

## Stelian: the governor's Chappaquiddick?

On July 21, the day that Michael Dukakis capped his political comeback by accepting the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ran a political commentary by Christopher Lydon, a former *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* reporter who now anchors the 10 o'clock news on Boston's public TV station WGBH. Lydon warned convention delegates that a "Tragic Sibling Rivalry Toughened Dukakis."

"An excruciating tragedy of sibling rivalry lies close to the mainspring of Dukakis's politics. . . . Comparable brother troubles have formed a lot of political characters this century—such as Jimmy Carter, for example, whose brother Billy, Miss Lillian said, was the brightest of her children. But Michael Dukakis's anguish is surely deeper because his beloved rival Stelian collapsed under the strain and died young. . . ."

"Stelian Dukakis, three years older than Michael, was an ace student, athlete and school politician until Michael trumped him in every field. Just when the 17-year-old Michael posted his personal best in sports, a 3.31 time in the Boston Marathon of 1951, Stelian broke down at Bates College, attempted suicide, and came home to family care. Over the years, he was estranged, despondent, sometimes openly at war with Michael's public triumphs.

"Then in 1973, Stelian got knocked off his bicycle by a hit-and-run driver. For four months, he lay unconscious in a coma before his family, Michael included, pulled the life supports."

1973 was not 1988. The rash of depression-era propaganda for euthanasia, mercy killing, "death with dignity," plug-pulling and other forms of literal murder was unheard of. Back in 1973, murder was murder.

What's worse, if a July 25, 1988 *Newsweek* magazine profile is accurate, brother Stelian, four months and twelve days in a coma following the March 17, 1973 hit-and-run incident, was beginning to show signs of coming out of the coma—when the plug was pulled. Nearly two months to the day after he buried his troublesome brother, on Oct. 1, 1973, Michael Dukakis formally declared his candidacy for governor of Massachusetts.

### 'Sibling rivalry was something awful'

To this day, Stelian Dukakis's tragic life—and death—are steeped in unanswered questions, the kind that spark the interests of clinical psychiatrists and police investigators alike. According to the Democratic nominee's semi-official cam-

paigned biography, *Dukakis: An American Odyssey*, by *Boston Globe* reporters Charles Kenney and Robert L. Turner, Stelian's 1951 mental collapse and attempted suicide, apparently triggered in large measure by the rivalry with brother Mike, posed continuing political problems for Michael Dukakis throughout the last dozen years of Stelian's life.

"After Stelian's breakdown, situations began to arise in which he seemed to compete with Michael's record—and usually fell short. . . . In the most bizarre and hurtful episode, Stelian went around Brookline one evening dropping off leaflets that urged people to vote against his brother. The details are sketchy, no copy of the leaflet apparently survived. There is even some uncertainty about when the incident occurred. . . ."

According to the biographers, when the word got out that Stelian was circulating an obviously personal and damning leaflet against his brother, the entire Dukakis campaign organization—apparently on orders from Kitty Dukakis—launched a late-night dragnet to grab up every single copy of the document and destroy them all.

In 1972, just as Michael Dukakis, now back as a full partner at his old Brahmin law firm, Hill and Barlow, was making his decision to run for governor, brother Stelian sought and won the GOP nomination for the state representative seat that Michael had formerly held. Although he lost the general election, Stelian's continued involvement in state politics was described by one Dukakis political intimate, Haskell Kassler, as "unhealthy."

According to Kenney and Turner's account of the tragedy that eventually claimed Stelian Dukakis's life, "It was a Saturday night, March 17, 1973, and Stelian was riding his bicycle on Winchester Street in Brookline, near his home at 198 St. Paul Street. The bicycle was his only means of transportation, and he had ridden it without incident for years, but that night, he was struck by a car. It was a terrible accident—his mother still remembers that 'the bicycle was doubled over, it was so bad'—but the driver did not stop and was never found."

According to the *Boston Herald American* of March 31, 1973, police were provided with all the information normally required to track down a hit-and-run driver:

"The brother of former state rep. Michael S. Dukakis of Brookline was seriously injured in a hit and run accident in one of several weekend crashes that took the lives of a Waltham man and a Rumford, Me. resident.

"Stelian P. Dukakis, 42, of Brookline was struck by a car while riding his bicycle on Winchester St. . . ."

"Brookline police said Dukakis was taken to Beth Israel Hospital. His condition is described as grave. Police said he was struck by a Volkswagen and thrown to the pavement, landing on his head. The car sped away, witnesses said, but police were supplied with the registration number.

"Dukakis's brother Michael, was an unsuccessful candidate for Lieutenant Governor in the last state election."