Obituary

My travels with John Slade

John Slade was a devoted Christian. A few years ago, John took me to a Sunday morning service at Westminster Abbey in London with Frances, his wife, and Jack Henningfield. It was beautiful and the music and sermon reflected John's devotion to God. A year or so later we were once again in London advising the UK on tobacco issues and John took me to Vespers at a beautiful Anglican chapel a few blocks from the meeting. When the minister asked me what Anglican Church I attended in Boston I had to admit that I was a Catholic and it was St Joe's in Belmont. John laughed and told him same "company" but only a different floor. We all laughed. I had my religious revenge with John when Father Mike Crosby, a close friend of John and I, baptised my son James about 11 years ago at our home. John and Alan Blum came to Boston so that they could celebrate my son's baptism. It was a wonderful occasion. The night we celebrated Vespers I came closer to God because of John. When you fight the immoral actions of the tobacco industry, you need a touchstone to persevere and stay on an ethical path. John was that touchstone and has kept many of us on that path. I am sure John is close with God this day.

John and I were great friends. Over the past 18 years we grew up together enjoying adventures that brought us around the world, to the US Congress, the White House, and ultimately the Supreme Court. There were the annual meetings of the tobacco industry, shared publications in scientific journals, and interviews in the newsrooms of our nation's networks. On these adventures we always laughed, worked, prayed, and grew wiser and older, sometimes cried and changed the world.

I had a ringside seat watching John grow and his career unfold, seeing him interact with presidents of the USA and of Philip Morris. Whether that person be a friend or a foe, John always treated them with dignity and respect. But, behind that gracious smile was an unflinching determination to make the world a better place. He alone had an uncanny vision of what it should be and how to make it happen.

While on an Asian trip John documented how US cigarette companies were targeting youth with interviews of

teenagers in a MacDonald's in Taipei, photos of indirect advertising in Malaysia, and a tour of the impoverished tobacco shops of Manila. He brought this information back to the USA and helped end a very bad tobacco trade policy.

In 1988, he became concerned with RJ Reynold's Premier cigarette and we testified before the Waxman's Committee. Premier died but John's vision of regulating tobacco products flourished. He lobbied the media and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and we appeared again in Congress in 1994 after David Kessler. Later we visited the White House. I remember President Clinton receiving a question about addiction and David Kessler immediately cornered John so he could get an answer back to him. Without John its doubtful if the FDA rule would have ever moved.

John conveyed his vision to America with his appearances on TV including the Day One News Story which earned him a brutal deposition from Philip Morris when they sued ABC for \$15 billion. John told me that was one of his toughest experiences. Few of us really knew how much pain he suffered from his unswerving commitment. John's best appearance was this fall's showing of the hour long documentary, by Nova, "In search of a safe cigarette". John ended the piece with a brilliant vision of the future. It must have been very hard for him to watch given his illness.

Of course, there were trips to the Philip Morris annual meetings with

Father Crosby and Alan Blum. John would eloquently disrobe the kings of big tobacco with his insightful questions and his shareholder proposals. The companies would reject the proposals but ultimately adopt them.

John and I had a lot in common: a February birthday in 1949 and Vizlas, Ginger for John and Mollie for me. We traded pictures of them often.

There was John the person, a man of enormous character with a built in smile that endeared him to anyone he met. He taught, nurtured, supported and cared for anyone he could. He did this with great humility and that's what made him a great friend. Anyone who got to know John, the person, always walked away thinking that he was his best friend. He was my best friend.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *The tipping point* describes how large social changes occur because of small events driven by gifted people. He describes "Mavens" who collect enormous amounts of knowledge and are compelled to share it with the world. That's our John, a connector who brings together people from diverse disciplines to tackle complex problems; that's John, a salesman like Paul Revere, who motivates others to do the things they would never dream of.

While many people have claimed responsibility for the great achievements in tobacco control, John Slade was the "tipping point" for changing America's view and policies on public health enemy number one. He has saved the lives of countless Americans.

John's passing leaves all of us with a void in our personal and professional lives. To fill that void we must ask God each day to give us just some of those gifts he bestowed on him; the ability to smile at adversity, love unconditionally, care for others and dream and work constantly for a better world.

My trips and adventures with John aren't over, like our friendships they are eternal.

God bless and be with you.

Amen.

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John Slade and Gregory Connolly are co-authors on an article in a supplement to this issue.