

From tragedy comes hope

As a marketing student at Iowa State in the 1980s, David Gladson had no connection to the disciplines that now comprise the Department of Genetics, Development and Cell Biology (GDCB). Today, however, an Iowa State scholarship firmly links this 1988 business graduate to GDCB.

The memorial brings together two dominant factors in Gladson's life—the university he loved and his 15-year battle with multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease that ravaged his body and led to his death in 2003. The fund is directed at enhancing the study of neurological disorders.

"David was so proud to be an Iowa Stater," says his brother, Steve Gladson. "He really enjoyed the time he spent in school, and he followed the Cyclones faithfully as an alum."

Known for his mild manner as he grew up in Cedar Falls, David Gladson found Ames to be full of good times.

"Barney, that's what we called him because he looked just like Fred Flinstone's sidekick Barney Rubble, had a blast in school," recalls Todd Ortberg, who first roomed with Gladson in Friley Hall.

After a couple of years at Iowa State, Gladson buckled down and focused on his studies. The first sign that something was amiss happened on a hunting trip during Christmas break of his senior year. "We flushed some pheasants, but David didn't shoot," recalls Steve Gladson. "He said there were dark spots in his eyes, and he couldn't see the birds." David's vision returned after a few minutes, but over the next year the problem began to occur more frequently.

After numerous medical tests, he got the bad news. "His doctor told him he had the most aggressive case of MS he had ever seen," says Ortberg. Within a year, Gladson was declared legally blind, and he had to quit a marketing job he'd taken in Kentucky after graduation from Iowa State. He moved home to Cedar Falls. "David worked with the Iowa Department for the Blind to relearn how to do things," says Steve Gladson. "He was always looking for ways to increase his skills and to improve himself."

The disease progressed, and Gladson went to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for treatment. While there, he met his future wife, Jody, who had been paralyzed in a car accident. They were married May 24, 1997, and lived in a new home they had built in Rochester.

The MS, though, was relentless and eventually left Gladson incapable of taking care of himself. He initially received round-the-clock in-home care, but in February 2001 he moved to a nursing home. "David accepted that he had to move," says Steve Gladson, "but he didn't give up on living. He was very outgoing and interacted with as many people as he could."

David Gladson was just 39 when he passed away July 31, 2003. As the family prepared for the funeral, Ortberg proposed the scholarship in his friend's memory. "David's years at Iowa State

were the best of his life," Ortberg asserts. "Putting money into an Iowa State scholarship that will be used to enhance the study of neurological disorders like MS is a way to make something positive come out of this tragedy."

Working with the Iowa State Foundation, Ortberg and Steve Gladson have been raising money to create the scholarship. "David would be really proud to know this fund is in his name," says Steve Gladson. "He loved Iowa State, and it would be fantastic if some headway could be made to find a cure for MS and other diseases like it."

"We are very grateful to David's family and friends for honoring his memory with this scholarship," says Martin Spalding, GDCB professor and chair. "Our researchers study genetic, molecular, and chemical issues that could lead to improved treatment and cures for neurological diseases. Donald Sakaguchi, for example, is currently

looking at ways to repair damaged nerve cells. (See article in the spring 2005 newsletter at www.gdcb.iastate.edu/events.) This fund will provide valuable support for research and for graduate students."



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depth of expertise teaching and designing courses in a departmental major."

The second advantage for students is the opportunity to gain a variety of hands-on research experiences. "With 70-plus faculty involved in genetics research on campus, our students can explore different areas and really tailor their experiences

to support their goals," Girton says. Faculty encourage and facilitate research experiences beginning with the students' freshman year.

The goal is to keep the genetics program small and well focused with between 80 and 100 majors. "This has been a very good recruiting year," Girton says. "I expect 20 freshmen coming in next fall,

and with good retention we are on target to reach our enrollment goals."

With the increasing costs of education, scholarships are essential for attracting top students to the undergraduate Genetics and Biology Programs. To contribute to the GDCB scholarship funds, please use the form on page 2. ■■■