Memorial

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Memorial Tribute to Andreas R. Grüntzig

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On Sunday, October 27, 1985, Andreas and Margaret Ann Grüntzig were tragically killed in an airplane accident. These two dear friends and colleagues, a German-born man and his American wife, were taken suddenly from us at the peak of their vitality and productivity and it is a loss from which we will not soon (if ever) recover.

Simon Stertz and I have had the privilege of working with Andreas during the past decade in the development of the technique and technology of coronary angioplasty, following his pioneering efforts in miniaturizing peripheral angioplasty catheters for the coronary arterial system. Indeed, the evolution of cardiovascular catheters for diagnosis and therapy has been a marriage of ideas of many physicians from abroad (especially Germany) and from the United States. Since Forssmann in Eberswald in 1929 and Coumad and Richards, 12 years later in New York, there has been a continuous interplay of invasive and interventional cardiologists and radiologists, notably, Mason Sones in 1958 in Cleveland, Melvin Judkins in Portland and Charles Dotter in 1964 and 3 years later in Loma Linda. Investigators from Nuremberg, Engelskirchen, Berlin, Frankfurt, Göttingen, Aachen, Mainz and other centers in Germany and Switzerland, merged easily with physicians from New York, Boston, Milwaukee, Rochester, Providence, Palo Alto, Miami, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Francisco and, of course, Atlanta during the 1970s and 1980s in the development of new interventional techniques which would revolutionize the treatment of obstructive cardiovascular disease.

With Andreas' death, I lost a dear friend with whom I shared many years of trial (often by fire) and ultimately success. His courage in allowing the very beginnings of the clinical usage of coronary angioplasty to be observed by numerous objective (and often, understandably, skeptical) referees is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in medicine. His willing generosity in sharing and teaching angioplasty personifies the title 'doctor' (from the Latin 'to teach'). I will miss him as I would a brother.

Sadly, there are other great pioneers and teachers who have passed away this year: Charles Dotter (the father of angioplasty), Melvin Judkins (his early associate and, in his own right, a pioneer in coronary angioplasty) and Mason Sones (the father of coronary angiography). These four men knew each other well and took great pride and delight in each other's new ideas. Although different 'personalities', they shared several qualities in common: courage, intellectual curiosity, dogged honesty and a 'maverick' spirit. Their professional lives can teach us all things beyond their tangible accomplishments.

In 1911, before any of these men were born, Da Costa, in a prophetic and elegant passage, spoke to them...

No one knows
The haunting anxiety
The deep responsibility
The numerous self-reproaches
Of a man
Who spends his life
Developing a new procedure.
He must have A hand as light
As floating perfume An eye as quick
As a Darting sunbeam A heart as compassionate As all humanity
And a soul as pure
As the waters of Lebanon.

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Dr. Thomas Ryan asked me to say a prayer on the occasion of this memorial, and though somewhat ill-equipped to do so, I sought the help of anonymous Hebrew scribes of the past three millenia on the subjects of life and death:

Thou has fashioned man and knows the inclinations of his heart. Man is but flesh and blood,
His origin dust. He wears out his life for his daily bread, He is like the grass that withers, The
flower that fades,

Like a shadow that moves on ... Like a cloud that passes by,

Like a mote of dust driven by the wind, A dream forgotten.

Our life is but a fleeting gleam between two eternities. All of us must inevitably tread the same
path.

Though we know not when the hour may come, may we so live that when the time arrives, It
shall find us prepared.

We look unto thee with hope ... God, Firmly believing that what thou does is for the best
Although the reason may seem obscure to us.

Immortality rests within the hearts and memories of those who survive. The glow from the torch
lit by these men will be passed on And serve as a beacon to us forever.