Twenty-five years ago, Brindell Gottlieb gave her ailing, newly wed husband, Milton, an ultimatum: he could either keep his attending physician or keep her.

Milton, who years before had suffered a heart attack and had had two valve replacements, was now experiencing a rapid heart beat. Milton chose Brindell and she chose to book an appointment with the cardiologist she trusted with her heartthrob’s heart: Stephen Corday, MD.

Neither Brindell nor Milton had ever met Dr. Stephen Corday. Yet, he was no stranger: Brindell’s parents, Ruth and Hyman Simon, were patients of Stephen’s father, Eliot Corday, MD, the eminent cardiologist whose clinical, research, and teaching accomplishments guided the development of the cardiology department at Cedars-Sinai.

Under Dr. Stephen Corday’s constant surveillance and good care, Milton enjoyed 21 more years of exceptional health, never again experiencing heart problems, before he died four years ago of unrelated causes. He was 92.

“Stephen gave us 21 years together; 21 years of love and affection,” Brindell says. “Milton was exceptionally bright, but Stephen was the genius that kept him shining!”

Brindell recalls that her parents were astonished when Dr. Eliot Corday, a former president of the American College of Cardiology, had the thoughtfulness to stop by their...
home when they were not well. With great pride, he even gave them a photo of their first granddaughter, Lindsay. It remained on their dresser until their passing. In turn, Ruth would often give the doctor homemade soups, pâtés, and strudels to take to his family. “I have memories of chopped liver on the dinner table,” Dr. Corday says. “I think I was about 10, and I recall being told that it was from Mrs. Simon. My father loved it!”

In honor of the longstanding ties between her family and Stephen’s, Brindell has funded two extraordinary endowments at Cedars-Sinai: the Stephen R. Corday, MD, Chair in Interventional Cardiology and the Eliot Corday, MD, International Prize for Heart Research.

“This was a very special relationship across generations: between father and son, between Stephen’s father and my parents, and between Stephen, Milton, and me,” says Brindell, a mother, grandmother of five, and great-grandmother of three. “Eliot meant so much to my family, as Stephen has meant to mine.”

A petite redhead with mischievous eyes and a sparkling smile, Brindell has a young spirit and vivacious personality. She still runs The Blue House, an antique store she opened in Santa Monica 35 years ago. Her late husband, who was a property developer and an economics professor, remains a lively presence at “The Milton,” the elegant hilltop home in Bel Air that bears his name.

Standing beside a bronze bust of Milton in the stylish study that had served as his office, Brindell and Stephen trade memories about the man who, as Brindell puts it, made this gift possible.

“He never used a swear word in his life, never criticized anybody, never put anybody down,” Brindell shares. “When I would come home upset about something, he never responded with any negativity. And if I didn’t like his response, he’d say, ‘Oh, honey, would you feel better if I got upset?’ That set the tone of our marriage for the next 20 years.”

Dr. Stephen Corday and Brindell Gottlieb’s friendship is so deep that they find a way to discuss even potentially awkward topics, such as Stephen’s initial reaction when Brindell informed him she wanted to “get him a chair.”

“He said, ‘That’s nice,’ and that was it,” she says. “I was a little surprised. I thought he would be a little more excited by it!”

Blushing slightly, Stephen admits that he didn’t really understand what she was offering. Eight hours later, when her offer had sunk in, he called and thanked her profusely.

“It was like someone saying, ‘I would like to give you a house and a new car,’” he says. “I was overwhelmed and stunned.”

The chair named in Stephen’s honor was awarded to Rajendra (Raj) Makkar, MD, associate director of Cedars-Sinai’s Heart Institute and director of the Interventional Cardiology and Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. Funds generated by the endowment will, among other things, support research in non-surgical techniques to treat a variety of heart valve malfunctions and transport stem cell therapies directly into damaged heart tissues.

Suspecting that Stephen might feel uncomfortable with an endowed chair in his name, Brindell expanded her gift to honor Stephen’s father, who suffered from aortic stenosis—the same ailment that afflicted Milton—and died in 1999. Stephen, who started accompanying his father on rounds when he was just three years old, practiced cardiology with his father for 20 years, and still treats some of his father’s patients. The Eliot Corday Prize is an annual award meant to honor top physicians from around the world who are also doing groundbreaking work in cardiac research.

As they share a simple dinner together, Brindell reaches for Stephen’s hand to describe the joy she felt in making a double gift to honor two generations of families and doctors who meant so much to one another.

“The thrill of being able to do this is greater than anything I’ve ever done in my life,” Brindell says, as tears fill her eyes. “I hope everyone has an opportunity to feel this exultation someday.”

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By Kim Kowsky

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