the type of teacher he was, I was readily anticipating this session. I signed up as soon as the meeting brochure was published. Since it was scheduled as an 8:00 am session I was quite pleasantly surprised to find out it was a “clinical” session as David generously brought classic bottles of wine from his cellar, including Chateau Palmer and a wonderful sauterne. As he did with everything, his goal was to impart the most knowledge to all and certainly our group left that morning with a deeper appreciation for wine and a vast appreciation of the man.

Stuart Lieblich, DMD

I have wonderful memories of him lecturing at the UCSF Hawaii meetings and of him being a visiting professor at UCSF. I have even happier memories of my wife Ann and I being entertained in Halifax, Nova Scotia by all the OMFS team, but especially David and Elizabeth. We still fondly look at their book on “Scarecrows of Nova Scotia.” Much more interesting than OMFS on occasion.

M. Anthony Pogrel, DDS, MD

His breath of knowledge was intimidating, yet he was easy to talk to about anything. In 1996, on an incredibly warm and humid evening in the Philippines, I had a chance to enjoy his wit and conversation. We spent several hours and consumed a few beverages. I do not recall the topics of our conversation, but with warmth I remember the smile and laughter. A leader and friend is lost.

Joseph Van Sickels, DDS, PhD

David moderated a session at AAOMS 2000 in San Francisco. I presented a paper on complications after genioplasty, so I naturally quoted his work extensively. It was more than a little intimidating to do this since I knew who he was but had never formally met him before. He was as gracious as anyone I have ever met in my life. His kind words and helpful comments were enormously uplifting and educational. We sat in the empty hall after the session for probably an hour talking about oral surgery and life. You always felt that when you spoke with David that you had his complete attention and that he was listening. He was a gentle giant: supremely competent and generous with his time and talent. One non-taxable benefit of academic OMS is temporary immortality—he lives on in each of us: all those he cared for and especially those he trained and educated. I am one of many who are grateful for his life and for his influence.

John R. Werther, DMD, MD, FACS

David created a department which reflected his values of putting the interests of the patient above all else, striving for the highest standards possible, to be hard working, to contribute back to the profession, to be honest, considerate, polite, and have a sense of humor. His department philosophy was that we all contributed in a different but equal way. When David gave his presentations around the world he would thank his fellow Department members for supporting him in so many ways that allowed him to share his research.

David also enjoyed fellowship with us, his associates. On our Cleft missions, we would stop in cities to reduce jet lag: Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Osaka, Taipei, Paris, and London. David would have a cultural itinerary planned which included museums, art galleries, palaces, castles, universities, the oldest pub in England, and of course, Michelin-approved restaurants. I am more than happy to tell you about the Royal College museum in London or the Emperors palace in Tokyo, but I cannot betray his trust by elaborating on the consequences of our four hour lunches and five hour dinners.

At the base of David’s coat of arms, the motto is PRIMUM PRODESSUS, “first, do good.” This reflects David’s positive nature and I believe he would not want us to be unhappy but instead we should appreciate how fortunate he was to accomplish so much, with, I suspect, the help and cooperation of everyone…”

Reginald Goodday, DDS, MSc

R. Bryan Bell, DDS, MD, FACS, FACD

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