



Stephen Joseph Dunn

August 23, 2019

On August 23rd, 2019, Stephen Joseph Dunn – husband, son, father, brother, “Papa,” uncle and friend – passed on after a two-month journey with cancer.

The old phrase, “he has never met a stranger in his life” was likely based on somebody identical to Steve Dunn, because every person lucky enough to meet him felt immediately known and seen and loved.

A fourth generation Coloradan, Steve grew up in Denver with his parents Mary and Francis (better known as Andy) and two older brothers Don and Mike. As is such with three boys, life was full of adventure and mischief. When the young Dunn boys were playing a round of golf in the backyard and a rogue shot went flying through the window of their Park Hill home, the boys ran into the living room where Andy was sitting and Mike quipped, “just playing through Dad.” We are not sure where Mary was at this time, but from the sound of it, she was nothing but pure doting love, grace and gentleness, so it’s unlikely they were disciplined with much beyond a hug.

Steve went on to excel at athletics and academics through his schooling. His baseball team’s pitcher & basketball team’s point guard, Steve was never one to sit still long. He was selected as one of the “Men of the Year” at Regis High School for his smarts and sportiness. (He would hate that we are including this in his obituary because of its bragginess, but just as dads are allowed to

brag about their children, so are children allowed to brag about their dads).

Following high school, Steve went on to earn three different graduate degrees from Catholic University and the University of Denver. We liked to joke with him that his master's degree in Philosophy (taught entirely in Latin) was for the sole purpose of completely dominating the vocabulary category of our ridiculously competitive Trivial Pursuit games at Christmas time. But turns out it also came in handy for his six years spent as a Catholic priest. Many people remember him as a phenomenal priest, known especially for his excellent homilies (naturally).

Needless to say, Steve Dunn and Coleen Byrne did not have the most typical love story but their children still think of it as the most interesting, circuitous, beautiful one around. Here's the short version: they met, fell in love and Steve had to make the very difficult decision to leave a career he considered his calling to marry Coleen on February 18th, 1978.

Ten months later, their son Kevin arrived. Steve went back to school to pursue a counseling degree (who wouldn't want to spend 11 years in college?) and their daughter Maura arrived a couple of years later. In 1981, Steve convinced Coleen to buy a VW Van in an attempt to experience the hippy days of the sixties that he missed while in the seminary. Three years later, the van was gone, and their youngest child Sheila was born. Their brother-in-law built them a home in Fort Collins and they built a life with their three children.

Steve's entire life was built around the scaffolding of love. Whether it was caring for his three children with the utmost tenderness and presence, or caring for others' children with that same tenderness and presence, including his years spent working for Child Protective Services. Whether it was the kindness and attention he bestowed upon his wife of 41 years or the kindness and attention he bestowed upon his clients in his 35 years as a counselor.

During his final days, it is no surprise that Steve continued to charm every worker at the hospital and hospice facility, asking – with the genuineness and presence so unique to him – about their lives as he was navigating the end of his own.

In the words of a friend, from one of the numerous letters he received, “There’s no irony in the fact that even now, a thousand miles away, you’re still helping people heal. Helping people become better, and better servants of this world. That’s just who you are. You have made this world a better place. Not most of the time, but every damn day. Stories of your selflessness, even during your hospital stay, make their way around, because that’s what special people are capable of.”

Shortly before his death, we asked him if he was scared. He took a minute and then said, “Yes. I am a little scared...but that’s not the pervasive feeling. The pervasive feeling is one of immense, immense gratitude.”

If a life is measured in the amount of love given and the amount of love received, Steve Dunn lived many within the span of this one. And his love is something that will live on in every single life he touched during his time on Earth.

Thirteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart once said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” So, with the deepest, sincerest, most Steve-Dunn-style thank you we can muster, this is our prayer of gratitude to you: Thank you husband, son, father, brother, “Papa,” uncle, friend. We are all better because of you.

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A celebration of Steve's (really amazing) life will be held at the Drake Centre (802 W Drake Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80526) Saturday, September 14th at 2pm with a reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to Together Rising (togetherrising.org) or Housing First Initiative (homeward2020.org/housing-first-initiative).

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

SEP **14.** 2:00 PM (MT)

Drake Center
802 W. Drake Rd.
Fort Collins, CO 80526

Tribute Wall

JA

“ Stephen has been on my mind the last several months, and wouldn't you know it, but it took asking another counselor to learn that he had passed away. I will never forget that Steve was the first and only counselor who ever made me feel welcome to share my faith in God with, and we had several beautiful conversations about how my relationship with God impacted my battle with mental health. There were so many times where I was in a dark place, but Steve was also the first and only counselor to call me back on a late night and take me to Perkins for coffee. Steve, as is clear in his obituary and the comments on this page, was one-of-a-kind and the love that others hold for him is a love I still carry with me today. I am so honored to have been in his office for several years of counseling, and I know that his example will always be a beacon of light and the standard bearer in my mind of what good counseling is. Blessings to your family and friends, and May the Peace of the Lord Always Be With You.

Jason - April 03, 2025 at 07:53 PM

MB

I just came across this post while looking up something from my dad's obituary and it warmed my heart. Thank you for sharing, Jason. He was quite a man, and I'm grateful that his impact is still being felt by those of us fortunate enough to love and be loved by him.

Maura Burns - January 18 at 03:06 PM



“ Stephen Joseph Dunn

October 25, 2022 at 06:14 PM

KD

“ Steve was one of the best loved customers at my coffee shop. He was always upbeat and loved talking with my baristas. He loved coming in to catch up on the latest news while drinking his enorme' latte! (sometimes he would cheat and get a breve! Thank you Steve for the joy and goodness you brought to our little corner of the world. The coffee cart crew will miss you greatly.

See you in heaven!

Kim Dittmar

Kim Dittmar - September 10, 2019 at 08:06 PM

JR

“ Steve was a wonderful friend, colleague and golf partner. Always positive and encouraging, no matter how badly I played. He was an effective and caring therapist, always respected by colleagues. The world has a lost a positive influence. May God bless his family.

Jack Reid - September 03, 2019 at 12:19 PM



“ Steve was always ready to greet with a smile, a hug if needed, and an open ear for the positive or other in your life. I was wondering if things were ok in his world as I hadn't seen him on the golf course this season. Now I know he is playing on the beautiful course that God has provided. He is missed already and I thank him for all the positive he helped my family see. You are missed. Charlene and Matthew Brown

Charlene K Brown - September 01, 2019 at 10:36 AM

DM

I was a class-mate of Steve (Pops) at St. Thomas Seminary. A memory that keeps appearing is one of Steve leaving the table during our St. Thomas Re-union gathering this past June, heading toward the table where his brother Don was sitting and assisting Don with his lunch. For me, that sums up Steve's life of service, love, and gratitude. I live with deep gratitude for how the Dunn Family opened their home, their heart, and their love to me for 6 years and to all that entered. Thank you, Steve, for teaching us how to live a fully inhabited life and how to "surrender" when life calls us into another birth.
Duane (Dewey) Mullner

Duane Mullner - September 08, 2019 at 10:23 PM

JA

Dear Dunn Family, I'm so sorry for your loss. I know you will all miss him very much. I enjoyed reading the obituary for your husband, father, son, brother, etc. I learned interesting facts about this amazing man. Not surprised that he accomplished so much with so many. I did know he was a priest for a while. And I knew his sweet wife, Colleen, because they were parents of two of my Bennett Elementary students, Kevin and Maura. Sheila was not in my home room, but of course I knew her too. I have loving memories of the family and remember seeing you at St. John XXIII over the years. My heart aches for all of you. Love, Mrs. Janie Arnold

Janie Arnold - September 23, 2019 at 04:12 PM