



Steven Ackley

March 5, 1946 - June 2, 2013

R. Steven Ackley, an adored and much beloved father, grandfather and audiology professor, died unexpectedly on June 2 while sleeping at his home in Fort Collins, Colo. He was 67.

The cause of death was congestive heart failure and vascular disease. Steve, as he was known, mentored numerous students over the years and dazzled them in the classroom with his humor, down-to-earth charm, love of learning and scientific research and guidance to question what they thought they knew.

Since 2000, he had been a professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. He previously served as chairman of the university's Department of Hearing, Speech and Language Sciences and most recently was director of the department's Ph.D. program. He taught many graduate-level audiology courses with a focus on pediatric, medical and geriatric audiology, balance testing and anatomy and physiology.

He also served as a confidant, mentor and personal comedian to his students, who routinely called him their favorite professor, showered him with copious thank-you notes and expressed their love for him and his compassionate nature.

Before joining Gallaudet, he served as chairman of the Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences Department at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley and had previously been a professor at Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

He wrote research-based articles and book chapters and edited “An Essential Guide to Hearing and Balance Disorders” published in 2007. He won numerous awards from his colleagues and students. He served as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division from 2001 to 2003.

He spent much of his professional life teaching students and helping people. In college, he worked as a counselor at Camp Courage for children with special needs.

He earned his bachelor’s degree from Cornell College in Iowa. He received a master’s degree in deaf education from what is now McDaniel College and then worked at the Maryland School for the Deaf.

He earned his Ph.D. in audiology from the University of Colorado, where he developed a lifelong love of the state’s mountains, camping and fly fishing. He enjoyed Shakespeare, especially CU’s summer productions performed outdoors, and he wooed his future wife with poetry he wrote.

In addition to his focus on audiology, he taught sign language. No matter the subject, he inspired students with a thirst for knowledge, discovery and caring. He counseled his students about their career paths and worried about the personal details, such as them finding housing in safe neighborhoods in D.C. He was known to many of them as “Ackley” or simply “Ack.”

He had recently conducted research on hearing health among Native American and Alaskan Native peoples, and was about to embark on a one-year sabbatical leave helping the Ojibwe people of Minnesota by analyzing data related to their hearing health. This research initiative was to be sustained for several years by his doctoral students.

He was a Baltimore Orioles and Colorado Rockies fan, but his favorite baseball team was that of Denver’s South High School when his son played first base.

He was an utterly devoted father and grandfather, whose kind smile became a fixture at his grandchildren’s day care, St. Ann’s in Hyattsville, Md. He almost never missed a school function, and regularly picked them up, his eyes and

their eyes lighting up whenever “Papa Stebes” arrived. When he vacationed in Colorado in recent summers, he sent his granddaughter postcards with beautiful mountain scenes every day. Among the many gifts he lavished his grandkids was a microscope for his granddaughter, fostering the next generation of scientists.

He was a gracious and generous host, who enjoyed preparing feasts, especially of smoked ribs and pulled pork. If his kids needed a ride to the airport at 3 in the morning, Papa Stebes was happy to do it and would bring juice boxes and snacks, too.

He is survived and desperately missed by his daughter, Kate Ackley Zeller, her husband Shawn and grandchildren Madelyn and Luke of Washington, D.C.; his son, United States Air Force Capt. Jonathan Ackley and his wife, Brittany Edwards, who currently reside in South Korea; his former wife, Mary K. Ackley of Denver; two brothers, James Ackley of Payson, Utah, and Alan Ackley of Des Moines, Iowa; as well as cousins, nephews, in-laws and many adoring former students and colleagues. He was preceded in death by his parents, Karen N. and Wayne Ackley of Des Moines, Iowa.

Visitation and services will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Sunday, June 9, 2013 at The Lodge at Mackenzie Place, 4751 Pleasant Oak Drive, Fort Collins, and at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 15 at Chapel Hall on the Gallaudet campus in Washington, D.C.

Tribute Wall



“ Steven Ackley

October 25, 2022 at 06:14 PM



“ *I know this is much belated as I just found out in my Gallaudet Today magazine, but I had to write in case the family is still reading these. He was truly my favorite professor in my undergrad studies at CSU and taught my first sign language course. I went on to obtain my Masters of Deaf Education at Gallaudet, I say in part thanks to Dr. Ackley. He was so down to earth, eager about his field, and fun to be in class with. I tried to keep in touch through the years, and he always remembered me! I was so sad to read of his passing and send warm thoughts to his family and friends. What a gift to the field and to people.*

Liz Fallon, '88 CSU grad

Liz - December 02, 2013 at 08:35 PM



“ It is amazing how we lose touch with people and how quickly time passes. I just heard today about Steve's passing from another one of his former students. Like me, she considered him to be one of her favorite teachers. Although I am no longer in the field of Audiology, some of my fondest memories of Ft. Collins include time spent with Dr. Ackley. Professor, mentor and friend are words I would use to describe this influential man. Even though it had been many years since our last visit, just the thought of Dr. Ackley always brought a smile to my face. He will be missed.

My condolences to his family and friends.

Regards,

Chris McDowell

Chris McDowell - September 10, 2013 at 11:47 PM

EM

“ I was thumbing through one of my professional journals when my eyes fell on a memorial article about my former classmate, Steve Ackley. Although I had not seen him for years, I felt secure in knowing he was only an hour away from my office in Baltimore. Steve and I started the Master's degree program at Gallaudet in 1969. The year he was there he was a definite presence. He was a serious student and oh so studious. He was also a riot and could be relied upon to come up with a wonderfully sarcastic reference to almost anything. He kept his peers on our toes and he also kept us laughing. I thought it great poetic justice that he landed back at Gallaudet after all those years.

This a loss for all. I am so sorry that he had to leave so soon. I know family, friends, students and peers have many good memories and we could probably tell some good stories. Be at peace Steve. Look down and smile and go ahead and laugh.

Esther F. Coffin Miller

Esther F. Coffin Miller - July 29, 2013 at 06:54 PM

JB

“ I have just recently heard of the passing of Dr. Ackley. My deepest sympathy to his family and loved ones. Dr. Ackley was by far the best teacher and professor I have ever had the pleasure of learning from. His expertise along with his ease of communication and genuine interest in audiology motivated myself and countless other students. Despite his obvious successes in the field of audiology he was always modest, never intimidating, and always approachable. He is the first person I think of when I think of my education as an audiologist. Beyond being a fantastic professor he was a genuinely kind person. ..sincere, patient, funny, thoughtful. He had an ease of well-being that encouraged others to be themselves. His love for his kids, Kate and Jonathan, was obvious even to his students. He talked of them constantly and we all felt we knew them through him. I have fond memories of him bringing them to our graduate classes at CSU when they were little--I think that is when I saw him smile the biggest. My wish for you both is that despite the sadness and pain you are going through you will notice his presence in the small things and I hope it will help to bring you peace.

Many blessings to you and yours,
Jody Berg

Jody Berg - July 26, 2013 at 01:02 AM

KK

“ *Some people come into our lives and quickly go.
Some people move our souls to dance. They awaken us to new understanding with the passing whisper of their wisdom.
Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon . They stay in our lives for while, leave footprints on our hearts and we are never, ever the same.*

Thank you Steve. You are missed.

Kathy Kronick

Kathy Kronick - July 03, 2013 at 06:19 AM



On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Kathy.

Shawn Zeller - July 07, 2013 at 07:10 PM

TS

“ *I am deeply saddened to hear my favorite professor at CSU is no longer here with us. He was the most genuine person and someone I have always held close to my heart and thought of often. I remember him walking into class and saying "hey hippies" and then the great times would just roll. He kept everyone so engaged. His enthusiasm for hearing science and his brilliant sense of humor along with an amazing caring soul are things I will never forget. He was a great man. My condolences to his family. I remember him talking about Kate and Jonathon, he adored his children. Tracy*

Tracy Schneider - June 25, 2013 at 11:07 PM



On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Tracey.

Shawn Zeller - July 07, 2013 at 07:11 PM

HC

“ Dr A, I can hardly type this with my shaking hands and tear blurred vision but just had to tell the world how influential you were in my career. How tragic to learn of your passing on social media but I know it wouldn't have been long before I called or emailed as I often did to ask a question about Audiology. You always taught me to seek to understand why with every theory. You were the ultimate scientist and kept everything light. I remember as I struggled with my dissertation how you put your feet up (on your messy desk) and said Heather the process is just as much of a lesson than the result. How right that has been in many aspects of my life. I will be grateful for your mentoring and later friendship and I will make you proud Dr A. Hugs! Heather Ruest Carter Gallaudet Class if 1998 and 2002.

Heather Carter - June 24, 2013 at 08:24 AM



On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Heather.

Shawn Zeller - July 07, 2013 at 07:12 PM

JS

“ They Called Him

*they called him mentor
he loved his students so
always with the answer
always in the know*

*they called him comedian
he was fun and made us laugh
some thought him really serious
we knew that he was daft*

*they called him scientist
he added knowledge without a doubt
he brought insight to a problem
and often teased the answer out*

*they called him colleague
and better friend you could not have
not a single thing about him
could be thought of as really bad*

*they called him clinician
his empathy was awesome to behold
he treated patients expertly
as if family of his own*

*they called him papa
devoted as he could be
a better grampa honestly
you will never see*

*they called him steve
its who he was to me
his light shined brightly for me
it often helped me to clearly see*



*I will not get used to darkness
But then he would not want that outcome to be
He would want me to shine brightly
In his honor for others to see*

Joseph Smaldino----long time friend and colleague

Joseph Smaldino - June 12, 2013 at 06:32 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Joseph.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:08 AM

AS

“ *Goodbyes are not forever
Goodbyes are not the end
They simply mean I'll miss you
Until we meet again.* ”

Adele Seitz - June 12, 2013 at 11:30 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Adele.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:09 AM

SQ

“ *So very sorry to hear of Steve's passing. I worked with Steve at Gallaudet and had since enjoyed seeing him at conferences and conventions. He always made me laugh. My thoughts and prayers are with you all*

Silvia Quevedo

silvia quevedo - June 12, 2013 at 09:20 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Silvia.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:09 AM

DC

“ *I worked with Steve at MD School for the Deaf in the early 70's and remember him as a Very Nice Person (the caps are intentional) with a wonderful sense of humor. I have memory of him having to interpret at the last minute for a guest speaker, which he did in a suit and hiking boots! And he did a great job. He was one of those unique individuals who was really bright, a great communicator, and truly interested in the people around him. He enjoyed life to the fullest. He's already much missed. Rest in peace, Steve! My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.*

Debbie Clark

Debbie Clark - June 11, 2013 at 08:36 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Debbie.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:09 AM

RH

“ *I am so very sorry to hear about the passing of your dad. He and I taught sign language classes together back in 1972 - 73 at MD School for the Deaf and he was always lots of fun. He had a true gift for communicating with people and I learned a lot from him. He truly was one of a kind and we all thought a great deal of him. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.*

Ruth Howell

Ruth Howell - June 10, 2013 at 04:18 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Ruth.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:10 AM

FT

“ *Kate, Shaun and family,*

We are thinking of you in this difficult time. The suddenness of his death will make it even harder to process the reality that you Dad is gone. However, once the healing begins, you will have nothing but the good memories in your hearts.

God bless you and your beautiful family. So glad that you have strong faith to help you through this.

Love Francine and Paul and family

Francine Townsend - June 10, 2013 at 11:47 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Francine.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:10 AM

SD

“ *Steve will be greatly missed and cherished. He was ever the supporter, helping coach PAL baseball and then later, an energetic fan of South's High School team. he had a wonderful sense of humor and took great joy in his children and grandchildren. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.*

John and susan Denny

susan Denny - June 10, 2013 at 10:19 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you John and Sue.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:11 AM

FD

“ I am terribly saddened by Steve's passing. I am a colleague of his at Gallaudet University. He was more than a colleague to me...he was a kind and generous friend who shared my love for riding Harley Davidson motorcycles.

Francis Duffy

Francis Duffy - June 09, 2013 at 09:57 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Francis.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:11 AM

MC

“ Mr Ackley always had a smile on his face regardless of the outcome of our South High School baseball games. My father tells me Mr Acks was his favorite parent to hang with at those games, and he is remembered as the nicest and most pleasant parent to support our team!

Mike S Cerbo - June 09, 2013 at 01:10 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Mike.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:11 AM

KS

“ I am grateful for having known Dr Ackley and feel blessed to have had his touch on my career and life. I'll always remember his first semester at UNC when the two of us laughed our way through an ENG on a blind, Spanish speaking only dizzy lady. My thoughts are with his family during this difficult time. Find your way in Peace Steve.
Karen Swope

Karen Swope - June 09, 2013 at 11:33 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Karen.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:12 AM

SC

“ I was very sad to learn of the sudden passing of Dr. Ackley. He was a terrific person and professor, who touched the lives of all who knew him. I had many wonderful discussions with him and learned so much during my time as a graduate student at UNC. He was a genuine and compassionate person who was eager to share his time and knowledge with others. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.

Stephanie Cathers - June 09, 2013 at 10:51 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Stephanie.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:12 AM

JH

“ Back in graduate school, just when I would be getting burned out or discouraged, I would take an Ackley class. He would fire me up again and make me love our field and all that there was to learn. His approach to teaching, along with his charisma, was hard to beat. EVERYONE felt comfortable and engaged with Dr. Ackley.
Josie Harvey

Josie Harvey - June 09, 2013 at 09:32 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Josie.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:12 AM

LA

“ Dr. Ackley really was my favorite professor at CSU... So much so that I briefly considered switching majors from speech pathology to audiology! He was funny, deeply caring of his students and passionate about his field. Cheers to you, Dr. A.
Lisa Beard Aulwurm, M.S., CCC-SLP

Lisa Aulwurm - June 09, 2013 at 06:58 AM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Lisa.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:12 AM



Theresa Small

“ Theresa Small lit a candle in memory of Steven Ackley



Theresa Small - June 08, 2013 at 09:52 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Theresa.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:13 AM

JE

“ *Dr. Ackley was the best! I remember him once throwing the syllabus for a class in the trash and just starting a conversation about whatever the topic was. He was a great professor who inspired you to want to learn. I got to see him last when I lived in Omaha and he was speaking at a scientific conference. He really had so many friends; not just in audiology. We were lucky to know him.*
Jen (Harris) Torres

Jennifer - June 08, 2013 at 08:22 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Jen.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:13 AM

PP

“ *Steve and I played home made hand ball in the old primary gym at MSD in 1972. He was a joy to be around. My heart is heavy and my thoughts and prayers are with his family.* *Paul Peksa*

Paul Peksa - June 08, 2013 at 06:19 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Paul.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:13 AM

JC

“ I am so proud that I had the opportunity to know and learn from Dr. Ackley. He was by far my favorite professor at University of Northern Colorado. I will forever remember him in his tan corduroy blazer with the patches on the elbows! He was a wonderful man and I will miss his presence on this earth! My thoughts and prayers are with his family. ~Jane Coulter

Jane Coulter - June 08, 2013 at 05:56 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Jane.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:13 AM

RL

“ I'm saddened to hear the news about Dr. Ackley. He was my advisor & professor for several years at UNC in Greeley. His humor, down to earth, and stories about real life examples made learning fun and even more interesting. Often times as we left his classroom and saw him in public, he didn't treat us as students. We were his friends and he showed a genuine interest in our lives. He touched so many lives and his knowledge base left me in awe. My thoughts and prayers go out to his family, friends, and students who will all miss him dearly.
Roz Long MA CCC-SLP
Northeast Colorado

Roz Long - June 08, 2013 at 05:50 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Roz.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:14 AM

WP

“ Steve was certainly one of my all time favorite professors. No matter what he taught, he made it fun and interesting. I last saw him several years ago at an ASHA conference and had a great time catching up. Steve, you will be missed by everyone you touched along your travels in life and will continue to be an influence for many years to come. Till we meet again, your friend and student, Wanda Pritekel.



Wanda Pritekel - June 08, 2013 at 02:01 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Wanda.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:14 AM

JV

“ Julie Verhoff purchased the Our Sincere Condolences Gourmet Gift Basket for the family of Steven Ackley.



Julie Verhoff - June 08, 2013 at 08:56 AM

JU

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Julie - June 08, 2013 at 08:27 AM

LS

Steve and I had many terrific conversation over the years: first in the CU CCDS parking lot then in the Plymouth Children's Center parking lot and at ASHA conventions! Such a kind hearted wise man! He was a gift to our field and will be missed by us all!


Lynne Soraci

Lynne Soraci - June 10, 2013 at 01:41 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Julie.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:14 AM


Priscilla
López

“ *Priscilla López lit a candle in memory of Steven Ackley*



Priscilla López - June 07, 2013 at 08:28 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Priscilla.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:15 AM

DL

“ *We loved you Dr. Ackley!*

Deb Livingston - June 07, 2013 at 07:48 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Deb.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:15 AM

DB

“ *Diane Brady lit a candle in memory of Steven Ackley*



Diane Brady - June 07, 2013 at 02:36 PM

KZ

On behalf of the Ackley family, thank you Diane.

Kate Ackley Zeller - June 14, 2013 at 11:15 AM