Howard B. Stein—husband, father, honorary professor, rheumatologist, political advocate and ambassador for world peace—died September 21st, 2006 of myelofibrosis. He was 60 years old. Throughout the 17 years battling myelofibrosis he remained very involved in medicine, politics and world peace. Howard, affectionately known as “Howie,” never stopped making a difference in our world.

He was an incredible man. Always good humored and interested in the views of others. To meet him made one feel fortunate. The response of others to Howard was always praise and admiration.

He created the Division of Rheumatology at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC) and served as Division Head at St. Paul’s until his illness made this impossible. He mentored a generation of young doctors and his teaching was recognized by a raft of awards. He led in creating medication-specific disease-monitoring clinics and performed landmark research around them.

Howard was the consummate clinician. His empathetic bedside manner made every patient feel that he/she was the only person in the world. His diagnostic acumen left even his colleagues suspecting he had a sixth sense. He was as gifted in management as diagnosis and much sought after for a second opinion.

Although for the past few years he was unable to carry on a full-time practice, he was ever present for patients and for the trainees—including his colleagues who never stopped learning from him. He set up a weekly course for the Rheumatology Residents Academic Half-Day where he taught week-in and week-out, passing on his insights won by decades of study. His answers for patients’ questions on The Arthritis Society’s web page were often brought to consultations with other rheumatologists. It was rare that both the patient and physician didn’t benefit from his wise advice.

Howard was busy outside of medicine. He campaigned ardently for the BC Liberal party. He brought representatives from Jordan and Israel to Vancouver for a peace summit. Leaders of Jordan sent a telegram of sympathy and the Canadian parliament held a moment of silence upon his death. Howard quietly chartered his own campaign for world peace. His motto might have been, “One person can make a difference.”

Yet, despite his myriad accomplishments, Howard was a humble man of great character and unwavering dignity. He never boasted or patronized. His main sources of joy in life were his wife Sunni and his precious boys Jaime and Jordan. He radiated happiness when he discussed his boys—he considered them his greatest accomplishment.

The rheumatology community has lost a “Great One.” But, Howard Stein’s legacy will certainly live on. We should memorialize him in our everyday lives by striving to make a difference for others.

Rhonda Shuckett, MD, FRCPC
John M. Esdaile, MD, FRCPC