



Steve Carey - My Mentor, Teacher, Coach, and Friend

I first met Steve Carey in the fall of 1971, shortly after I turned seven.

Fresh out of Bowdoin College, Steve - aka “Stem” had taken a job at Tabor Academy, where my father had been teaching since 1963. From the beginning, he was someone who belonged — tall and confident, full of life, endlessly energetic. He loved sports, was a terrific basketball player, loved to fish, and had a Boston accent. He was for sure — *the genuine article*.

Some of my earliest memories of him are on the water with my dad, fishing for blues and stripers. As a kid, I mostly listened —

watching and absorbing the conversations, the humor, and the easy confidence with which Steve moved around the boat and through the world. Even as a young boy, I could tell he took an interest in me.

Seven years later, I became a student-athlete at Tabor, and our paths grew much closer — in hallways, classrooms, and on the fields. In the spring, he coached my JV lacrosse team, which went 13-1. The next fall, he coached me in JV football — my favorite season at Tabor, and one of the best sports experiences of my life.

Steve coached the offense; Dick Duffy coached the defense. “Duff’s toughs, and Stem’s gems,” we used to say. I was more gem than tough — an option quarterback — and Steve recognized and nurtured what came to be my greatest asset as an athlete — my creativity. That’s when I first realized: this was a man who saw me and believed in me. That belief mattered. It changed how I saw myself.

I also had Steve in the classroom for Latin. While he loved the language, what he really loved were the lessons hidden inside it. Translating Cicero, and engaging with the ideas of other classical thinkers, wasn’t just academic work, it was a way of learning how to live - utterly consistent with Steve’s style, and something we could use a little more of today. Those classes eventually led me to minor in Classics in college. I still remember reading Cicero’s *De Senectute* with him during my junior year — a text I still return to today.

Steve’s classroom was famously all-encompassing. Latin was the excuse; life was the subject. He was a master storyteller — sharing tales from Boston Latin, Bowdoin, and his years as an athlete. His stories always carried lessons and usually humor. He loved to

laugh. In the spring of '81, when Patrick was born, and the Celtics were on their way to the NBA Championship, class was especially good. He had a move — he'd come in, sit down, put his feet up on the desk, and flip his Latin book to the side. A dozen boys smiled in unison.

Steve was my advisor throughout my time at Tabor. One moment stands out clearly. I had written a paper titled *Art and Architecture in Ancient Greece*. Writing came easily to me, though at sixteen I was more focused on finishing than on excellence. I earned a B+.

In our advisor meeting, Steve didn't talk much about the grade. Instead, he asked me to look again at a comment he'd written in the margin. *You'll never know if you can reach the stars until you really try for them. Keep reaching, Pete.*

There were a number of legendary teachers and coaches at Tabor. Steve was foremost among them. Confident without ego. Funny. Tough. Fiercely competitive — I think he may have been the best basketball player at Tabor until he was thirty-five. But he was also deeply human and unfailingly kind. He sought to understand people as they were, not as he thought they should be. That rare balance is why he was so important to so many of us.

As a teenage boy, you begin to form a vision of the man you hope to become. Steve embodied that for me - a sportsman and scholar, devoted father and husband, engaging, humble, and rapt with the wonder of "life's rich pageant."

During summers in college, I worked for Steve painting houses. Those were heady days - full of work, conversation, and possibility. I was twenty; he was thirty-five. He was still my mentor — but now we were becoming friends.

We were painting together when his first marriage ended. I was struck by his tenderness, his vulnerability, and his resilience. He ran. He worked out. He stayed positive. He grew. Years later, I would lean heavily on his example.

The summer after I graduated from college, unsure of my next step, he asked me to help paint his parents' house in Jamaica Plain. I brought along my friend Matt, who was also finding his way. Hot summer days. Radio playing softly. The quiet rhythm of prepping wood trim, laying paint with care, framed in casual meandering conversation between long moments of calm focus. Evenings at Doyle's Pub — Steve holding court, telling stories, teaching without ever making it feel like teaching.

He sold me my first car — a white 1980 Pinto — for \$350 of painting money. It still had a black vinyl #4 on the bumper from its days as a Tabor school car. After installing a Pioneer cassette deck and chrome surfer foot gas pedal (because why wouldn't you do that?) I drove it proudly for two solid years.

Now - those of you who know what a Ford Pinto is might be wondering - if Steve cared about Pete, why on earth would he sell him a 1980 Ford Pinto with 110,000 miles on it? The Pinto gained notoriety because it was prone to exploding if involved in a rear end collision, hence the nickname "Chariot of Fire, and "Explode a Car." I like to think it was his way of showing confidence in my driving skills.

In the mid 90's, we found ourselves near each other again — me at Governors Academy with my young family, he at Pingree, and well into his life with Lee. We'd meet for pints at the Choate Bridge pub. He was still coaching me — still offering wisdom I eagerly took in.

Then I noticed the tremor in his left hand. “Parkinson’s,” he told me. It was hard to imagine this force of a man facing illness. But he did what he always did — he shrugged it off and carried on.

In 2013, my wife got cancer. A year later, she was gone. I’ll never forget the hug Steve gave me when he entered the chapel for her celebration of life. I can’t remember the words he whispered to me, but I can remember how steadying they were. He was still there for me.

I left Governor’s and the North Shore in 2016. Our contact slowed. A few calls. Updates through Lee. Two years ago, when I visited Dick Duffy near the end of his life, I was glad to see Steve there too. Parkinson’s had taken much from him. But when I sat beside him, he put his arm around me and looked at me with those smiling Irish eyes. Nothing needed to be said.

If you’re lucky in life, you find a mentor — someone who recognizes your potential and helps shape your life. Steve Carey was the most influential mentor I ever had. And what he gave me didn’t end with me; I’ve tried to carry forward what was so generous and true in him, to those who’ve come after.

Cicero reminds us that a life devoted to virtue, friendship, and service doesn’t diminish with age — it gathers meaning. What matters most is not how long a person lives, but how fully they have lived, and how deeply they have shaped others.

Steve Carey — thank you. For inspiring me to reach for the stars, and to meet Life’s Rich Pageant with a heart that is open, awake, and appreciative of people just as they are.

