

The Heart Beat of Life

Steven Cohen embraced life with the energy and passion of his huge heart. A devoted father, husband, son, brother and friend, he was nothing short of famous to those who knew him and loved him. A talented local businessman and strong athlete, the healthy-looking 35-year-old went about his usual routine on December 7, 1995.

He kissed his wife, Eva and young daughters, Ashton and Lindsay, as he walked out the door to meet his friends for their weekly basketball game. The December dusk air was crisp with the night's cold air sinking gracefully and shifting the warmth of the day.

The game commenced, and Steven complained that he was not feeling well. He left the court, sat down, and shortly afterwards suffered a massive heart attack – otherwise known as Sudden Cardiac Death. The happy predictability of Steve's return to his family that night to embrace his three girls turned into a shocking, gray-shrouded nightmare. His life evaporated in seconds and nobody saw it coming.

Steven's closest friend, Mark Litman, received the shock call from Steve's wife, Eva, that no one is prepared for. Mark grieved with the family as they confronted their unfathomable depth of

loss. Within their collective grief, and on the day of the funeral, Mark, together with Steven's aunt and business partner, Evie, and Tom Eisenstadt, decided that preventing other families from having their world unhinged from its axis so tragically and needlessly, was the only constructive option. Without warning, Steven became one out of 250,000 Americans who meet this fate every year, and one of the first signs of coronary artery disease is sudden death.

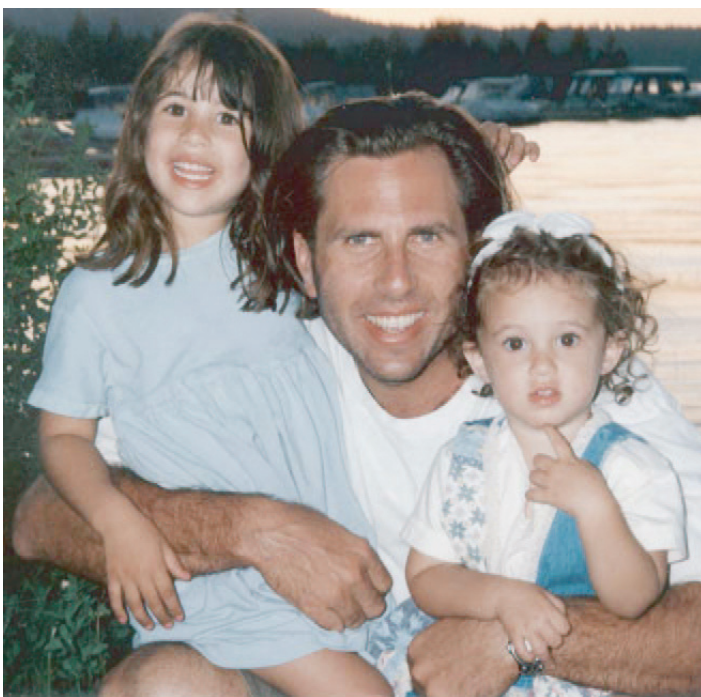
Mark, a passionate leader, rallied a group of caring family, friends and community members, and gave birth to The Heart Foundation in January 1996, in memory of Steven Cohen. He is adamant that it was a collective effort and shuns any spotlight on him. He recalls their three-fold objective: "We wanted to create a meaningful legacy for Steve; develop a support structure for advanced research on coronary heart disease, and equally as important, create a heightened awareness so that people are equipped to avoid a tragedy such as this." Mark's earnest intentions in helping others follow preventative action are liquid clear: "If Steve had undergone a 'treadmill stress test' before this hap-

pened, doctors would have known that his arteries were over 90% blocked and remedial work would have begun immediately to prevent his death. But he didn't know that..."

The Heart Foundation supports the work of world-renowned cardiologist, Dr. P.K. Shah, who is Director of the

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Cardiology and Atherosclerosis Research Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical. The funds raised are pumped into Dr. Shah's extensive research as he and his team search for a heart disease cure. They focus on detecting, preventing and treating heart disease and in their cutting-edge research, they are identifying new genes that protect arteries from plaque build-up. They are also using gene therapy for the prevention of plaque build-up and re-blockage of arteries after angioplasty and stenting. A vaccine is currently being developed to prevent arterial plaque build-up (continued on page 44)



Ashton, Steve & Lindsay Cohen

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and heart attacks.

When you consider that more than 60 million Americans – one in five – have one or more heart and blood diseases, putting them at risk for Sudden Cardiac Death, the reality of how important it is to take an interest in the prevention of it is responsible and sensible. We asked Mark how this all fits in with The American Heart Association, and he explains: “Dr. Shah is on the Board of the American Heart Association in southern California and all our efforts are collective efforts as

Heart Foundation to the next level. Norman Brokaw, Chairman of the Board of the William Morris Agency, was the 2004 recipient of the Humanitarian Award, and this year, Mark enthuses as he speaks with the utmost respect of Kirk and Anne Douglas. “We are so looking forward to honoring them with The Steven S. Cohen Humanitarian Award at our Gala on October 11th. “

Mark cannot praise highly enough the volunteer committee members of The Heart Foundation. He says, “they are busy people who have full-time careers and families, but they find time to make The Foundation

wife, Tammy’s understanding and support, and the encouragement from my sons, Jordan and Riley, I couldn’t have gone this road”.

Recently, Steven’s daughter, Lindsay, stepped up to the plate by raising over \$3,500 with her 5th grade class at school. Mark was thrilled to accept the class’s check at their school assembly and recognize them for their efforts.

Mark stares across the lake at the setting sun as he smiles and verbalizes his deep-felt satisfaction: “This is such an amazing, sad, yet inspiring story. Ten years ago our initial reaction was incredulous shock at the waste

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From top left: (A) Mark Litman, Norman Brokaw, Bill Cosby and Dr. Shah (at The Heart Foundation’s 2004 Gala honoring Norman Brokaw) (B) Camille & Bill Cosby, Joanna & Sidney Poitier (at The Heart Foundation’s 2004 Gala with Bill Cosby providing the evening’s entertainment) (C) Mark Litman & Lindsay Cohen (at Lindsay’s school check presentation) (D) Kirk & Anne Douglas

we support one another.”

The Steven S. Cohen Humanitarian Award is given each year to an individual who effects change within his/her community, and who demonstrates a commitment to the betterment of humankind. Mark speaks with sincere conviction when he says, “Steve was a caring, loving, thoughtful, generous person, and in 2002, we initiated this award for a worthy recipient who demonstrates these admirable qualities. We were so proud to honor Marshall Ezralow as the first recipient of the award. He helped us catapult The

what it is: A synergy of dynamic, passionate people who love working together in an atmosphere that’s filled with joy”. Mark says that the success of The Heart Foundation from its grass-roots level in 1996 to its almost 10-year anniversary heights with 20 committee members has been due to everyone’s unflinching dedication. He recognizes the important participation of talented people like Dana Carvey and Bill Cosby, as well as the overwhelming support from families in the community. He is also quick to thank the people at home: “If it weren’t for my

of such a young, vibrant life. Although we can’t bring Steve back, his death wasn’t a waste. Lives have been saved; relationships have been made. The story of Steven Cohen is about death, sacrifices, life and passion. It makes me so proud knowing that The Heart Foundation has given Steve’s life significant purpose.” **WM**

If you would like to support The Heart Foundation or learn more about them, go to www.theheartfoundation.net, or call them at 818-865-1100