

MIKE HALBERSTAM, DOCTOR
(Originally published January 1981)

We just took the trouble to sit down and reread all of the Michael Halberstam editorials that we had snipped out of the journals over past years. We actually had a large collection of them because everything he wrote seemed to be right on target and worth saving, and because Mike Halberstam was, by far, the most intelligent and entertaining writer on medical and related matters to come along in our lifetime. He always had something interesting to say and he said it well, with humor and an unusual ability as a craftsman of the writing art. Mike was shot and killed last month when he and his wife came home one night and found a professional burglar ransacking their house.

Mike was only in his late 40s, a busy, full-time, practicing internist and cardiologist in Washington, D.C. who was not only an active outdoorsman and sportsman but also an author, novelist, radio commentator, teacher, lecturer and panelist. He succeeded Irving Page of Cleveland as editor-in-chief of the controlled circulation journal, *Modern Medicine*, in 1976 and from its pages, as a staunch defender of private medicine, zeroed in on authoritative and bureaucratic folly wherever and whenever it appeared. He was a true liberal, blessed with unbounded energy, genuine humility and an uncommon amount of common sense. He was also one hell of a good doctor.

We never had the pleasure of meeting Mike in person, but we were often in communication by mail asking permission to reprint one of his articles or answering a complimentary note of his about something that had appeared in our local *Bulletin*, which he read with interest.

In one of his editorials reviewing Jonathan Miller's book, *The Body in Question*, he praised the author for reminding us in the profession of its greatness, our debt to the past, and our hopes for the future. He wrote, "Still, remember the man whose job in the circus consisted of cleaning up after the elephants and who, ordered to retire, protested, "What! and leave show business?" It is an absurd and touching story, touching because he had hit on an essential truth—most of us are small change in great fields, and when we lose sight of the greatness of the enterprise, we doubt the worth of our daily work."

Dr. Michael Halberstam was a lot more than "small change" in his field, but he never lost sight of the basic nature of his work, nor of the greatness of the enterprise. Medicine will miss one of its most brilliant spokesmen.