

Stephen Bruton's Trip Around the Sun

Funny how life works. Last week, a few days after I got back from my friend Stephen's Bruton's funeral in Fort Worth, I was asked to record some radio spots for Stand Up to Cancer. Recording the spots allowed me to honor my friend Stephen, even in a small way. On May 9th, Stephen Bruton became one of the 1,500 people that die everyday from cancer. That's a mind-numbing statistic. Unfortunately such statistics can go ignored. But people like Stephen Bruton cannot.

Stephen was one of Fort Worth's favorite sons, and one of the most prominent guitar players in the world -- certainly one of the very best to come out of Texas, and that's saying something. He was also a gifted storyteller, a musician's musician, who wrote songs which spoke to, "nothing but the truth" which was the title of one of his albums.

Throughout his illustrious career, Stephen played alongside Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Bonnie Raitt, Jimmy Buffett, Martina McBride, Little Feat, Elvis Costello, Carly Simon, and the list goes on and on. Many of these artists recorded songs Stephen had written. He was a fixture in Kris Kristofferson's music for 40 years -- from the moment he graduated Texas Christian University to working on Kristofferson's latest release that is due in the fall. T Bone Burnett met Stephen as a teenager, where Stephen introduced him to the Appalachian music T Bone would make use of so beautifully in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*.

He was a pretty good actor to boot -- Kris Kristofferson got him a part in *A Star is Born*, and Hollywood kept giving Stephen roles in *Heaven's Gate*, *Michael*, *Sweet Thing*, *Miss Congeniality*, and *The Alamo* among others.

Stephen and I remained friends throughout the years. I'd see him in Fort Worth; he'd visit me in LA. I always felt connected to him as you do with the people you grow up around. Our families both went to Holy Family Church; his father ran a local record store, where I took my first guitar lesson. Even if it had been awhile since we spoke, I was always aware of what he was doing. Stephen was a good reminder to do what you love and love what you do. I will miss him dearly. And he was one brave cat in the face of death.

Today, Stand Up to Cancer is announcing the funding of its first Dream Team collaborations which are going to bring doctors together from different disciplines to work on specific projects aimed at eradicating cancer. I admire the work of Laura Ziskin and all the entertainment folks, the doctors and the scientists who are taking a stand against this disease. And they need to win. Why? Because the lives of the other 1,499 people who died of cancer on the same day as Stephen Bruton were just as important and influential to the friends and families that

surrounded them. They were no less loved, they are no less missed. They just couldn't play the six string like Stephen.

Until the time when cancer no longer claims the lives of creative spirits taken from this earth way too soon, let us heed the wisdom found in the songs of Stephen Bruton:

"Just enjoy this ride on my trip around the sun. Just enjoy this ride 'till it's done."

--Bill Paxton, Actor