



Remembering The Ol' Professor Living and Dying with Grace



Steve Thrasher on the air as The Ol' Professor. Photo by Jim Krause

After learning of Steve Thrasher's death late in April and grappling with the shock and grief, I posted on his Facebook page — too soon for some mourners, I'm sure — that I could imagine Steve saying something like, “You mean I died from a bodyboarding accident in Hawaii at age 62? How cool is that?”

Not that he would have wanted to die so young and with so much to live for. But if you knew Steve, you loved his wry humor.

It showed itself often on the long-running WFHB program *Dark End of the Street* where he adopted the radio name of The Ol' Professor, Dr. Raymond Dubose. Every Saturday from 2–4 p.m., he teamed up with co-host Gus Travers (Bill Weaver) to play “the best of old-time country and rhythm and blues” with a healthy dose of entertaining banter between the two longtime friends.

Steve's widow, Indiana University Provost Lauren Robel, says her husband was doing what he loved when he suffered the spinal cord injury on April 25 that left him paralyzed and on a ventilator. Less than a week after the accident, “he decided that only one path would be consistent with his sense of dignity” and told his family he wanted to be removed from life support and be allowed to die a natural death.

I first got to know Steve after I asked him to join my team in the annual Boomers versus Seniors charity basketball game, which I carried on for 15 years while I was a columnist for *The Herald-Times*. Ultimately, Steve had to back out because of chronic knee problems that his radio co-host believes contributed to his love of bodyboarding. It was a difficult and challenging sport that he could enjoy without putting a lot of stress on those worn-out knees.

Those knees had their glory years, though, and there was no more glorious a moment than their role in the epic students-versus-faculty basketball game sponsored by the IU School of Law–Bloomington in 1994. After enduring a 50-point shellacking the previous year, faculty players decided to expand the definition of faculty to include spouses, staff, and anyone who happened to have been a varsity IU basketball player. Former IU player Chris Reynolds, then a first-year law student, happily accepted the invitation, as did Steve, whose wife was then associate dean of the law school.

The last 10 minutes of the game were extremely competitive. Leading by two points with five seconds to go, the students bungled their inbounds pass, Steve intercepted it, took a step back behind the three-point line, and drilled the game-winning shot as time expired.

“I don't know why I did it,” he told me afterward. “But I've always visualized making a three-point shot to win a game.”

I emailed Lauren, a few weeks after Steve's death, and explained that I was going to tell that story in my little tribute to Steve. She replied, “I've had a lot of time to think about that funny, irresistible, creative guy I spent the last 35 years listening to music with — the last song I played in his ear was one of the first we ever bonded over — Otis Redding's ‘I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop Now).’”

“I wish I could do justice in words to how utterly fearless and admirable he was in facing his death. Like taking the pass and one step back before sinking a three-pointer. Pure grace.”

Mike Leonard
executive editor
mike@magbloom.com