



ERIC M SCHWIETZ M.D.

1964 - 2009

As I sit to write this memoir for my former partner in practice, Eric M. Schwietz, M.D., I am saddened to do so, but glad to have the opportunity to share with you the extraordinary life that he led. He was born 45 years ago, having passed on Friday, September 18, 2009 after sustaining fatal head injuries from a tragic car accident. No one else was injured or in the car, and the details of what happened, not corroborated, will probably never fully be known.

His father was a decorated Air Force man and the family moved about the country for all of Eric's childhood. He eventually got to call Louisville, Kentucky home, and is where his father, Tom Sr., and mother, Ethel, still reside. The youngest of five, he had one brother, Tom (the oldest), and three older sisters, Leigh Anne, Teresa, and Monica, who dutifully harassed and deeply loved him. It was an honor and pleasure to have the opportunity to meet most of Eric's family during the brief time they were out here. Truly wonderful people, as one would expect, being of the same stock as Eric. They displayed their strong bond of love for him, humor as a pillar of their character, fortitude to accept the unacceptable.

Eric took a passionate approach toward life endeavors. He took to swimming at an early age and won three National Championships as a member of the Stanford University Varsity Swim Team. He also competed in the 1984 Olympic Trials when the games were in Los Angeles. He graduated with honors in Chemistry and took a path of travel and exploration, and a variety of jobs that reflected his wide range of interests, including a stint as an assistant winemaker at Bargetto Winery. Never one to hold back, his travels included research and cultural immersion in places off the beaten path of usual tourism and into places like Kenya, Tanzania, and Haiti, where he worked to measure pupillary response and dark adaptation as a way to detect Vitamin A deficiency, Romania to work on a project involving retinopathy of prematurity, Hungary, India, and a year living in Nepal. No doubt, Eric has made friends, and saved vision and lives all over the world.

Eric had a passion and great knowledge in so many different areas; he was a constant source of interesting information, laughter, and genuine gusto for things in life. He viewed things with a child's eye-with sincerity and playfulness that allowed him to not only relate to, but really befriend folks from all walks of life and from all backgrounds with no prejudice, and only genuine love and caring. He approached everything he did in life with zest and energy, whether it was abalone diving, surfing, crabbing, mushroom hunting, cooking, gardening, orchids and hot peppers, riding horses, practicing yoga, or traveling to remote areas to help people, everything Eric did, he did with the infectious gusto that made him friends everywhere he went. This I witnessed in the last few years that I knew him, and am still just now getting a sense of how profoundly he impacted our community where he chose to practice. He wasn't known as just an ophthalmologist, but as an engaged, interested and caring friend in our small community, he really got to know people in multiple capacities, and forged strong bonds with many.

Most of all, Eric, a big kid himself, loved children. He worked as a nanny for a few years between undergraduate studies and medical school. He did a pediatric internship and had a way of engaging with children of all ages and backgrounds. He was looking forward to having a family of his own when his life was tragically struck short.

What all who mourn his passing share is the tremendous sense of lost opportunity to share our lives with him and experience and learn along with him, as well as the missed chance for him to fulfill many of his evolving hopes and desires. I think he was poised to achieve those last few things in life that had eluded him prior. I also think he knew they were within reach and finally coming about, and I hope he finds some comfort in knowing so. We, as his friends, family, patients, colleagues, and community, will all feel the deep loss of Eric, but he will live on brilliantly as he lived on earth, in our memories, and in the thousands of patients whose lives were saved, vision restored or saved, and in the scores who now carry his organs and tissue and have been given a new opportunity of live. Go well, Eric. May peace be with you. We will miss you dearly and celebrate you always.

In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Dr. Schwietz may be made to the California Transplant Donor Network at 1000 Broadway, Suite 600, Oakland, CA 94607, or a charity of your choice.

by Michael Mizoguchi, M.D.