



Editorial

## Memorial for Prof. Curt Tribble

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Curt Tribble, MD, Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the University of Virginia, died tragically on September 6, 2025, following a bicycle accident near Charlottesville, Virginia. Our specialty has lost a genuine treasure. His passing leaves an enormous void in the lives of his family, friends, colleagues, medical students, patients, as well as the many surgical residents who had the good fortune to learn from him.

Curt was the eldest of six boys. His father, David Tribble, was a General and Thoracic surgeon for many years in Columbia, South Carolina. Curt studied Biology and English at Presbyterian College and graduated Valedictorian of his class. His love of literature and keen awareness of the importance of communication style helped shape his unique ability to connect with many different people.

He attended medical school at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and then trained in General, Thoracic, and Cardiovascular Surgery at the University of Virginia. Upon completion of his training in 1987, he joined the UVA faculty.

Dr. Tribble quickly established himself as an excellent clinician. In addition to teaching in the operating room and on the wards, he was actively involved in the education of third year medical students during their surgical clerkship. He was recognized for his educational excellence and was awarded nearly every teaching award at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. The Curtis G. Tribble award was established in 2016 to recognize excellence in resident education.

Research was an important part of his career. He studied reperfusion injury, lung transplantation, organ recovery after death and mechanical circulatory support among others. He is the author or coauthor of hundreds of peer reviewed publications and many book chapters. Dr. Tribble served on the Editorial Boards of the *Annals of Thoracic Surgery* and *The Heart Surgery Forum* journal.

In 2006, Dr Tribble took the position as Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the University of Florida, Gainesville. In 2009, he was recruited to the University of Mississippi to help reinstate the CT Surgery residency where he served as both the Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery and the Vice Chair of the Department of Surgery. In 2014, Dr. Tribble was recruited back to the University of Virginia to establish the I-6 program where applicants were offered

an alternate pathway for Cardiothoracic Surgery training without prior General Surgery board eligibility.

Dr. Tribble's influence in our specialty is amplified by his clear and formative role in *The Heart Surgery Forum* journal. It is true to say that the HSF would not exist without the insight of Dr. Tribble. He was responsible for opening many opportunities in the early days when the HSF was simply an interesting website written by a novice programmer on the West Coast. It was Curt Tribble who recognized the potential for the future and enticed its founder, Dr. Mark Levinson, to journey from his home in Seattle, Washington, to present the HSF concept to the CT department at the University of Virginia. The results of that visit almost 30 years ago launched the journal you are now reading.

The HSF broke many barriers and established new academic publication standards, such as double blind peer review, rapid manuscript turnover using email, online manuscript submission, and majority vote for acceptance. Today, these are standards for many prominent academic journals, but the HSF was the first to bring all these together using the new Internet medium in the spring of 1996.

Dr. Tribble's involvement with the HSF began when he joined as one of the initial members of the HSF's innovative email list-serve (the "Openheart-L") which went live in September 1995. The format for the OHL centered around presenting challenging surgical cases, and this remains its mission even to this day. When the OHL was just getting started, Dr. Tribble posted a case that puzzled him as a young academic surgeon. It was a patient with multiple aortic paragangliomas of the proximal aorta. Responses on the OHL list suggested he approach this patient under hypothermic circulatory arrest. Dr. Tribble adopted this approach which eventually led to both a successful clinical outcome and a published case report.

The initial HSF Web site went live on June 17, 1995, and grew quickly. Dr. Tribble foresaw the progress that the Internet offered and wanted his institution to be at the forefront. It was his concept that the U of Virginia could incorporate the HSF journal into its academic and teaching missions. With this purpose in mind, he invited Dr. Levinson to present the HSF project to an audience within the CT Surgical department at the U of Virginia.

As a direct result of this presentation, Dr. Levinson was introduced to Bill Carden and Joe Jennings, part-



ners in an academic publishing firm based in Charlottesville that was similarly enthusiastic about the future of online and multimedia publishing. Forum Multimedia Publishing, LLC was created to implement these new online publication strategies. Without this critical juncture provided by Dr. Tribble's invitation to Charlottesville, it is likely that the HSF journal would never have fulfilled its potential.

Dr. Tribble continued his support and contributions to the HSF journal throughout his remaining career. For many years, Curt served as an active member of the Editorial Board. More importantly, his passion for educating young trainees produced many original manuscripts published in the HSF journal and were read widely. Dr. Tribble's expressive writing style was a gift that guided the maturation of our newest surgeons. He published many editorials in the HSF journal explaining his approach to patient care and surgical challenges. Through his voice, many of our younger generation were able to appreciate the role they would be playing in the future lives of their patients. His voice will be missed but his contributions are preserved in the online archives at <https://www.imrpress.com/journal/HSF>.

Not many of us can pass along as much to others as Curt Tribble did. He had a gentle and patient personality that fostered growth in his students. He was the ideal mentor for young minds who could pass down principles of moral character and surgical skills. He could lead others by his quiet but persistent approach while emphasizing knowledge and quality. When others would just operate, Curt would also teach. Many of the quality graduates of the U VA CT Surgical training program owe their stature and talents to Dr. Tribble as their mentor. Indeed, his role was even broader as the chairman of the national Residency Directors organization which establishes guidelines for training programs throughout the country.

Curt was an exceptional physician, surgeon, educator, mentor, colleague and friend. He always made time to help those with problems or questions. His thoughtful responses were based on sound judgement and clinical acumen. His calm demeanor during stressful periods was legendary. He had an extraordinary ability to communicate with empathy and clarity. He excelled in teaching both the art and science of medicine. He will be missed but his wisdom and profound influence on those fortunate to have known him will carry on.

The greatest honor in life is to be remembered. Dr. Tribble will certainly be remembered by so many. Rest in Peace, our dear friend. Our special condolences to his wife Megan and his family.

By Mark M Levinson and John R. Rowles.

### **Author Contributions**

MML and JRR contributed to the writing of the obituary and to the editing and revision of the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version. They have each made substantial contributions to this work and agree to assume full responsibility for all aspects of the study.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.