

**Stella Van Praagh MD;  
World famous pediatric cardiologist, pathologist, and philosopher**

Stella Van Praagh, MD was a world renowned pediatric cardiologist and pathologist of Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard Medical School who died following a very brief illness on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006. The author of more than 100 scientific publications on pediatric cardiology, congenital cardiac pathology, and congenital heart surgery, she played a key role in developing the diagnostic approach to the understanding of complex heart disease in infants and children that is now used worldwide. In addition, Dr. Stella Van Praagh clarified the pathologic anatomy and embryology of many different forms of structural heart disease in infants and children, which led in turn to more accurate diagnosis and more successful surgical management.

Born in Rethymnon, Crete, Greece and née Stella Zacharioudaki, she graduated from the School of Medicine of the University of Athens, Greece in 1952. Following 9 years of postgraduate work, almost all in the USA and Canada, she was invited to join the Pediatric Cardiology staff of the Buffalo Children's Hospital, Buffalo, NY, in 1962. In the same year, she married Richard Van Praagh, MD, beginning a lifelong love affair and professional collaboration. Richard and Stella were a team of investigative pediatric cardiologists and pathologists, who were invited to join the staff of Children's Hospital Boston in 1965 and have worked there ever since. Richard was Stella's first teacher of a then new anatomic and developmental approach to the diagnostic understanding of congenital heart disease. In recompense, Stella has been teaching Richard ever since. As Stella once said with a twinkle in her eye, "Dickie, you and I have proved that husbands and wives really *can* work together."

The family of Drs. Stella and Richard Van Praagh consists of 3 children — Andrew, Helen (who died in 2001), and Alexander — plus 5 (soon to be 6) grandchildren. In addition to being a superb clinician and medical scientist, she was also a remarkable cuisinière. Her baklava and bread were legendary. Adored by her patients and her many students and colleagues, she was a second mother to many of them.

In addition to modern Greek, Dr. Stella Van Praagh was also conversant with Byzantine Greek and ancient Greek. Aristotle had written that the human heart normally has *three* ventricles. ("Everyone" now knows that the human heart normally has only *two* ventricles.) The problem of Aristotle's "triventricular" heart had remained unresolved for the past twenty-two hundred years. Consequently, Dr. Stella Van Praagh translated Aristotle's ancient Greek text, to check on the accuracy of the translation by Oxford classicists, and to correct their errors. Suffice it to say that her accurate translation proved to be an important part of the solution of this long-standing mystery.

At the urging of friends, Dr. Stella Van Praagh led an ancient Greek studies group in Wellesley, fondly known as the Mythology Club. She was that very rare combination: a physician — philosopher. As these words are being written, the Mythology Club is meeting — to celebrate the life of Dr. Stella Van Praagh.

Many friends and colleagues sensed that there was something very different about Dr. Stella. Some saw her as a visionary. Others were awed by her great inner strength and her

fearless integrity. She was also modest, self-effacing, and always anxious to help others. The last act of her life was to make a hot dinner, that only she in our family knows how to make (pasticcio), and she took it to her son Andrew's home because Catherine, Andrew's wife, is now full-term and awaiting delivery. Abigail, Andrew and Catherine's first child, loves pasticcio.

Dr. Stella Van Praagh was the embodiment of what Socrates and Plato called virtue. She had the courage and the integrity always to call it as she saw it, no matter how difficult or unpopular that might be.

Dr. Stella Van Praagh wore many hats, all of them well: cardiologist, pathologist, philosopher, wife, mother, grandmother, incomparable friend, and wise counselor.

A private family funeral is planned, followed by a memorial service at Wellesley Hills Congregational Church at the intersection of Routes 9 and 16 on Friday, June 23 at 2 PM. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Cardiac Registry Research Fund, Children's Hospital Boston. Arrangements by the Henry J. Burke & Sons Funeral Home, Wellesley Hills.