

In Memoriam

From *Xiphophorus* to Melanoma—A Tribute to Steven Kazianis (1966–2008)

IT IS WITH GREAT SADNESS THAT we say goodbye to Steven Kazianis who died on March 10, 2008, at the age of 41 after a long battle with anaplastic astrocytoma. Steve was an extremely accomplished scientist involved in many aspects of research with *Xiphophorus* fish (swordtails and platyfish), specializing in gene mapping and the molecular genetics of melanoma formation in hybrid and nonhybrid fish. More recently, he devoted his research to the biology of malignant melanoma in humans.



During his career he published 31 peer-reviewed papers and 9 additional invited articles, magazine articles, and book chapters co-authored with such noteworthy scientists as David Barnes, Meenhard Herlyn, Klaus Kallman, Donald Morizot, Rodney Nairn, Manfred Schartl, Richard Setlow, Jürgen Vielkind, and Ronald Walter. As an editor of the scientific journal *Zebrafish*, he contributed to the continuing education of other scientists in the field. He founded and developed www.xiphophorus.org, a Web site featured in *Science* and fully dedicated to scientists and laypersons requiring information on *Xiphophorus*. He was an active teacher and enjoyed passing on his wealth of knowledge to students in lectures about carcinogenesis, pathology, genetics, field biology, and ecology. Steve was rarely alone: he was always surrounded by students, always eager

to teach them theoretical knowledge, and always ready to plan and perform scientific experiments. Neither students nor colleagues were bored around Steve due to his unfailing ability to entertain with interesting and funny stories about his varied and unusual life experiences. Of particular note were the stories about his and Klaus Kallman's quests for unique *Xiphophorus* species in the remote mountain streams in the Sierra Occidentalis in Mexico driving a disintegrating late 1970s International Scout I.

As we are writing this tribute, he would have been celebrating his 42nd birthday. Steve was born on April 4, 1966, in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in Flushing. He spent 9 years at New York University, where he earned his B.A., M.Phil., M.S., and Ph.D. and taught as an Adjunct Professor. He joined the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Department of Carcinogenesis in Smithville in 1995, where he became an Assistant Professor. From 2000 to 2003, he moved a short distance to Texas State University in San Marcos, where he worked with Ron Walter as an Assistant Professor and Associate Director of the *Xiphophorus* Genetic Stock Center until 2003. Steve was an integral part of a large NIH Program Project Grant on the "Genetic Determinants of Tumorigenesis" along with Andrew Butler, Dennis Johnson, David Mitchell, Donald Morizot, Rodney Nairn, and Ronald Walter. In 2003 he joined Meenhard Herlyn's laboratory at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia to continue his studies on the biology of melanoma. His unique training gave him the ability to tackle a wide variety of scientific issues. He was particularly interested in cell-cell interactions and



signaling pathways in melanoma and coordinated a group effort to design and produce viral vectors for shRNA silencing and over-expression of genes important in melanomagenesis. His friends and associates at Wistar and the University of Pennsylvania included Meenhard Herlyn, Nikolas Haass, Mizuho Fukunaga-Kalabis, Mercedes Lioni, Ronan McDaid, Suresh Kumar, Akihiro Yoneta, and Xiaowei Xu.

In the face of his own terrible disease, Steve approached his problem scientifically, studying the literature before agreeing to or, in some cases, disagreeing with the choice of treatment. Steve loved life. He enjoyed giving parties at his house with his friends and family. He loved loud rock-n-roll and could be heard singing at work and in the occasional karaoke bar!

Since his youth, Steve had a great passion for ornithology and nature photography. He was an excellent photographer, displayed award-winning pictures at the New York Audubon Society (see his shot of a Great Blue Heron

catching a rat), and gave exhibitions of his work in Central Park. His scientific pictures graced the covers of several journals (e.g., *Genome Research*, 1996; *Marine Biotechnology*, 2001; *Laboratory Investigation*, 2001). He was a life-long birdwatcher (a very good one), and an active member of the Bastrop County (Texas) Audubon Society for many years, where he developed and maintained their Web site. Steve was not only an outstanding scientist and great colleague, but he was also a close friend to many people, a loving husband, a doting father, and a brother and son. On July 22, 2000, he married Margaret LaCava, and in 2002 their daughter Gabriella was born. We hope that Gabriella will look back on this tribute someday and realize how important her father was and how much he contributed to the world around him. He will be missed but remembered for a long time.

To continue Steve's passion for research, teaching, and field biology, Steve's family and friends are creating an annual NYU Steve Kazianis Award and a Steve Kazianis Memorial Field Trip to Jamaica Bay, New York. For further information about the award, field trip, or how to contribute, please contact Jacob Cohen at jacob_cohen@msn.com. This tribute was initiated and coauthored by his close friends Nikolas Haass and David Mitchell.

Address reprint requests to:
Nikolas K. Haass, M.D., Ph.D.

Centenary Institute of Cancer Medicine and
Cell Biology
Locked Bag 6
Newtown, NSW 2042
Australia

E-mail: n.haass@centenary.org.au