

A Tribute to Bernard Lown, M.D.

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It would be impossible for me to cover the many highlights I found in Bernard Lown's inspiring new book, *Prescription for Survival*. But one theme inspires my brief remarks this evening. In his book, Bernard cites one of my favorite passages from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*. There Glendower boasts, "I can summon spirits from the vasty deep." To which Hotspur replies, "Why so can I, or so can any man. But when you summon them, will they come?"

Through Hotspur, the Bard is making the point that while many of us have the audacity to summon the spirits, precious few of us have the power to make them come. Bernard Lown, of course, is among that precious few. He has summoned the spirits of the world—let's call them the public opinion of the citizens of the globe—to take arms against nuclear madness, and the spirits came. And our honoree, as much as any human being, has made our world a little better.

But of course you all know the story of these remarkable *macro*-accomplishments in the name of mankind, and you'll hear much about them on this fantastic evening. But as a two-decade patient of Dr. Lown, I'd like to speak of his *micro*-accomplishments: summoning the spirits of his patients and making them come. By dint of his powerful character and brilliant mind, Dr. Lown has enriched and increased the lives of countless patients—thousands of human beings hungry for care, seeking solutions to their complex heart malfunctions, searching not only for reassurance, but for a chance to live full, productive, satisfying, contributing lives.

I am privileged to number myself among those patients. In 1960, when I was barely thirty-one years old, I suffered my first heart attack. It puzzled cardiologists in Philadelphia and in Cleveland, where in 1967 one of the early pacemakers was implanted into my fragile heart. The operation was a success, but in fact the patient almost died. Worse, it didn't relieve my symptoms, perhaps even made them worse. I was told that the then unknown disease was serious, that my life expectancy was limited, and that I should actually never work again.

I'm not one to accept such advice. So I decided to search for the best cardiologist in America. The name that kept coming up was, of course, Dr. Lown. He took on my case, beginning a 20-year doctor-patient relationship that saved my life, and gave me a bridge over the troubled waters of a mysterious heart disease. As he would write to me years later, "that dire early prognosis left out of the calculus the indefinable human spirit that can powerfully tilt the balance toward life." In the words from a song in *Les Miserable*, Bernard Lown not only "gave me hope when gone, he gave me strength to carry on."

Over the following two decades, I made a score of extended visits to Brigham Hospital where he frequently inspected me (if you will) on his legendary rounds. Believe me, it was not only the residents and fellows who accompanied him who were intimidated. So were his patients! But I was also inspired and utterly confident that I had his rapt attention and concern—yes, and love—every moment that he stood by my bedside. I should add that sadly one of my four daughters, Nancy, inherited my genetic malady. Dr Lown also helped her along the difficult road, and she shares my feelings about him, perhaps even more fervently.

At Brigham I endured a then-record 50 stress tests, evaluating the effectiveness of the various experimental drug therapies with which he tried to alleviate my frequent bouts of ventricular tachycardia. These attacks were punctuated by perhaps a dozen fibrillations, and a half-dozen or so cardiac arrests. Some were resolved by CPR; some by the electrified paddles administered by the very cardioverter that Dr. Lown invented all those years earlier; and one when my squash opponent simply hammered on my chest. (It beats doing nothing!)

I lived. I lived! But by early 1995, half of my heart had stopped pumping. It was time for a heart transplant, which I received in Philadelphia on February 21, 1996. I've now enjoyed 12 ½ extra years of life, years during which I've written six more books, books that have increasingly focused on challenging American society to return to a focus on our traditional values. In particular, it's high time for our egregious financial system to change its ways, to serve its clients first and itself only second. It's proven to be a lot to ask, but I hope my forthcoming book, entitled *Enough.*, will make a difference in our "more" society.

So here I am tonight, to report to you that the package of love, healing, care, intensity, focus, empathy and professional skill provided by Dr. Lown was without parallel in my long struggle with cardiomyopathy, and enabled me to press on with my life. Could any of you even

imagine that a man who first experienced congestive heart failure six decades ago would, God willing, soon begin the ninth decade of his life?

Were my case unique, my story would hardly be worth the telling. But Nancy and I are microcosms representing all those individual patients to whom Dr. Lown has given—one at a time—an extra lease on life. I have no doubt that his art of healing each of these human beings is every bit as important as the macrocosm of his mission—yes, his battle—fought to save the world from nuclear madness, driven by his remarkable ability, as a concerned citizen of the world, to summon those spirits. And make them come!

To pay tribute to the great humanitarian and cardiologist whom we honor this evening, I close with a daring leap from Shakespeare to the Beatles, paraphrasing the words of my favorite Beatles' song. If you'll think "Bern-ard" rather than "Hey, Jude," you'll get the picture. I've talked Kai-Yun Lu, clarinetist with the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra (which graces us with their beautiful music at tonight's celebration), into giving me some musical support. Here we go:

*Bern-ard, you've made it good
You took a sad song and made it better
You remembered to let the world get under your skin
Then you began . . . to make it better.
Better, better, better, better, better, oh
Na, na na na na na
Na na na na, Ber-nard.*

Now, please, all join me in the chorus. . .

*Then you began. . . to make it better.
Better, better, better, better, better, oh
Na, na na na na na
Na na na na, Ber-nard.*

For the world and for your patients, Bernard Lown, you made us better. We thank you.