

Charles Krauthammer — A Life That Will Always Matter



Charles Krauthammer (photo by John Daly)

In a piece in *The Washington Post* last Friday, syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer announced some devastating personal news to his readers and fans. The cancer that had been removed from his body through surgery last August (complications from which have kept him hospitalized ever since) has returned and is spreading rapidly. His doctors have given him only weeks to live.

The revelation took the wind out of many of us who've long admired the conservative thought leader, and had eagerly been awaiting his return to television and published editorial (which was expected to happen as early as late summer). Krauthammer's vast depth of knowledge and his refined and thoughtful intellect have made him perhaps the most insightful political commentator in the country. His valuable takes on big stories have been sorely missed and desperately needed at a time when our news-media landscape has reached unprecedented levels of intellectual shallowness and tribal gamesmanship.

An independent thinker and a man of unquestionable character (not to mention a sharp and humble sense of humor), Krauthammer has long been a saving grace to serious news-commentary consumers — those looking for an *adult in the room* to give it to them straight, without hidden agendas or partisan fluff. They've counted on him to strengthen their

understanding of various issues, and help them formulate their positions. It's a service he has provided with eloquence, wisdom, and reliability.

The outpouring of heartache and support in reaction to Krauthammer's announcement has been tremendous. Friends and colleagues have been extending **meaningful tributes**, showering him with well-deserved accolades, and sharing endearing stories. Here are a few you'll want to check out (there will assuredly be many more in the coming days):

- **[A Tribute to Charles Krauthammer \(The Weekly Standard Podcast\)](#)**
- **[The Unsinkable Dr. Krauthammer, by Chris Stirewalt](#)**
- **[Fridays Without Charles, by The Washington Post Editorial Board](#)**

I would also highly recommend watching or re-watching the **special that Fox News ran on him** back in 2013, when he was promoting his excellent book, *Things That Matter*. It delves into his personal background (including the physical challenges he has overcome), as well as his career in and out of politics

I don't know Charles Krauthammer personally, though we did meet on one occasion (I'll get to that later). Still, he has been incredibly influential on my work as a writer and commentator. In fact, he was one of the people who first attracted me to the arena of political commentary, along with Bernard Goldberg. And I know I'm not alone in that respect.

Truth be told, it doesn't necessarily take a boatload of talent to make a name for yourself in this digital-age of the news media. One can build a pretty impressive (and lucrative) online presence just by tapping into partisan angst and tossing red meat at a political base. Many have done just that by emulating (on a much smaller scale) the political-media powerhouses you'll find on the cable news networks in the prime-time hour.

What's much harder (but far more important) is the ability to persuade people with a principled, intellectually-sound argument or idea that they're initially (and perhaps instinctively) resistant to. To me, that has always been the true value of good commentary. This approach requires a commentator to view his or her role not as a product aimed at a target market, but rather as a public service aimed at strengthening knowledge, a situation, or an environment. And that's what I've always recognized Krauthammer's frame of reference to be.

When Krauthammer presents his thoughts on a topic (whether it be on television, in a

lecture hall, or through his writing), he does so — I believe — as a contributor to the betterment of society and the advancement of peace and prosperity. To Krauthammer, these are the things that matter (no pun intended). He has admirably respected his readers and listeners enough not to cater to their political instincts. Instead, he has leveled with his audience, and provided them with helpful, qualified insight. And in doing so, he has changed a lot of minds and shaped a lot of views (including mine).

That's how it should be.

One of Krauthammer's favorite quotes comes from playwright Tom Stoddard: "Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little."

I think that's absolutely right, and I don't think anyone can honestly argue that Dr. Krauthammer's words haven't nudged the world, at least a little.

I'm proud to have had this man as a role model. He is someone I admire beyond words. I've learned a lot from his work and personal integrity, and I think of him whenever I'm working a serious thought-piece. And though I don't always live up to the example he has put forth, I certainly try (and will continue to).

As I mentioned earlier, I did have the honor and privilege of meeting Dr. Krauthammer, and I'll go ahead and finish out this column by describing the experience.

It happened about a year ago at a *Weekly Standard* event in Colorado Springs. Knowing he was one of the speakers, I purchased a ticket (I really couldn't afford) and ended up sharing a brief conversation with the man. I wish I could say that it was a particularly substantive discussion, but the truth is that we were in a loud room and surrounded by lots of people who were just as eager to introduce themselves as I was. We mostly just exchanged pleasantries before smiling for the camera:



However, I did come away from that event with a rather amusing story — one that illustrates Krauthammer’s healthy sense of humor that is so often referenced by those who know him.

The agenda for that day of the event included two Krauthammer appearances in the venue’s ballroom. The first one was a one-on-one interview with Bill Kristol, in which Krauthammer (who received a huge ovation before Kristol even had a chance to introduce him) offered his thoughts on President Trump and a number of other topics. As expected, it was a fascinating and insightful exchange, enhanced by Krauthammer’s legendary charm.

In the second appearance, he joined a panel of other well-known commentators for a question and answer session with the audience. This ended up being a much more spirited forum than I had anticipated, being that the audience seemed split about 50/50 between Trump supporters and Trump skeptics. Most of the commentators on stage (including Krauthammer) fell into the latter category.

One of the Trump supporters that stepped up to the microphone addressed Krauthammer directly, telling him that he was going to lay out a baseball metaphor (knowing that Krauthammer is a big baseball fan).

The man then described a scene (in a surprising amount of detail) of a minor-league player entering the big leagues, and in his first step up to the plate in his first big game, he hits a home-run high up into the stands. The man then explained that the player's name was Trump, and that the home-run was the nomination of Supreme Court Justice, Neil Gorsuch. He then asked Krauthammer for his thoughts on why Trump's presidency shouldn't be defined by that achievement alone.

Krauthammer, without missing a beat, advanced the metaphor. He asked the questioner to envision the baseball that Trump had hit into the stands colliding with one of the park's floodlights, crashing through bulbs, sending shards of glass down onto spectators, and causing an electrical fire.

Laughter filled the room, but Krauthammer wasn't done. He described the stadium going up in flames, with thousands of baseball fans perishing.

"Men, women, and children!" I believe he added, much to the amusement of the audience.

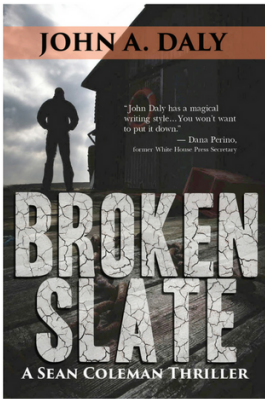
If I recall correctly, he took the metaphor even further (perhaps including the igniting of nearby buildings). Regardless, when he was finished, he received a loud ovation for his creativity and sharp wit, before moving onto a more direct answer of the man's question.

It was a true pleasure listening to him that day. He is an irreplaceable figure.

Thank you Charles, for your wisdom, your decency, and your immeasurable contributions to this great nation. Yours is a life that truly does matter, and it will continue to matter to me and millions of others for a very long time.

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