



Thomas L. Slovis (1941–2018)

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Thomas L. Slovis, MD, a world-renowned leader in the pediatric imaging community and a tireless advocate for the health and safety of children, died Feb. 6, 2018. He was 76 years old.

Tom was born June 16, 1941, in Passaic, NJ, the son of Rose and Reuben Slovis. His mother was a school teacher and his father an optometrist. As a youth, he excelled at basketball but was encouraged from an early age to become a doctor.

Tom earned his bachelor's degree, and Phi Beta Kappa honors, from Hobart College in Upstate New York. During his sophomore year, Tom shared a class with a William Smith College student from New York, Ellie Wimpfheimer. Their relationship blossomed over many study dates, and they married in June 1964 at Park Avenue Synagogue. For the next 53 years, Tom and Ellie were an inseparable team, with Ellie at Tom's side throughout his career.

After medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, Tom completed a residency in pediatrics at the University of Colorado Medical Center in Denver. In the months immediately following his residency, he discovered a new interest in radiology and decided he would pursue a career in pediatric radiology after fulfilling his obligation to the U.S. Air Force. For 2 years, Tom served as a pediatrician in Tucson at the Davis–Monthan Air Force Base. During this time, he enjoyed caring for adolescents so much that he seriously considered additional training in adolescent medicine but decided to follow his original plan.

Tom went back East to New York-Presbyterian/Columbia Medical Center, completing a second residency (in radiology) and following this with a pediatric radiology fellowship at Babies Hospital under Drs. David Baker and Walter Berdon. His co-fellow was Jack Haller, who became a very close friend and collaborator on many projects, including multiple articles and books (*Pediatric Radiology*, *Imaging of the Pediatric Urinary System* with Dr. John Sty and *Caffey's Pediatric Diagnostic Imaging*, 10th edition, co-edited with Dr. Jerald Kuhn). Tom and Jack remained the closest of friends — bantering like brothers — until Jack's death in 2004.

In 1975, Tom agreed to come to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit “on a handshake” with Dr. Joseph Reed,

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the chief of Pediatric Radiology at the time. Tom was so excited about all the opportunities offered to him when he interviewed, especially the chance to attend on the pediatric wards, that he forgot to inquire what his salary would be. Tom and Ellie arrived in Detroit with their four children, intending to stay no longer than 5 years and then return West.

But they never left. Tom served as a pediatric radiology attending physician at Children's Hospital of Michigan for 42 years. In addition to his radiology duties, early in his tenure Tom also rotated as an attending pediatrician, even in the intensive care unit, and started the hospital's pediatric gastroenterology clinic. He impressed colleagues with his skill and enthusiasm. Dr. Reed referred to Tom as "Boy Wonder" — until Tom started calling Dr. Reed "Batman." In 1978, Tom was named director of Ultrasound. He took over as chief of Pediatric Imaging in 1987, a position he held for 16 years. Tom transformed the Pediatric Imaging Department at the Children's Hospital of Michigan into a center for research and innovation for the entire hospital and worked to break down barriers between departments in the cause of improved pediatric care. Tom held academic titles of professor of pediatrics and professor of radiology at the Wayne State University School of Medicine, the hospital's academic affiliate. He was a strong advocate for Children's Hospital of Michigan, serving on the Board of Trustees, as chair of the board's Finance Committee and on the Advisory Board of the Children's Research Center. Tom was a trusted adviser to hospital administrators, offering them advice and support on how to develop and maintain a robust facility for pediatric care in the struggling city of Detroit.

Tom's colleagues at Children's Hospital of Michigan and throughout pediatric radiology remember him as a champion of fairness, kindness, generosity, open communication and, above all, the welfare of young patients. He was resolutely punctual, limitless in his energy and curiosity, and he inspired those who worked with him to live up to his exacting standards. Every moment was a teachable moment.

Tom was blessed with boundless enthusiasm and determination. Tom got things done. If you were working on a paper or project with Tom, he drove you to get it done and you tried not to disappoint him. The key to making progress, he would say, was to "keep on pushing" and to "apply constant amounts of small pressure," a strategy that became familiar to his associates at the hospital and within the Society for Pediatric Radiology (SPR).

Tom would scrawl goals, to-do lists, action plans, meeting notes, questions and ideas on yellow legal pads and was rarely seen at the hospital without a legal pad under his arm. He was highly organized and managed to keep track of volumes of information on legal pads, filed articles and binders with remarkable accuracy.

Tom relished learning and sharing his knowledge with a broad cross-section of stakeholders across the health care

community. Tom believed in open communication with the pediatricians and specialists in the hospital, encouraging them to drop in and seek consultations and have regular X-ray rounds with the radiologists. For many years, he reached out to the pediatricians with a weekly X-ray conference on Fridays at noon, engaging attending physicians and residents in Socratic dialogue, showing cases and asking questions rather than delivering straight lectures. He encouraged them to read on their own and to ask him questions also. This interactive conference series served as the framework for his introductory-level textbook, *Pediatric Radiology*. For his teaching efforts, Tom was recognized with the Teacher of the Year Award from the Children's Hospital of Michigan Department of Pediatrics.

Tom's door was always open and he managed to find time to talk with individual technologists, nurses, medical students, residents, fellows and faculty, no matter how many committees or projects he was working on; he was generous with his time and wisdom, listening attentively and giving sage advice on how they could achieve their educational and career goals. He was always ready to write a letter or pick up the phone and use his network of connections to help them succeed.

Tom encouraged young radiologists in Detroit to develop professionally, arranging for them to do visiting fellowships at other children's hospitals and return to put their new skills and experience to work for the children of Detroit. Those additional skills in pediatric neuroradiology, interventional radiology, cardiac imaging and musculoskeletal imaging strengthened the radiologists' skill sets while improving service lines at Children's Hospital of Michigan.

In the course of his medical career spanning half a century, Tom wrote, co-authored or contributed to more than 300 scientific articles, commentaries and educational publications. His 40-page curriculum vitae lists more than 120 lectures, visiting professorships and presentations on broad-ranging topics including detection of signs of child abuse, many applications of ultrasound, the small left colon, statistics, radiation dose management, the radiologist's role in health care reform and "the art of communication."

Tom adapted to new radiology technology easily. He developed ultrasound at Children's Hospital of Michigan, and learned neuroradiology CT and MR after his residency and fellowship. He continued to read pediatric neuroradiology cases late into his career. After stepping down as chief of Pediatric Imaging in 2003, Tom remained fully engaged in the department's day-to-day activities as a clinical radiologist, researcher, teacher, mentor and adviser.

Over the course of his early and mid-career, Tom played an increasingly active and influential role in the SPR. He participated on innumerable committees. He served on the SPR Board of Directors longer than anyone else, wearing the hats of member-at-large and secretary before ramping up to president and chairman of the Board of Directors, then tacking on a

few more years as journal editor (ex officio). Tom served as president of the Society in 1999–2000 and presided over the Society's meeting in Naples, FL, in 2000. Tom was an energetic leader for the SPR. He led with forethought and vision, an example being his instrumental support for early initiatives in cardiac imaging. Under Tom's leadership, foundations for the current administrative structure of the Society were laid. In recognition of his legacy of service and dedication, in 2005 Tom was honored with the Gold Medal of the SPR. He was a constant presence at the SPR meetings until last year, when his health limited his travel.

Tom also served in many roles and on numerous committees of several other major medical societies and organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (Fellow, 1993), the American College of Radiology (Fellow, 1987), the American Board of Radiology, the Radiological Society of North America and the Michigan Radiological Society (Gold Medal, 2012). In each instance, Tom's work was focused on furthering pediatric radiology and improving the health care of children.

In 2003, Tom assumed the role of editor for the Americas of our subspecialty journal, *Pediatric Radiology*. Preceding this, Tom served as assistant editor under Walter Berdon, his longtime friend and mentor. Eager to learn more about being an editor, Tom enrolled in journalism classes at Wayne State University. During his decade as editor, Tom carried forward the great work of his predecessor. Tom expanded the scope of the journal with greater emphasis on review articles and topic-oriented mini-symposiums. He maintained high standards for scientific inquiry. Most important, he brought many contributors into the fold as authors, reviewers, editorial board members and assistant editors. In recognition for his service as journal editor, the SPR established the Thomas L. Slovis Award for best basic science paper published in the journal during the year preceding the annual meeting.

Tom edited two editions of *Caffey's Pediatric Diagnostic Imaging*, each time enlisting the help of a large cadre of colleagues to bring the text up-to-date and provide a comprehensive reference for practicing pediatric radiologists. Tom was the chief editor for the 11th edition — arguably the best and most comprehensive pediatric radiology text ever compiled — two volumes, 3,536 pages, 3,900 illustrations and 23 pounds (!). One reviewer called the text “a behemoth of radiology information ... [that] not only defines the entire field of pediatric radiology but shows just how far radiology/diagnostic imaging has progressed during the decades.... The neuroradiology section alone challenges any free-standing single neuroradiology text” [1].

For all of his projects — the Caffey text, book chapters, the journal — Tom worked closely with photography editor Amanda Oberlee to edit images and ensure their highest quality. They spent countless hours at the computer, painstakingly

cropping, adjusting contrast and tinkering with the brightness of each image. “They need to jump out at you,” Tom would say.

Tom was instrumental in focusing our attention on managing radiation dose in children. Spurred in 2001 by published reports that radiation from CT could cause cancer in children, Tom organized the first in a series of ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) meetings for the pediatric radiology community, aimed at fostering best practices that limit children's exposure to medical radiation. The meeting emphasized responsibility in reducing radiation dose and brought together stakeholders from radiobiology, physics, clinical oncology, public health, epidemiology, imaging equipment manufacturing and pediatric radiology. This sentinel conference began the important ongoing discussion of dose concerns in pediatric imaging and was followed in subsequent years with meetings addressing dose in radiography, fluoroscopy, interventional radiology, emergency medicine and oncology. To prepare for the ALARA meeting and for subsequent discussions, Tom educated himself on the subject by independently studying radiation physics and radiation biology. Believing it was vital to teach medical students about radiation, he used his newly acquired knowledge to develop a lecture, *Biological Effects of Radiation*, for medical students, available through the SPR. He also authored chapters on this subject for *Nelson's Textbook of Pediatrics* and *Caffey's Pediatric Diagnostic Imaging*.

Tom felt a strong moral responsibility to stand up to those who used incomplete information and unproven facts to fabricate controversy on the diagnosis of child abuse. In a 2012 *Pediatric Radiology* editorial, Tom declared, “Child abuse is real! To obscure facts based on non-accepted hypotheses and pseudoscience is unconscionable. The time for action is now” [2]. In 2014, Tom appeared on an episode of the television show *The Doctors* to debate a notorious denialist physician on the subject, making a strong case and maintaining his cool all the while. Tom served until his death on the Child Abuse Imaging Committee of the SPR. One of his last contributions was to a critical review of child abuse neurotrauma, soon to be published.

As much as Tom loved the practice of medicine, his family always came first. A devoted husband and father, he coached his children's sports teams and attended his children's school programs, even if it meant rearranging his work schedule.

Tom loved the outdoors and the mountainous terrain of Colorado, where he began his training in 1967. He and Ellie shared a home in Telluride for many years with longtime friends Tina and Jerald Kuhn. “Telluride Tom” was a laid-back persona who reveled in the company of family and friends at their vacation home. Soon, the Society of Pediatric Imaging (“SPI”) was created with the combined love for pediatric radiology and the Colorado outdoors. Tom looked forward to the annual gathering of the SPI in the West, where he met with a small group of pediatric radiologists, other pediatric specialists and their families to exchange interesting cases — and to ski.

Tom and Ellie always traveled together to multiple annual meetings — the Caffey Society, SPR and ski meetings — and developed incredible friendships. As their family grew, they traveled more, to visit their children and grandchildren. In addition to family, they opened their home to welcome job recruits, visiting professors and newcomers to Detroit.

Tom was a movie buff with a standing engagement at the annual film festival in Telluride. Having watched a selection of buzzworthy international films, he and Ellie returned to Detroit each year with a generous helping of movie recommendations for their friends. They frequented an art-house cinema a short walk from their home and belonged to a movie club with other couples.

On sunny summer days, Tom loved driving his black sports car with the top down and a baseball cap on. He would offer any traveling companion a choice of caps from his expansive collection. Tom loved baseball, the Detroit Tigers especially, and was often looking for somebody to accompany him to an afternoon game at Comerica Park, a few blocks down Brush Street from the hospital. In the fall, his attention turned, raptly, to football: University of Michigan on Saturdays at the Big House, and his beloved New York Giants on Sundays. In the winter, it was University of Michigan basketball. Home or away, Tom rarely missed watching a game. It was also Tom's joy to attend as many of his grandchildren's games and events as possible. If he could not attend, he would often call for pre-game encouragement or a post-game update.

Tom was an avid and accomplished photographer. The walls of his and Ellie's longtime home in Bloomfield Hills and the halls of the Department of Radiology at Children's Hospital of Michigan are adorned with brilliant images of desert landscapes, wildflowers, wildlife and rugged mountain vistas that he

captured with his keen eye and camera lens, in detail and vivid color. Through photography, Tom saw a way to portray nature and people in the way he thought was ideal.

But Tom's overriding passion was in caring for and protecting children. He pursued this with a simple moral code: "Do the right thing." Everything that Tom did in his career supported the ideal of improving the health care and well-being of children. His dedication to this goal is an exemplar for all of us.

Tom's family provided foundation, inspiration and support. He was immensely proud of his children and grandchildren. Tom is survived by his wife, Ellie; his four children: Michael (Kellie) Slovis, Debbie (Michael) Berger, Max Slovis and Lisa (David) Mandel; 12 grandchildren: Ryan Slovis, Kyle Slovis, Andrew Slovis, Charlie Slovis, Samantha Berger, Jeremy Berger, Victor Berger, Chardon Stuart, Brenon Stuart, Kedon Slovis, Jacob Mandel and Gideon Mandel; and a brother, Norman (Carol) Slovis.

Thank you, Tom, for inspiring us to do more, to do better and to do the right thing.

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