

Stewart Cup Memorial Cross Country

Gerry and Brian Stewart

Press Release: July 10, 2003

Members of the University of Alberta are struggling to deal with the loss of two friends, Dr. Gerry Stewart and his brother, Brian Stewart. The family of the two U of A medical students, who disappeared during a mountain climb in Russia, have called off a search for the men.

Gerry, 29, and Brian, 25, went missing June 22 during a climb on Mt. Elbrus, Europe's highest mountain. On June 29, three family members, brothers David and James and their uncle, Robert Leishman, traveled to Russia to take part in the search. They returned last week, resigned to the fact that the two will probably not be found alive.

Known as outstanding students and excellent athletes, both brothers continued a family tradition of pursuing careers in medicine and both continued family traditions of membership in U of A track and field and cross-country running teams. Gerry was to have begun a residency in nephrology at the University of Alberta Hospital this summer. Brian was to have begun his fourth year as a medical student in the U of A Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

"I think you'd have to look a long way back to find a U of A track team that didn't have a member of the Stewart family on it," said Adam Wellstead, an assistant coach with the U of A track and field and cross-country teams.

James Stewart said track and field and cross-country running are family passions. James, Gerry, Brian, their sister, Barb, and Dave, the eldest child, have all been on U of A track teams.

Wellstead knew both men, having raced with Brian on cross-country teams. In more recent years he had helped coach Brian.

"There were two of the most completely selfless, completely team-oriented people I've met," said Wellstead. "They were very talented, but they had to work hard too. They were very well balanced individuals who knew where their priorities were. And when it was time to study they studied. They just knew how to do it. They would just go off and study--the thing was, they would be there for most of the practices too. They were always there for the team."

At track and field practices this week, the mood has been sombre, says Dallas Raudebaugh, a business student who ran and occasionally roomed with Brian.

"It's a tough time. Everybody feels the same way--it's kind of surreal. We all have this little bit of hope that you'll wake up tomorrow and find out they're all right. But that isn't going to happen," he said.

Fellow medical student and teammate Michelle Carle has that same feeling.

"Yesterday at practice it was brutal...we all know what each other is going through, but you don't want to talk about it. You keep hoping for some miracle."

Carle had worked in a lab one summer with Brian, ran with him on U of A teams and met Gerry through other track events. She looked to the two as mentors in athletics and academics, asking for advice in medicine and hoping to emulate the pair's 'give-it-all' attitude towards their sport.

"When Brian ran he always gave all he had. You could never fault him for not trying. You'd look at his face while he was racing and you could see he was giving everything he had at that moment."

Teammate Heidi Nusse says the friendships athletes form are strong because they share moments of pain, commitment, victories, and defeats. "A team is about more than the sport," she said. And so the loss of Brian will be deeply felt.

"It is so hard to find words to do him justice," Nusse said. "Early in my running career I remember seeing this guy who was so smart and committed to everything--his faith, his school, his running. He was absolutely the best role model any athlete could have."

Both brothers had an infectious enthusiasm. Dr. Peter Hamilton, director of internal medicine, says Gerry had a way of lifting the spirits of everyone around him. Even after spending a night on call, doctors and colleagues looked forward to morning rounds with Gerry.

"He was a fantastic kid," said Hamilton. "He really was an uplifting individual. He had a zest for life--enthusiasm and incredible energy. He brought everybody's energy up--patients, doctors, everyone...We're all deeply saddened by this news."

The family has a very strong and long history with the U of A, and the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. Gerry and Brian's father, Dr. Calvin Stewart, graduated in 1969, and Dr. Hugh Stewart, Calvin's brother, graduated several years later. Their mother, Anne Stewart, graduated from the U of A Faculty of Nursing in 1969. Her two brothers, Robert and William Leishman, were also graduates of the University of Alberta medical school. Four of Calvin and Anne Stewart's sons were physicians, David and Gerry graduating from the University of Calgary, and James and Brian studied medicine at the U of A. The faculty plans to establish memorial scholarships named for the brothers. A memorial service will be held on campus this fall.

The Stewart family's website dedicated to Gerry and Brian:

<http://www.dimages.ca/>