

Stephan Black

February 26, 1957 – December 19, 2021

Funeral Service
Minister: Gail Mathews

January 15, 2021

Minister's Introduction:

Welcome friends. And a particular welcome to William Harvey, who is here with us today, and to Stephan's family members who are viewing remotely.

We have come together today to honor the life of our beloved friend, Stephan Black. We are here to hold Stephan in our hearts for this brief period, and then release him, together transforming our sorrow into presence.

At the death of a friend, we can see their play as a whole. And we can see it—as we cannot yet fully see our own—as a perfect, complete, and realized destiny. Now we more clearly understand the payment and contribution that Stephan made, and we are grateful for his honesty, for the enthusiasm he brought to all his pursuits, and for his dedication to the school, his friends, and his family.

Now let us stand and remember Stephan in silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank you.

The physical body is designed to produce presence and being, and then to be laid aside. Walt Whitman said, "The best of me then, when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly striving." Stephan takes with him the presence that he has gained in this lifetime, and his connection with Influence C. Our teacher has said, "That is all we can take with us, but it is more than enough."

[Reading: Rilke, “I Live My Life in Growing Orbits”]
(Reader: Victoria Craig)

I live my life in growing orbits
Which move out over the things of the world.
Perhaps I can never achieve the last,
But that will be my attempt.

I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,
And I have been circling for a thousand years,
And still I don't know if I am a falcon, or a storm, or a great song.

[Music: Erik Satie]
(Musicians: Michael Parks)

[Eulogy: Karen Harvey]

Stephan and I laughed when we realized we had actually first met at Peter Morrow's camp in the Adirondack Mountains around 1986. He even produced a photograph of me pushing my son in a swing under one of the tall pine trees on Peter's property. Together we would go on to forge an appreciation of the intricate weavings of C Influence in our lives, an appreciation which became the basis of the lasting bond between us.

Stephan was born in Toronto, Canada, where his first school was a French one, adding another language to his already proficient German and English-speaking skills. His main memory of that school was that the children were made to eat liver for lunch every day, which he could not stand. His rascally nature became evident when he devised a way to take each forkful toward his mouth but then carefully dropped the food inside his shirt. When he left the dining room, he would linger over the garbage can and lift out the bottom of his shirt so the food would fall out. His mother could not understand how his shirts got so soiled every day.

The family moved to Seattle, where the natural surroundings nourished Stephan's love of nature. He memorized bird calls at a young age, a skill which made him a valuable asset to the Apollo birders. He also inherited his family's musical gene. Stephan's grandfather was the church organist in a village in Germany and friends with Carl Orff, the composer of the famous cantata "Carmina Burana."

After graduating high school, Stephan joined a program designed to assist underprivileged children in Kenya. It was an extraordinary experience for him to move to another country at the age of 18, and teach English to young people, many of whom had never seen a white person before. One day while Stephan was walking past a hut, a man ran out and shouted, "Quick, what's your name?" The tradition in those parts was to name the newly born child after the first person seen. There must be a Stephan living somewhere in Kenya now.

Stephan's own name was given him by his Bavarian mother, after the patron saint of Germany. This often created confusion in how his name was pronounced. In Starbuck's he would give his name as Steve.

After enrolling in Grinnell College, Stephan's life changed dramatically when a marimba band performed a lively concert on campus. He was so taken with the music that he left college and followed the group to Seattle, where he became a member of the band and performed with them at various venues, including the Monterey Jazz Festival. Once again, he had launched himself into the unknown.

During this time, Stephan began to search for a deeper meaning to life. He explored various B-influence groups and was not satisfied until he found *In Search of the Miraculous* in a friend's apartment. He resonated with the ideas and tried to practice them.

At about the same time, he began noticing advertisements: “Gurdjieff/Ouspensky center now accepting members.” A conflict began when he discovered that the meetings seemed to occur at the same time of his marimba practice nights. One particular rainy night, he was in a Thai restaurant outside a bus stop churning over a decision. Taking the bus one way would deliver him to his marimba practice; the bus going the other way would lead to the prospective student meeting. Finally, he remembered the advice from Ouspensky, “What you begin you must finish,” and Stephan determined to take the bus to his practice.

At that precise moment, a couple at a nearby table became very loud in their discussion. The young man slammed his hands on the table while standing up saying, “Don’t you understand? Man is a machine.” Suddenly Stephan found himself at that table demanding, “What are you talking about?” “We’re going to a meeting of a Gurdjieff/Ouspensky group. Would you like to join us?” Sometime after joining the school in 1979, Stephan discovered he had been voted least likely to join.

The center director urged Stephan to go to Renaissance, and so at the age of 23 he moved to a new environment once more, where he found himself under the direction of the vineyard manager, Grant Ramey. Stephan often said he learned self-discipline during this time. He liked to tell the story of one morning waking up to find Grant standing over his bed commanding him to get up and get going. He was in further disbelief when Grant got into his truck and actually waited for Stephan to come out. Because Stephan was continuously working the dusty backhoe and needing to steam clean the vehicle each time, Grant nicknamed him “Steamy Wonder”.

It was a magical age in the school, where Stephan enjoyed developing the vineyard and learning the various skills that were required. A friend remarked that during those years Stephan always seemed to be behind a backhoe. The only days off were on the moons. Another friend remembers that Stephan would often tell stories of his early life in the Pacific Northwest that would have the whole crew rolling with laughter—a welcome interlude during days of harsh weather and hard work.

In the early 1980's Stephan married, and he and his wife Sally were invited to move to Miami where they lived for five years, helping develop a thriving center. It was there that their only child was born, a beautiful blond, blue-eyed little boy, Michael.

The biggest shock of Stephan's life was Michael's death at age 29, after a motorbike accident in Greece. Stephan was still processing his grief when he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia.

Stephan had a warm spot in his heart for youngsters, including my three children. Once he came over in a pinch when I had to pick up one son, Eric, from football practice and leave a frustrated and angry William, who was trying to complete a science fair project by making electricity out of lemons. I returned to find two laughing guys running around the house with his special gizmo checking for electricity in plants, the piano, and their heads. Stephan patiently taught Eric to change his own oil in the car and he very much enjoyed participating in my daughter Morgen's growth from a three-year-old to an accomplished young woman.

Stephan and I used our differences to learn to be more understanding and accepting of the strengths and weaknesses of our mechanics. We truly used each other for our own evolution. Our dinners every night included candlelight and quotes augmented by delicious food Stephan enjoyed cooking. It was amazing to me that we had lively conversations every night over the course of 22 years.

Stephan is remembered by his friends for his high-spirited love of "the hunt" when out birding, for his generosity and sly humor. He had a way of finding enjoyment in the small moments of life. A friend and neighbor recalls hearing Stephan sing at the top of his lungs while mowing his lawn. She often had the thought to sing soprano to his tenor.

He was deeply committed to the Apollo Chorus for more than 20 years, and also played in the recorder ensemble, bringing his exuberant spirit along to enliven the whole enterprise. He was especially enthusiastic when the Orchestra and Chorus prepared Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Stephan never missed a rehearsal and worked hard to help make the performance a success. He saw it as an artistic contribution to the school that might never come again and so should not be missed.

Although we were never married, each year Stephan and I would celebrate the anniversary of our first date, the last Thursday of April. While driving back from Bodega Bay on April 30 this year we stopped to charge the electric car. Stephan checked his emails and the results of his routine yearly tests showed up with red flags everywhere. The shock was so strong, we could only decide the tests were wrong. They weren't.

This fellow who was the blooming picture of health, who practiced yoga and exercised, whose aim was to never be in a hospital, was given the role of enduring the rapid descent of his machine—a C-influence play that precluded any way to turn the play around. The only recourse was to use it.

The ensuing journey incorporated many ups and downs. When it became clear during his last week in the hospital that there was nothing more that could be medically done, Stephan only wanted to come home.

When I opened the double doors of the medic van, Stephan was sitting up with an amazing glow on his face. I thought the sudden rush of cold air might be too much of a shock for him and started to close the doors. "No," he said, "Keep them open." The air and the sunny view of his own yard were such a joy.

During the last few days his mother, Irene, and his younger brother, Martin, came to help and fill his days with the love that he so welcomed. His sister Sigrid was unwell and sadly could not make the trip.

As the disease took its toll, Stephan never complained. Not once. It was such a poignant and humbling experience to witness. Stephan said he felt like he was migrating from his body to his soul. The last entry in his journal included these words: “Accept Accept Accept. It’s hard to do, but it makes it all easier to deal with. By not accepting you end up in a space of confusion and fear and anxiety. . . . Accept it and meet it fully no matter what the outcome.

“The alternative, the dance of resistance, although it seems justified in so many ways, actually causes more suffering. It allows that tiny possibility that there is a choice—a choice to resist, deny, pretend. The craziest part of this play is that it’s really happening. By embracing it somehow it becomes easier, more businesslike. No more pretending—instead be pragmatic, forward-looking, and realize that, yes, even these days are an opportunity for presence and are happening only once, and never again.”

[**Music:** J. S. Bach, “Sheep May Safely Graze”]
(Musicians: Calixta Coral Paz, soprano; Michael Parks, piano)

**[Reading: “Steps” by Hermann Hesse,
(Reader: William Harvey)**

As every blossom fades
And all youth sinks into old age,
So every life’s design, each flower of wisdom,
Attains its prime and cannot last forever.
The heart must submit itself courageously
To life’s call without a hint of grief,
A magic dwells in each beginning,
Protecting us, telling us how to live.

High-purposed we shall traverse realm on realm,
Cleaving to none as to a home,
The world of spirit wishes not to fetter us
But raise us higher, step by step.
Scarce in some safe accustomed sphere of life
Have we established a house, then we grow lax;
Only he who is ready to journey forth
Can throw old habits off.

Maybe death’s hour too will send us out new-born
Towards undreamed lands,
Maybe life’s call to us will never find an end
Courage my heart, take leave and fare thee well.

Minister's Conclusion:

The death of a friend reminds us that we each inhabit a fragile and temporary vessel, through which presence emerges and connects us.

May Stephan's questing spirit remind us that "we have not done enough unless we are present";

May his striving to accept and transform loss and terminal illness strengthen us as we confront our own suffering; and

May his efforts to build and support Apollo, and his love for his teacher, his friends, and his family inspire us to greater efforts.

Dear Stephan, we thank thee.

Minister:

The task of this lifetime has been fulfilled. The role of Stephan is complete. The shell of the body falls away, and the soul that inhabited that body is released to continue its divine journey.

Candle Ceremony

Minister signals urn bearer (Graylin).

Minister: Please stand.

Funeral party leaves.

At the Cemetery

Announcement (Bonnie):

After the interment, you are all invited to gather and raise a glass to Stephan.

Minister's Introduction:

Dear friends, here in this sacred place, we gather to release Stephan to his, and our, true home.

[Reading: "Wanderers (Nachtlied)" by Goethe] (Readers: Guinevere Ruth and Gernot Mueller)

Über allen Gipfeln Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln Spürest du

Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde. Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.

Over all the mountain peaks there is calm,
In all the treetops you feel barely a breeze;

The birds are silent in the forest. Just wait, soon
Thou too shalt rest.

Minister:

We return Stephan's ashes to the ground: from earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Words fade in the face of a great reality. We, too, arrive at this simplest of moments—our friend, Stephan, showing us how.

Urn is placed in the grave.

Minister:

Rumi wrote, "Uncover in silence your soul's own rose garden." Let these rose petals remind us of the sweetness of our departed friend, and of the rose garden of his soul.

Minister and participants scatter rose petals into the grave.

Minister's Conclusion:

The earth returns to the earth, and a divine spark returns to its divine source. The circle of life is complete. Let us join in raising a glass to Stephan, and then depart, with a renewed and vivid appreciation for the gift of life allotted to each of us.

Attendees gather for the toast.

[Toast: "Ablution" by John Craig]
(Reader: Blair Wilson)

Ablution:

Wash, wash the dust that every day blows in to mar the light.

Clean the mind again, again. So quickly loosens the grip.

And we slide away into the lies of mortality.

Only high up, up very high, is the air truly clear.

Go higher, above the air itself, beyond the last thought,

To the very edge of mind. Now new, cross into silence.