



# From the Heart

*A forum for the patients & friends of the Lown Cardiovascular Center*

Spring 2015

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## Dr. Thomas Graboys: A Legacy

*Our dear friend and colleague, Dr. Thomas Graboys, passed away in January 2015. This special edition of our newsletter shares the lasting impression he left on the Lown Center, his friends and colleagues, and most importantly, his patients.*

Dr. Thomas Graboys served as the director of the Lown Cardiovascular Center for 30 years and throughout that entire time he was an integral member of our team.

At the height of his career in the 1990s, Dr. Graboys, alongside Dr. Lown, was practicing a non-invasive model of care during a time when there was a fiscal incentive to push procedure-driven cardiology. His standards for compassionate, patient-centered care was a much-needed voice in a rapidly evolving field of complex and impersonal technology. It was – and continues to be – unusual to meet someone like this: an accomplished physician with such a humanitarian stance.

*“When I met him in 1993, my first impression was that he was not only an amazing physician, but also - and more impressively - an incredible human,” said Dr. Brian Bilchik.*

Driven by his motive to do the right thing for his patients, Dr. Graboys was an ardent advocate for them at every turn. He would always find the time to listen to his patients, sitting next to them at hospital, fluffing their pillow, making them feel comfortable. He knew every little, intricate detail about his patients' lives and that ultimately led to better outcomes. As one could imagine, he was loved by his patients.

“My brother was a healer, not simply someone who treats,” said George Graboys, Dr. Graboys' brother. “He had a rare understanding of the human condition. After a patient exam, he would sit with him/her and attempt to relieve the stress. Fearful became hopeful, discouragement became encouragement, and they were always accompanied by the dazzling smile and his own sense of humor that alleviated any distress.”

## A Life of Accomplishments

Dr. Graboys' other professional accomplishments are of little surprise for an individual of his energy, intellect, and commitment. He had extensive responsibilities for both

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the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology. He consulted for both National Institutes of Health and the United States Senate. He was a member of the Cardiovascular and Renal Drug Advisory Committee for the FDA, offering guidance on national pharmaceutical policies.

Dr. Graboys served on the Advisory Board Member for Physicians for Social Responsibility as well as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985.

On top of all this, Dr. Graboys personally supervised the professional development of more than 100 national and international cardiologists and he published more than 150 research articles. Driven by his passion as an educator, Dr. Graboys was Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and served as co-chair of the School's Admissions Committee.

*“But that is not the Tom I know,” said Dr. Gilbert Mudge. “And certainly not the Tom who I believe to be the essence of medicine.”*

## The Essence of Medicine

Dr. Gilbert Mudge shared these following words at Dr. Graboys' funeral.

Many individuals – both patients and practitioners – have long thought Dr. Graboys was the essence of medicine. But what is that? Is it patient care? Research? If you asked ten doctors you would get ten different answers. We need to look at this question from the patient's perspective to appreciate why Dr. Graboys represents the pinnacle of medical care.

To do that, we have to go back 52 years to read the very last poem Robert Frost ever wrote. It is practically unknown. At age 89, his health had deteriorated and he was admitted to the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. His wife passed away 25 years before and only two of his six children were still alive – he was alone in the world and dying.

The St. Petersburg Times wrote: “On her last day as the poet's nurse, Frost asked Miss Forbes for a scrap of paper, borrowed her pen, wrote and then gave her the paper.” It read:

*I met you on a cloudy dark day and when you smiled  
and spoke my room was filled with sunshine*

*The way you smiled at me has given my heart  
a change of mood  
and saved some part of the day I had rued.*

This poem represents the essence of medicine, to understand, to delay, yes, but also to comfort, to console our inevitable fate. This is Dr. Thomas Graboys – to understand, to delay, to comfort, to console. And when he became the patient, he provided us with the sunshine and saved some part of that day he knew was coming.

My more precious memories are those more recent years, during Tom's decline. Two or three times a year we had dinner at his favorite restaurant. We were couched in quite private conversations, shielding out the noise and commotion of the usual restaurant chatter. Ours was a gentle conversation, we knew the future. Tom's life had been won and we enjoyed the glow together.

Dr. Graboys stepped down from the Lown Center in 2007 after battling Parkinson's disease and dementia for several years. True to his character, the following year he published *Life in the Balance*, chronicling his move from physician to patient and offering hope in the compassionate, humanitarian way that only he could.

*“The book was but one vehicle,” said George Graboys. “He published articles, taught lectures, and gave interviews as well. He allowed himself to be an example of a victim of the disease to better educate students and the public. Even as it became difficult for him, he carried on teaching and healing in his own way.”*

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This article includes contributions from Dr. Gilbert Mudge, George Graboys, and the Lown Center doctors.

# Remembering Dr. Graboys

*Patients share their fond memories of Dr. Graboys*

My mother had heart disease for over 20 years and it was often hard to tell the nature of the problem, but Dr. Graboys was constantly by her side, not only providing excellent medical care, but also urging her to live a rich and full life. I can still hear her say: "Dr. Graboys says I can go to China!" (Ray, Emily, Harriet, and Rob Madoff)

Not only did Tom live a great life, he saved and improved the quality of life for thousands more both through the direct treatment of his patients and indirectly through the compassionate spirit with which he instilled in the practice of the Lown Clinic physicians for so many years. (Roger Levey)

*"Dr. Graboys was the consummate professional and the genuine friend. This may be hard to imagine, but I actually looked forward to going to the doctor - because it was Dr. Graboys."*

My mother fell in love with him and so did I. It was during our first office visit to seek his opinion about the immediate necessity of a pacemaker for her, as had been strongly advised. He spoke passionately and convincingly about his reasons for not going forward with the procedure at that time. We were mesmerized by his engaging enthusiasm. His straightforward, no nonsense manner instilled us with the confidence to follow his sound advice. We celebrated my mother's 103rd birthday in October. It was truly a privilege to have been in his care. (Phyllis Feld)

My husband was a patient of Dr. Graboys, we could not believe our luck. As time passed we could not believe his luck, but true to the magnificent human being he was, he remained heroic and valorous. (Rose Marie Thoms and Nathan Steinberg)

*"The way he took time with each patient, and thereby increased the quality of care, is a model that is sorely needed throughout the medical profession today."*

*Dr. Graboys gave my husband an extra six years of life. They embraced the last time we saw him as Dr. Graboys had just related to my husband of his own illness. They both knew that they were in for the fight of their lives and it was touching to see them consoling one another. My whole family loved him and he will always have a special place in my heart. (Mary-Lou Wilkinson-Quigley)*

## About Us



The Lown Cardiovascular Center provides patient-centered, noninvasive cardiovascular care that emphasizes prevention, compassion, and trust between doctor and patient.

We understand the importance of doing **more** for the patient, and **less** to the patient.

The Lown Center specializes in second opinions, especially when it comes to evaluating the need for invasive procedures. We also offer nutrition counseling and on-site testing in our fully accredited cardiac labs, with free parking, no facility fees, and an unhurried atmosphere.

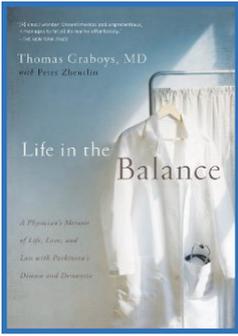
## Feedback

Are there topics you would like us to discuss in a future newsletter? Comments on our website? We would love to hear any feedback you might have. You can contact us at [info@lowncenter.org](mailto:info@lowncenter.org) or by calling 617-732-1318.

## Sign Up to Our Email Newsletter

If you would like to receive an email version of this newsletter, please let us by emailing us at [info@lowncenter.org](mailto:info@lowncenter.org).

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## Life in the Balance

By Dr. Thomas Grabovs

*An excerpt from his memoir, which chronicles his change from doctor to patient when diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.*

Holding on. Much of my life, today and every day, is about holding on to what I've got—or, more precisely, holding on to what is left. There is still happiness in my life: my wife, my children and grandchildren, music, and, now that I can no longer practice medicine, the time to explore new interests such as indoor cycling and writing.

*There are even days when the “old Tom” emerges, usually briefly, and I feel like my old self, only to awake the next day and come face to face once again with the reality of life with a progressive neurological disease.*

For now, I still see the light; but on the other side of this knife-edge ridge I walk, there is darkness, so I hold on. I have discussed this with my wife and adult daughters. There is a point beyond which I do not wish to go. That is the day I can no longer control my bowels and my bladder, a common problem for patients with advanced Parkinson's disease. To me, this is the ultimate regression. I have been in too many hospital wards and nursing homes where patients with severe dementia are lying on the floor or sitting in their own urine and feces, oblivious to the world around them. I have seen the end of this road, and I won't go there.

*I am determined not to let Parkinson's, which has stolen so much, steal my dignity.*

That is what I am really holding on to. Dignity. It's why I exercise, practice yoga, and play the drums. It's why I shave every day. It's why I dress well and make sure I look my best. As a cardiologist with a predominantly geriatric patient population, I often noted in my files when a patient started looking unkempt, a look that signaled that he had surrendered, been beaten down, or no longer cared enough to pull himself together. I no longer save my best clothes for special occasions. Now, every day is a special occasion.

