

To My Friend in Heaven: Tomislav Šoša (1948-2006)

Neither of us really believed it would happen so soon! The last time we talked, you told me that you were close to the end, but I never suspected it would be in three days. You called me to tell me your opinion of my new literature book, *Inside on Medicine*. I asked you to write down your thoughts, but you declined, saying that you could not lift a pen. Still, your voice was clear and strong, the tone certain, and your words charming as always. You even laughed, and I laughed with you, because your jokes were always great. You especially liked the story on the absurdity of health system financing, saying that, in the end, one is forced to steal if one wants to do the job right, as taught in medical school.

I called you at home the next day. You were in hospital, but I did not worry too much (people rightfully tell me that I would make a poor clinician!). You had mentioned that you would go to the hospital for assessment of the fever you had had for some time. Then I called you on

your cell phone and the answering machine politely said I could leave a message. The next day I called again, but this time the line was silent. Then I learned that you had died.



When you died, anybody may die.

Did you know, my friend, that you would die so soon, on Sunday, March 26, 2006? If you did, you were a brave man, because you sounded so calm; if you did not, you were a happy man. I admire both the brave and the happy. Thank you for talking to me at that time.

I loved the way you talked. You told better jokes and had a better voice than I did. We both used hard

Mediterranean words, often rude and cruel, unaware of their effect on gentler people from the north. We talked about poetry, women, and Dalmatia. You tried to talk about sailing, but I am a mountain man and do not care about the sea. I tried to talk about scientific publishing, but you were a surgeon, and surgeons do not care about publishing. You yearned to talk about vascular surgery, but you knew my attitude toward surgery and surgeons, so you did not push it. I wanted to talk about your poetry, but you sensed that an editor in me was talking, and withdrew in time. So I have never been able to get to publish your poetry, although we wanted to present another physician-poet in the *Croatian Medical Journal*. OK, maybe you would be embarrassed, because it is questionable whether rough professionals as surgeons are supposed to write romantic, even love poetry.

You loved surgery – such a gentle soul, a witty mind attracted to the profession so prescribed, physically demanding, and emotionally ex-

hausting. Would it not have been better if we had sat down (over a gallon of beer) and – wrote, or at least talked about Dalmatian Hinterland, gorgeous white-stone towns, vineyards, women? With warm hearts, open hands, and lots of great jokes.

Have we really been friends? We liked each other very much from the first time we met, but we were too old, too scarred, too smart to plan, dream or initiate a real friendship. Friendships can be painful, so we both settled for casual meetings. Yet we always talked about important things in life, like love, friendship, parenthood (we are both parents, a job more demanding than surgery). I would make a poor friend: lately, you were talking about art more than about medicine, but you were also giving me hints about your illness. However, I never guessed what you were actu-

ally trying to tell me, that you were ill and knew of the illness.

I thank you for calling me to share your thoughts on my book “Inside of Medicine”, which I had sent you shortly before you went to hospital. It was fascinating how perfectly you understood what I wanted to say in that book, which reflects both of our lives in medicine. You analyzed it with surgical precision, pinning down the message I wanted to convey to the reader. You did it in your witty, Mediterranean style, with a mixture of calmness and passion that people liked in you so much. Thank you, my friend.

When it came to you, I have always been late – late to convince you to send a manuscript to the *Croatian Medical Journal*, late to finalize our plans for a thematic issue on vascular surgery, late to extract your poetry from you. Late for the last gift you could have giv-

en me – one more encounter. Now, it is too late for everything but for writing to you, for thanking you. You died and we mourn you. But I do not want to be late to say, without shame, that I write to you with a smile as well, with a joke on my lips. But actually, we do not need to crack another joke – we know how and why we laughed, we set standards for funny but smart things. You know.

I am so sorry that you’re gone! I cannot do anything else but say that. So long, my friend, so long. Soon, I will meet you. No need to set the place and time, because the place is known, and time does not exist. Just order a beer and sharpen your tongue. Beer is a paradise food, poetry God’s gift, soccer a heavenly game, and sailing (on clouds) desirable. For good people, the times are always good.

Matko Marušić