

## Steve's Last Day

August 1987 – I was not yet twenty and had just graduated high school. He was a professor at Laurentian University. We met at a House Ceilidh – a small intimate gathering in someone's home where music is played and stories are told – where he sang a ballad about a coal mine owner meeting the ghost of a miner's wife, and I sang a ballad about Robin Hood. I always joked with listeners hearing me tell the story of how Steve and I met, saying “it was love at first sound.” But in a way, that wasn't so far from the truth.

August 2009 – After twenty two years of sharing music, stories, protests, and travels, ups and downs, woes and joys, Steve died with me right at his side. Twenty two years is a hell of an accomplishment for any couple in this day and age. And I can honestly say we were always the best of friends. In all those years, I regularly experienced what call “wow” moments with him. They are those shared magic moments when time stops for an instant and with crystallizing clarity, I feel to my deepest core how much I love to be with him.

I want to tell the story of the three “wow” moments I had with Steve on his last day.

It was a hot Saturday in Yellowknife. There was, as usual, a lot happening in town. The annual Old Town Ramble 'N Ride festival was in full swing, and both Steve and I were scheduled to perform; Steve on Saturday and me the following day. If I had only known that this would be the last time I would ever see him perform, I would have been there in the audience. Everyone told me afterwards they had never seen him perform better. But I had grocery shopping to do, and I had to practice for my own gig, so Steve went down to Old town without me.

When he came home a couple of hours later, he was extremely happy with his performance. He had done a number of jazz guitar pieces he had been working on recently. He had been practicing them diligently for weeks and this was his first time sharing the material with an audience other than the regular House Ceilidh crowd. I was pleased that his gig went well. He decided to take a long bike ride to celebrate.

An hour later, I had finished some house work and was lying down on the bed for a brief rest. Steve returned from his bike ride also feeling a bit tired, so he lay down beside me. We snuggled for a few minutes, just relishing a moment of quietness and peace in each other's company. And then it happened: the moment was captured in my spirit like a snap shot in a photo album and I thought to myself – Oh how good it feels to have his body next to mine, our fingers interlaced! No words were spoken, but I know he felt it too.

It was getting close to supper time, so I got myself up to prepare our meal. At dinner, we talked about world events. This always got Steve into a lively discussion, especially if US policies happened to be involved. Somehow, as our dinner concluded, the conversation inspired Steve to launch into one of his humorous anecdotes. I had heard them all before, of course; some of them hundreds of times over the years. But they never failed to make me laugh. His face became animated as he imitated characters in his story. I laughed so hard, tears formed. And then it happened again: I looked at his laughing face and the sparkle in his eyes and moment froze as I

thought – Oh how I love it when he tells these stories and makes me laugh! I knew the moment was precious for both of us.

With the dinner cleared away, we talked about going to our neighbour's house to watch a film. They were away on holidays and had asked us to house-sit. They had one of those giant flat screened HD TVs, so Steve and I wanted to take advantage and watch a film with really impressive cinematography. We chose "Alexander", a recent film about Alexander the Great. We had both seen it in the theatres when it came out, but the DVD I had was the Director's cut, so it had several previously unavailable scenes.

We snuggled up together on the neighbour's sofa and began watching the film. Because of the added scenes, it was quite long. We paused the film two thirds of the way so we could make some tea. We both talked about how much we were really enjoying the film: the cinematography, the costumes, the story. The added scenes improved the film immensely as well. And then it happened a third time: in that magic moment, our thoughts and feelings were one; not just about the film, but about sharing it with each other, and I thought – Oh how much I enjoy having him to share this with!

We sat back down on the sofa and released the pause button.

Within 10 minutes, Steve was dead.

Even now, after the passage of just over two years, I weep to tell that story. And yet, I feel so blessed. How precious was that day to me! To have had in the space of only a few hours three magical "wow" moments with a man I had loved more than half my life. And then to have been privileged enough to be there with him as his beautiful spirit left. Many of us would count ourselves lucky indeed to be able to spend such a perfect last day in the company of loved ones.