

Guest Editorial

Bright light and early darkness, reflections on the life of Tiziano Baccetti

An appreciation

Sheldon Peck

*This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased,
the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering
the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death and the stars.*

"A Clear Midnight" by Walt Whitman (1881)

I'll do this for my father. I'll have some fun.

Those must have been the well-intentioned, final thoughts of Dr. Tiziano Baccetti moments before he met instant death on November 25, 2011. While posing for a photograph on a historic bridge in Prague, Czech Republic, he slipped on old stonework at the base of one of the saintly statues that decorate the bridge and fell 8 meters to the rocks below. It was the Charles Bridge—Ponte Carlo in Italian. Tiziano's beloved father, who knows that bridge well, is also Carlo.

Tiziano Baccetti at age 45 had already achieved worldwide fame in fields he helped create: facial growth modification, timing of skeletofacial growth and orthopedic treatments, and biological associations of dental anomalies, to name a few. His realm was the application and broadening of observational science in clinical orthodontics.

Early in his professional schooling, Tiziano Baccetti realized that he had a passion and talent for scientific research, particularly studies that had impact on the understanding and improvement of diagnosis and treatments. He formed a bond with his classmate Lorenzo Franchi, who also found joy in solving research problems. After Tiziano completed officer's duty in the Italian army, he and Lorenzo teamed up to do orthodontically related studies at the University of Florence. A truly complementary lifetime research partnership was born.

From the outset, Tiziano and Lorenzo were different than most of the others. They were searching and researching deeply for natural truths and biological relationships. They had no interest in testing ephemeral product claims, such as which orthodontic brackets or bonding materials are superior, or what

magic can come from new imaging devices. Furthermore, Tiziano and Lorenzo—co-authors in over half of Tiziano's 250 publications—were always conscientious to properly study and publish their findings before talking about them, unlike a raft of product-centered anecdotal "experts" speaking at conferences today.

Tiziano Baccetti became a master at public presentation early in his acclaimed career. He was a natural at the podium, a marvelously effective speaker in Italian and English, his second language. His elaborate scientific visuals were studiously organized, and entertaining to follow. Humor, a prominent thread woven into all aspects of Tiziano's life, permeated his engaging lecture style. Tiziano's cutting-edge clinical content, delivered with his special charisma and energy, endeared him to the huge audiences at his courses and presentations around the world. He made learning fun and memorable, the hallmarks of a gifted teacher.

His critical mind and diagnostic eye were always at work. In his last e-mail to me, 5 days before the tragic accident, Tiziano happily shared that Vittorio, his adored 7-year-old son, "is 1.42 meters tall!!" This puts Vittorio in the 98th percentile of growth, at the head of his class, the proud father went on. As he becomes older, Vittorio will learn what we know, that his exceptional father was at the head of his class too, a gentle giant in most everything he touched in life.

The bright light from this giant is prematurely gone now. But in the darkness where dear Tiziano's light had shone brilliantly there remains a lasting glow. When we employ his insights and applications to clarify our diagnostic thinking, we are according Tiziano Baccetti the highest memorial. Tiziano's loving, deeply hurt family and friends can take heart that this man, during his brief time with us, fully earned immortality in the minds of his peers. Glow on, Tiziano, glow on.

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