



By Caryn Sullivan

**TONY SNOW - ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS –  
WITH A LOVE OF LIFE AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS**

St. Paul Pioneer Press  
7/16/08

The phone rang early on Saturday morning, waking me from a restless sleep. Friday ended with concerns about our daughter being at a western Wisconsin lake that was potentially in the path of a tornado. So when I answered the phone and heard my brother say, from 1,500 miles east, that he and his wife were calling to commiserate about the sad news, I immediately assumed another weather-related catastrophe had occurred while I'd slept.

It turned out they weren't calling to talk tornado. They were calling to talk about the loss of a man we'd never met but truly admired, 53-year-old Tony Snow. Tony, husband and father of three, conservative commentator and former Bush press secretary, had died during the night from cancer that was diagnosed in his colon in 2005 and resurfaced in his liver in 2007.

My brother and Tony were both 17 when they lost their mothers to colon cancer. My siblings and I have been diligent about getting regular checkups and trying to live relatively healthy lives so as to fend off the evil disease — just like Tony was. So the news left us with unnerving questions about genetics and cancer and whether we'll be more successful than Tony in dodging that bullet.

It's strange to feel such a sense of loss for someone I didn't know. In his roles as radio and TV commentator, writer and Bush presidential spokesman, I found him refreshingly human and engaging. He had a sparkle in his eye and a lilt in his voice. He was smart, funny, provocative and respectful to all, regardless of political persuasion. As a musician, film lover and family man, he lived life with vigor. He was a rare celebrity who, according to those who actually knew him, never changed after becoming famous.

On Saturday and Sunday mornings, I go bike riding with my baby boomer pals. After I heard the news Saturday, I was tempted to pull the covers over my head and skip the ride. But I rolled out of bed, put on my spandex shorts and helmet and joined the guys on a trek into a 20 mph wind.

As we rode up and down the hills, battling the wind, I thought about how much biking is like fighting cancer. There are lots of ups and downs. Some days the wind is relentless; other days it's calm. There are times to coast and times to crank the gears and use every bit of energy to climb a seemingly insurmountable hill. The exhilaration of making it to the top provides the fuel for the challenge of the next hill.

I thought about the ups and downs that Tony Snow had been through since his diagnosis in 2005 and how, despite his conviction that optimism is a potent weapon against the disease, he didn't make it to the top of that last hill. I thought about his

school-age kids, who'd lost their dad at such an important time in their lives, and about his wife, who lost a special guy far too early. And I thought about how those of us who had admired him from afar had lost an exceptional role model in a public arena full of big egos and questionable values.

On Sunday morning, I skipped the bike ride, opting to watch as Snow's colleagues paid tribute to him on his former show, "Fox News Sunday." I looked at picture after picture of him with a smile on his face, even after his hair disappeared and his frame dwindled, both the treatment and the disease taking their toll on his body — but never his spirit. I wondered whether you're born with that unwavering cheerful outlook or if you can acquire it, because I wish I had more of it, even after my successful fight with breast cancer.

As 24/7 cable news has become a way of life, the tone of this extremely competitive business has become increasingly negative. The "scare the pants off of you" coverage has transformed me from a news junkie to a reluctant consumer, at best. Not surprisingly, my teenage offspring adamantly reject the "boring and depressing" news and embrace the lighter versions as presented on Comedy Central a la Jon Stewart's "Daily Show" and Stephen Colbert's "Colbert Report."

So the void left by "one of the good guys" is a big one. Those who are jockeying to fill it should take note of the qualities that have been ascribed to Tony Snow by many who knew him as both friend and foe — the ability to debate policy, not attack personalities; a deeper love for the job than for the notoriety that it brought him; a genuine respect for others, regardless of differing opinions; and an exuberant approach to life, especially when he recognized he was living his final days.

Caryn Sullivan is a Minnesota attorney and writer. Her column appears from time to time on these pages. Her e-mail address is [carynsullivan@comcast.net](mailto:carynsullivan@comcast.net).