

IV. Stephen W. Lacey  
Memorial Service  
May 6, 2000

**Stephen W. Lacey**

1943-2000

PROCESSIONAL

Choral Song..... Samuel Sebastian Wesley

Dr. Robert Triplett

College Organist and Distinguished Artist-in-Residence

CALL TO THE COMMUNITY

Dr. Leslie H. Garner, Jr.

President of the College

CELEBRATION OF A LIFE

Dr. Dennis Damon Moore

Dean of the College

**Organ Interlude**

O World, I Now Must Leave Thee, Johannes Brahms

Dr. Diane Crowder

Colleague and Friend

Dr. Leslie Hankins

Chair, English Department

**Sonnets 73 and 30, William Shakespeare**

Dr. Catherine Burroughs

Cornell English faculty, 1988 to 1996

**Organ Interlude**

Pastorale in F Major, J.S. Bach

Galen Lacey

Brother

CLOSING

Dr. Leslie H. Garner, Jr.

RECESSIONAL

Finale (*Symphony #1*)..... Louis Vierne

## CALL TO THE COMMUNITY

**Leslie H. Garner Jr.**  
**President of the College**

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this memorial service. We gather to celebrate the life and career of Stephen Lacey, friend, colleague, teacher, mentor, son, and brother. I want especially to note the presence of Stephen's mother, Claudine, his sister, Julianne, and her family, and his brother, Galen. I know that there are many among you who have come long distances for this commemoration. It is fitting that, once again, Stephen should bring our community together.

In preparing for this service, I came across a reference to an autobiographical essay by Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet. Heaney remembers a chestnut tree planted in the front yard of his boyhood home. Later, after he and his family moved from that house, the tree was cut down. He found that he was drawn to the space that the tree had once filled. That space, now filled with light, became a source of comfort and inspiration to him. From it, the memory of the tree stayed alive and real for him.

Like Heaney, we come today to a space often filled with the spirit of Stephen Lacey. Bathed in the light of this glorious spring day, we seek in this space the comfort of memory and friendship.

## CELEBRATION OF A LIFE

**Dennis Damon Moore**  
**Dean of the College**

When Ellen Horne was a prospective student she visited Cornell and sat in on Stephen Lacey's class. "[It] was brilliant," she remembered. "What a teacher!" Then she went to visit Macalester. Amazingly, Stephen was there, too. "In the lobby of the theater he came rushing up to me while I was on a campus tour. He pleaded with me: 'No, no no! You can't go to college here! We must have you at Cornell!' Then he turned to the tour leader and screamed, 'You can't have her!'" He had changed Ellen's life before she ever enrolled on the Hilltop. This was Stephen to a T.

He was the Walt Whitman of Cornell College: Charismatic and attentive, reverent and outrageous, passionate and tender. "Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?" asks Whitman. "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems." Students learned from Stephen, took everything he had to give. Sometimes it was a put-down. Paul Grohne remembered one of Stephen's best:

I had just dropped by his gracious, welcoming home and was explaining how I had welcomed some friends into my apartment by making some toast. True, the toast had literally burst into flames, but I was reading Plato at the time, and felt that the *esse*, not the *perceptio*, was the important thing. I was baiting Stephen in hopes of hearing another one of his senatorial pronouncements. Stephen didn't disappoint me. Clearing his throat

as I launched into a mangled summary of Hume, his rich baritone cut me off in mid-sentence: “If you cannot master toast, you must be truly inept.”

Even a shard of praise was welcome. A C+ paper drenched in red ink was redeemed for Jane Carpenter Thomas by this one sentence: “You have a sophisticated sense of punctuation.” Highly critical, Stephen was also very affirming. Todd Norris remembered that “Stephen could rescue any thought, and still give you credit for hitting on something crucial.” And to receive an A was to enter into the joy of the Master.

Students hung on his every word, and he had many of them. Jennifer Brannan remembered that when a student protested that Shakespeare’s sonnets were written to a boy, Stephen responded, “My dear, I don’t [care] if they were written to a sheep; they are still the most beautiful love poems ever written” And he brought Proust, AIDS literature, Shakespeare indelibly to life. “When I studied the Tragedies of Shakespeare with him,” recalled Miranda Richards, “I learned about raw emotion and the power of life to make us feel like gods or dust.” She vividly recalled Stephen’s presentation of the moment at the end of *King Lear* when the mad king realizes that he has killed his most beloved child, Cordelia. Now, in the wake of Stephen’s passing, she writes: “I think I understand the depth of loss that Lear must have felt.”

Earlier this spring, students gathered to speak of their experience with Stephen in his classes, at his house, in England. They remembered his booming laugh, his wit, his generosity. I was especially touched by the testimony of a student who had never taken a class with Stephen, never been an advisee, was not a student friend. “I talked to him once for ten minutes in his office,” the student said. “Then one day while I was on the switchboard he called from England—and recognized my voice. The last time I saw him was when I was going by his house and he was outside on the sidewalk and waved to me. I only saw him those three times, but I felt that he was interested in me.” Paul Grohne, of the burned toast, concludes his tribute this way:

Stephen was there, like a pool of light in the darkness, to assure me that I was smart, that my life would mean something. Years later, on a business trip, the plane flying over nighttime Iowa, I see the lights of the roads, tiny jewels, pools of light, connecting together different places. That is what Stephen did for us, he connected us, from the places we had come from, to the places we were going.

Stephen was a perfect match for Cornell College. As a student in the early 1960s, he ran a salon in his residence hall room and compiled a fine academic record. Writing to Bob Dana when Stephen was being considered for a faculty position in 1977, Bill Heywood remembered his work as “excellent in every respect.” He noted that Stephen did have “a flamboyant personality” but predicted that he would be a force for consensus at Cornell. Bill was right. Sally Farrington Clute recalled Stephen’s “radiant, encouraging warmth,” Gayle Luck his “pointing the way toward mediation and compassion.” Speaking for many, Karen Greenler said: “He offered friendship, vision, community.”

The College was grateful. In a letter to Stephen about his post-tenure review in 1999, I described him as one of Cornell’s great teachers, mentors, and citizens. I concluded: “Your efforts on behalf of the gay community have made the Hilltop a safer place for every sexual orientation in this era. You have affirmed the best of the Cornell tradition while challenging your alma mater to raise its consciousness and move ahead.”

Later it became more difficult for him to be Stephen Lacey. Illness visibly overcame him. Yet he remained fully committed. In my very last conversation with him as he lay in St. Luke's Medical Center, he appealed to me to let him offer the next block's Shakespeare course in his living room. "There would be room for twenty students," he said, "and I could teach from my sofa." It was not to be.

Several have remarked that Stephen was himself a living novel, challenging us to live our lives truly and fully. I agree. But especially for English professors, it is hard to resist comparisons with the greatest literature we know. Scott Klein sees Stephen as searching for lost time like Proust, or as a character like Falstaff, or Don Quixote, or some figure from Dickens. Ah, yes. Dickens.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. Heaped up upon the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, great joints of meat, suckling-pigs, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly. Though its eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them. "I am the Ghost of Christmas present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. Its dark brown curls were long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge [replied].

As we know, the Spirit invites Scrooge to touch his robe and they take flight together, first to the Cratchits' loving household, then to heights and depths of life Scrooge has never previously imagined. The Ghost warns Scrooge that we must erase ignorance or meet our Doom. Then, suddenly, the graying spirit vanishes, leaving Scrooge forever transformed.

Stephen Lacey will always be my Spirit of Christmas Present at Cornell College. It seems fitting that the best dramatic portrayal of this character should be that of Stephen's dear friend Desmond Barrit, the Royal Shakespeare Company actor who directed *The Comedy of Errors* on the Hilltop in 1999. Who can doubt that Stephen was the real-life model Desmond had in mind?

### **Dr. Diane Crowder Colleague and Friend**

Many times, as Stephen and I sat in one of our living rooms sharing a drink and a good conversation, he joked to me that he wanted for his epitaph only three little words, "Just One More." Just one more bourbon, or one more glass of a fine wine. Just one more lover.

Just one more aria. Margaret noted that cats with attitude who snubbed everyone else adored Stephen. His Mimi, my Lori, our Katie all begged for just one more pat and scratch on the head, and Stephen happily complied. Just one more of all the myriad things he enjoyed in life.

Stephen was Falstaffian in the pleasure he took in exquisite cuisine, vintage port, the company of friends, a good book, a trip to a new country. He had an acute eye for beauty, whether in art and music, in a lovely body, or in the social comedy in which he was such a fine player. He had a marvelous sense of humor and a hearty laugh, not least when the joke was on him. No one had more gusto for life than he. Even as his health deteriorated in recent years, he refused to relinquish his passion for life.

Stephen tried several religions as a young man, but he came to believe that it is our human life together that matters most. He loved humanity with all his heart. He loathed the petty cruelties and the great injustices that can flow from metaphysical views. As a gay man, he knew too well the pain caused by prejudice and intolerance. He fought tirelessly against bigotry in all its forms, and he wrote last year that “making ‘being gay all right’ will be my most important legacy to the college, more than my teaching, more than directing Shakespeare.” He was the most ethical person I know, because his morality came not from beyond, but from within, from his sense of kinship with others, and from plunging exuberantly into the human condition. The writers he enjoyed the most, Shakespeare and Proust, appealed to him because they portray humanity lovingly, with all its follies and all its grandeur.

Stephen didn’t publish much, although he was a voracious reader and an inspired critic. He would often read a new book or article and comment to me that he had been teaching those ideas for years. He didn’t crave academic fame or recognition. He wanted to know all he could about his subject in order to share his wisdom with his students. He wanted to inspire in them his love of learning. It was the human exchange that delighted him, and he was the greatest teacher I have ever seen in action because he connected with each student and brought alive in them that spark. When Margaret and I visited him in the hospital the evening before his crisis, he was insisting he would be able to teach “just one more” Shakespeare class in April, and he spoke about the England trip that he was hoping to make just one more time.

I always said to Stephen that his greatest talent was for friendship. He is the only person I know who could introduce two people to each other, and sincerely call each his dearest friend. He had many dearest friends, and there was always room and time for “just one more.” He cared deeply about people, and others responded by loving him as much as he loved them. Proust says that the real “resurrection of the soul after death is ... a phenomenon of memory.” (II,86) Indeed, for Proust “the dead annex the living who become their replicas and successors, the continuation of their interrupted life.” (II, 796-7) All of us who were blessed with Stephen’s friendship will know many moments of involuntary and voluntary memory, as we experience just one more time how intimately he shaped our lives, as we in truth keep him alive.

Stephen was my dearest friend. Most people never have the privilege of a friendship such as we shared, and I am profoundly grateful to have been a part of his life for nearly a quarter century. I want to join with all of you in saluting a superlative teacher, a beloved colleague, a shining example of humane values, a generous friend, and to say

on behalf of all those who grieve the loss of this extraordinary man, just one more time, in remembrance of times past, we love you Stephen.

**Dr. Leslie Hankins**  
**Chair, English Department**

Stephen Lacey has been a lifelong gift to the English department of Cornell College. From his apprenticeship student days with Winifred Van Etten and John Shackford, through decades of passionate professing, Stephen Lacey has been the heartbeat of the English department. He lovingly links generations of students, professors, and alumni.

With Stephen, every departmental gathering—even the most bureaucratic or grueling—interviewing seventeen job candidates in two days at the annual MLA convention—or anxiously awaiting dozens of displaced students for the England Trip held hostage by a blizzard at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport—became a cause for convivial celebration. He GLOWS across our lives, radiant, in perpetual delight.

SONNET 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death’s second self that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
    This thou preceiv’st, which makes thy love more  
    strong,  
    To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Stephen Lacey never shrank to fit. He stretched—or exploded—every role in the English department. He has been a more voracious and engaged student, a more giving and dedicated alum, a more cherished Chair, a more compassionate colleague, a more mind-boggling mentor, a more professing professor—and the host of hosts.

Stephen didn’t just think outside the box; he LEAPT outside the box, liberating and inspiring others, shattering our puny hearts and petty politics. He embodied GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT. Every day now I hear, like a mantra, his voice booming through South Hall: “When I’m chair, my dear, the operative word is “YES”!! Thank

you, Stephen, from the past, present, and future members of the English Department, for the legacy of YES.

SONNET 30

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste;  
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,  
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,  
And moan th'expense of many a vanished sight.  
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,  
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,  
Which I new pay as if not paid before.  
    But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
    All losses are restored and sorrows end.

— William Shakespeare

**Dr. Catherine Burroughs**  
**Cornell English faculty, 1988 to 1996**

My first memory of Steve is of his voice--that vibrant back-in-the-throat sound that promised, in the words of one of Steve's favorite plays, "More life." I first heard that voice in the fall of 1987, when Steve called to arrange a job interview, and I remember thinking, "I want to teach with that voice."

That I got my wish is one of the great blessings of my life.

Steve's students have recently filled his Web site with tributes to the ways his brilliant gusto changed their lives. The same is true for his colleagues. For Steve not only encouraged new teachers to explore our creative hearts and to aim for integrity in scholarly endeavor but he also cared greatly that we try to write and speak in a judicious but passionate voice.

Voices were important to Steve, which is probably why I keep hearing his voice in the many memories that have flooded in over the past two months since Steve took ill.

I remember one evening when Steve was talking about the kind of criticism he admired and hoped his junior colleagues would eventually want to write. Suddenly, he leapt out of his chair, strode to his beautiful built-in bookcases and grabbed a volume of essays by Dorothy Van Ghent, the famous literary critic who had taught Steve in graduate school, and who is the impetus for that wonderful story he told frequently about the time when she sabotaged a paper he was writing for her course at Buffalo by insisting that he accompany her on a midnight run to get "a hamburger." "Stephen, I want a hamburger"



(he loved to imitate Van Ghent's voice). And he came back to his chair with her essays and started reading her prose aloud with such expressiveness and quiet appreciation that—when he broke the spell by throwing back his head and slapping his knee with delight (that trademark gesture he reserved for something really accomplished, or beautiful, or outrageous) and roared, “My God, that’s good!”—we all felt thrilled we’d chosen to become literary critics and were convinced we’d forever write wonderful stuff from this evening on.

When I think of Steve, the sound of his voice, and his love of language, I also recall how he described his relationship with living in Iowa.

I remember Steve was fond of saying that “Iowa” is aptly named because the word is composed of vowels unbroken by consonants. According to Steve, the very pronunciation of the word mimics what he characterized, on occasion, as an environment of undifferentiated shapelessness. But even as he could make this kind of coastal pronouncement on the Midwest, he showed those of us who lived in Iowa how to give shape to our lives; he made Cornell College and Mount Vernon places of beauty, warmth, and love.

This was especially the case during late afternoons when the sun set behind Steve’s elegant little house. You all remember that to enter Steve’s Cotswold cottage was to enter a profoundly humane and urbane world—a world of intellectual excitement, glamor, sexiness, charm, compassion, generosity, and elegance (not to mention beauty, poetry, music, laughter). It was also a world whose most profound feature, for Steve, was a community of people united by pleasure, honesty, and joy in each other’s company.

“Come in,” you’d hear Steve’s voice call out when you knocked at any hour on his wooden door, “it’s open.” And when you stepped up the stone stairs to the wood-paneled living room, even before you saw Steve sitting near Mimi the cat in his chair with his long legs crossed, waving his cigarette holder (a gift from Dorothy Van Ghent) and sipping a bourbon, you felt you had entered a world that was a little bit London, a little bit New York, and a little bit LA—where the host had actually recently seen Sylvester Stallone playing polo without his shirt—a world enriched by smoked salmon and pork loin on the grill and a “last-minute salad”—and the best Merlot and port Steve had been able to get Wilkie’s to procure for him, a world that contained glimpses of Shakespeare festivals all over the country and which offered you the latest novel on AIDS. And, when dinner time arrived, but before Steve sat down at the table to announce that “the hostess has picked up his fork,” you realized you’d spent an astonishing hour finding your own voice in the electric atmosphere of Steve’s salon. For even as Steve would deflate your pretensions, decry your musical tastes, bemoan your obsessions, and fondly tell you that your observations about literature and life were “crap!,” he managed to surround you with such pleasure and acceptance that you seemed to be unfolding into a better self.

Indeed, Steve’s extraordinary success as a teacher, colleague, and friend came from several huge talents that he shared unreservedly everyday: he often saw what was missing in others and tried to supply it; he accepted people fully even as he dreamed big for them; he was marvelously honest and intellectually courageous; he had a laser-sharp intellect, a gigantic compassion, and he never took anything too seriously, even as he passionately gave himself away.

Of the many gifts Steve gave to me and others, the one I wish I could most thank him for today is having created a very long string of Proustian moments, moments in

which just a single sound or scent or image unleashes a flood of unsurpassably pleasurable and indelible associations. Whether you recall Steve pointing out Roman arches in Canterbury, sitting in the bar of the Black Swan in Helmsley, England, reenacting Titus Andronicus in South Hall, or throwing a Thanksgiving dinner for 25 in his living room, the vividness of these memories and their endurance must be what is meant by the afterlife.

Steve, you will live on in the hearts of those who loved you—and there were so many who did. Thank you for being, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald in “Tender is the Night,” “orchestrator of private gaiety, curator of richly encrusted happiness.”

**Galen Lacey  
Brother**

First, on behalf of the family, let me thank you all for being here today. It means a great deal to us.

I would also like to thank a handful of people who have made what has been a remarkably awful ordeal a bit more bearable. I cannot describe how much I, and we, appreciate the kindness, the love, and the support that you have given us.

Diane Crowder  
Margaret Lieb  
Craig Doran  
Seth Lane  
Charissa Vonk  
Ivan Vonk

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I am forever in your debt.

My brother was a large man with a huge appetite for life and a wonderful sense of humor. I hope my remarks today reflect those qualities.

The two things I would like to touch on today are the value of friendship and the joy of inspiring others.

If my brother’s life is a testament to anything, it is that the time and effort invested in developing friends is repaid thousands and thousands of times over. Steve had a gift for attracting friends unlike anyone I have ever known. And the friends he made became his friends for life.

Steve was also generous with his friends. Once you became his friend he shared all of his other friends with you. As a result, there are thousands of interrelationships which exist around the world which never would have existed were it not for Stephen. It is said that when the core of a network disappears, then the network dissolves. I would

certainly hope that this does not occur in this instance. There are many of you here that I would be very disappointed to never see again ... and if we work at it we can indeed keep in touch and remain friends for a long, long time. I do hope this happens.

Stephen played a variety of roles in our lives.

He was a brother, son, uncle, godfather (or godmother as the case may be) ... a surrogate father, a teacher, a student, mentor, a director, and even a tour guide. But in all these roles he was an inspiration. Stephen's great genius was his ability to get everyone he knew in whatever capacity. to reach just a little farther than they would have on their own. He asked us to:

Read more deeply  
Think more clearly  
Analyze more analytically  
To write with more clarity  
Travel more, eat better  
To see more live theater, visit more museums  
To be more than we were

And you know what—we did.

Every single one of us views the world differently by virtue of having known Steve. And because that is the case, Stephen lives on in each of us.

As such Stephen has left a legacy and it is a living legacy ... and that legacy is us!!!!!!

If you wish to move forward in a manner that captures Stephen's spirit, then I would suggest that you make every effort to expect more from those people whose paths you cross, just as Stephen expected more from you than you did of yourselves. That was his mission in life, that is why he chose to be a teacher, and that is why you remember him so fondly. He inspired you, and made you better people than you otherwise might have been.

If you would really like to live up to Stephen's expectations of you, then go forward and help others grow.

If you do, then Stephen will not only have left a living legacy, but he will have left a lasting legacy as well. And not only would Steve be pleased, I think he would have thought that his was a job well done.

Now, if the fates have been kinder, Steve would have lived for many more years. Throwing over-the-top parties ... having elegant dinners, and spending night after night sitting with friends, students, and colleagues .... and always ... always with a nightcap ... or two or three or ... well you know what I mean .... How many times have I heard ... "But Galen, 'tis the shank of the evening."

I had a talk a couple of weeks ago with Sarah Hill Cole who graduated in 1980, and she was laughing saying that someone should have a plaque made that reads. "Stephen Lacey ... Just one more."

The college is hosting a reception outside after the service.

In the spirit of “just one more”, we, the family, will be at Steve’s house this evening, and any of you old friends who would like to stop by and say hello ... and say goodbye ... and have a drink are welcome to do so.

Amazingly enough, we actually found a couple of bottles of Jack Daniel’s in his cupboard. Speaking of one last piece of advice ... if you happen to own any stock in the Jack Daniel’s distillery, you might consider selling it before they hear about what happened.

Thank you once again for being here ... and a special thanks to Cornell College, not only for this service but for everything that you meant to Stephen for so many years.

## **CLOSING**

### **Leslie H. Garner Jr.**

As we conclude this afternoon, I wish to reinforce the invitation to the reception following this service, where you can continue to greet one another. At the reception we will make available copies of the student tributes to Stephen, should you like to see one.

I thank my colleagues for sharing their memories of Stephen Lacey. And to their tributes I would like to add one more that was e-mailed from Stratford, England, by Desmond Barit:

“While I was at Mount Vernon in the fall of 1999 Stephen promised me that he would come to Stratford-upon-Avon to see *Henry IV*. Even though he has passed on I am sure that part of him is now in Stratford with me. Stephen was like Falstaff:

‘Give me life  
Which if I can save, so.  
If not, honour comes unlooked for  
And there’s an end.’

“ I dedicate my performance as Falstaff to Stephen.”

With Desmond’s recollection, we have indeed filled this space this afternoon with the spirit of Stephen Lacey, our Falstaff, our Ghost of Christmas Present. Let us hope that the memories shared today can become for all of us an inspiration. Let us further hope that these memories will keep the spirit of Stephen Lacey alive and real in this space for all of us and for the generations of students yet to come here.

Thank you for your presence.

