

# Kenneth Baughman, MD: A Personal Reflection

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I have always enjoyed attending the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology Scientific Sessions. The last American Heart Association meeting in November 2009 was no different. I eagerly awaited the opportunity to spend a few days in Orlando enjoying the city and reuniting with my cardiology colleagues and friends. On my first day, I attended the Council of Clinical Cardiology meeting, which culminated with a wonderful dinner at which I had the opportunity to talk to several friends. Among these was a particular cardiologist and fellow heart failure specialist, whom I had initially respected from afar before I came to be more aware of his excellence as a human being and a first-class cardiologist. He was Kenneth Baughman. As usual, when I saw him, we hugged and greeted each other. He graciously reminded me of how he enjoyed my previous visit to Brigham, and I replied, "I enjoyed it more." He smiled. We talked briefly about life in general and went our ways. Little did I know that it would be the last time I would see or speak with Ken. The next morning, while walking to the sessions, I saw my friend Josh Hare. He looked disturbed. I said, "Josh, good morning. Are you okay?" He said, "No, Hector! Ken Baughman died this morning." I felt hollowed. I said, "I saw him last night, Josh!" He said, "I know, but he died while running this morning. A car hit him." I remember mumbling my disbelief and condolences. I hugged Josh and stood there in shock, not knowing what to think or feel. I was numb. I remained incredulous of what had just happened and aimlessly wandered the convention center. I called my friend Marc Pfeffer, asking him whether it was true that Ken had died, and he unfortunately said, "Yes." The whole day went by without a purpose, and I barely remember attending Karl Swedberg's lecture, but I remember Mike Bristow's words about Ken's untimely death. I thought, "We have lost not only a friend and a mentor to many, but a great physician in the field and a great human being," and my memories of Ken and our association resurfaced.

Dr. Baughman's contributions to the field of cardiology and heart failure were extensive and are well summarized in many tributes to his accomplishments. His obituary read as follows<sup>1</sup>:

"BWH mourns the loss of Kenneth Baughman, MD, a loving husband, father and grandfather, inspiring leader, compassionate clinician and beloved colleague. He passed away Nov. 16 in a tragic accident in Florida, where he was attending the American Heart Association convention."

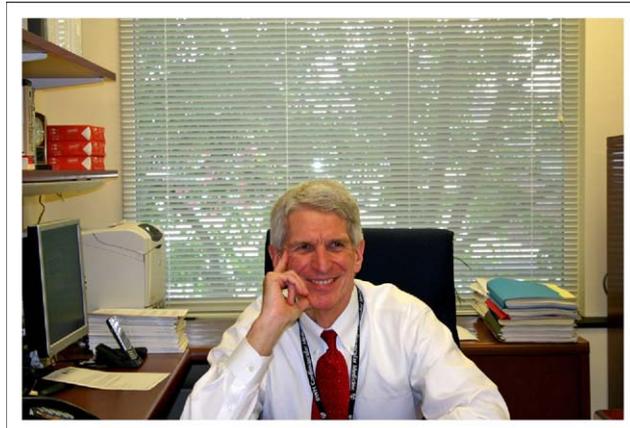
" 'Ken's passion for his patients was woven into the fabric of our hospital,' said BWH President Gary Gottlieb,

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MD, MBA. 'He represented the very best in medicine and cared so deeply for each and every person he touched.'

"A nationally renowned expert in heart failure—specifically myocarditis—Dr. Baughman joined BWH in 2002, when he was recruited from Johns Hopkins Hospital to direct the Advanced Heart Disease Section of the BWH Cardiovascular Division. In the past seven years, he has made an indelible mark on the Brigham community."

" 'Dr. Baughman was an extraordinarily skilled and insightful physician, a revered mentor who guided trainees and younger faculty alike and a man of incredible personal qualities beyond his professional excellence,' said Peter Libby, MD, chief of Cardiovascular Medicine. 'He will be sorely missed.' "

"A truly inspirational leader in the planning for the Shapiro Cardiovascular Center, Dr. Baughman was instrumental in bringing many perspectives together and engaging staff in collaboration to ensure the support of all cardiovascular patients."

... " 'He provided the type of care any patient or family member would want,' said Pat O'Gara, MD, of the Cardiovascular Division. 'His patients are forever grateful for his care and compassion.' "

... "A dedicated mentor who nurtured and promoted the careers of fellows and junior faculty, Dr. Baughman's boundless zeal for his work inspired his colleagues and those whom he mentored. 'So many of us learned about pursuing a vision and living one's passion from Ken,' said Debra Rogers, executive director of Cardiovascular Services."

"Dr. Baughman was an avid athlete who practiced what he preached to patients. He ran the Boston Marathon with Team Brigham in 2005 and, in 2006, was co-captain of the BWH Heart Walk team for the American Heart Associa-

tion's Boston Heart Walk. He also competed regularly in triathlons."

... "When his patients got to know him, they perceived it as another manifestation of his selflessness because he was very self-deprecating," said Gilbert Mudge, MD, of the Cardiovascular Division."

I would like to reflect, however, not on Dr. Baughman the cardiologist, but on my memories and recollections of our association.

In the late 1990s, I had the pleasure of personally meeting Ken. I was asked to participate in a symposium at the American College of Cardiology meeting in the field of heart failure. Ken was the chair of the symposium, and I remember communicating with him about some final touches to the symposium. I was very glad to participate, but I was even more pleased that I would to meet Ken, a respected colleague and a pioneer in the field of heart transplantation and heart failure. I always cherished these encounters. I remember Ken's last e-mail previous the symposium: "Gentlemen, we are ready, looking forward to it."

The day of symposium arrived. I was there early, and I had the chance to meet Ken. He was gracious, he knew who I was, and we talked briefly about William Osler, the Osler Society, and other issues related to the history of medicine. I was elated, much more so when after the symposium, he turned to me and said, "Good job, Hector." After that, we saw each other at cardiology meetings, and I got to know him better when we participated together in a Bethesda conference about the cardiology workforce that was chaired by my friend and fellow Oslerian Bruce Fye. From then on, when we saw each other, we hugged and always talked about our lives. It seemed that he always had time to talk. He made me feel "special". I remember leaving a conference early in the morning, when I saw Ken getting ready to jog (mind you, it was 6 in the morning in Chicago; it was cold!). He said, "Are you going to the meeting?" and I said "What meeting, Ken?" "The Education Committee meeting," he replied. I said, "It will be next year for me, I am

going back today because I have to coach my kids' soccer team. We are in the championship." He said "Good reason to leave, see you soon," and went jogging. I remember vividly when he left Baltimore for Brigham and became one of the associate editors of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, "the best journal club" he ever attended, in his words. Through Ken, I became a reviewer for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and I must say that this was a very important landmark of my academic career. A memory that I will always cherish is the time that I visited Boston and Brigham.

I was thrilled when Marc Pfeffer invited me to give a lecture for cardiology grand rounds at Brigham. It was my first time in Boston, and for a history buff like me to visit Boston and Brigham was a wonderful experience. Marc was a wonderful host, but one of the highlights of the trip was going to the catheterization laboratory during the morning. Ken was working there. When Ken was told that I wanted to say hello, he stopped what he was doing. He came and we hugged as we usually did. He asked about my professional life and how I was doing. He was the same gentleman whom I had always known. I said to him, "Ken, you shouldn't have to break your case to say hello," and he answered, "Yes I should, it's always very nice to see you, Hector. I'm sorry I won't be at grand rounds, but I'm sure you will do a great job."

Dr. Kenneth Baughman was a superb cardiologist, a pioneer, a great person, and a gentleman, and I and many others will miss him greatly. The national meetings will never be the same. He was a role model for many of us and certainly for me. In closing, Ken, thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done. You have touched my life and career in many ways, and I know that you have touched many people in your life. Your name will be remembered forever. Farewell, Ken!

1. Obituary: Kenneth Baughman, MD, director of advanced heart diseases, 63. *BWH Bull.* Available at: <http://www.brighamandwomens.org/publicaffairs/publications/DisplayBulletin.aspx?issueDate=11/20/2009%2012:00:00%20AM>. Accessed September 23, 2010.