

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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## “Howes' Illnesses of the Famous: *Whitney Houston*”

Whitney Elizabeth Houston was born in 1963 in Newark, New Jersey and little did she know of the tumultuous and, at times, chaotic life ahead of her. Her life and early death tell a cautionary tale of success countered by turmoil and overindulgence. As a teen fashion model, she appeared on the cover of *Glamour*. Whitney's mother, Cissy Houston, recorded "Midnight Train To Georgia" years before Gladys Knight and Cissy was a member of the Sweet Inspirations, who backed up Elvis Presley. Whitney was a natural for entertainment with cousins such as Dionne and Dee Dee Warick and her early career was managed by her father, who, before his 2003 death, unsuccessfully sued her for past due compensation. She had two miscarriages, one in 1994 and another in 1996. Many of these early on factors may have led to the rumors of an eating disorder and her more obvious drug problems and her trips in and out of rehab over the years. Sadly, cocaine, marijuana and an assortment of pills added additional stress to her turbulent life and in 2000, she was arrested at an airport with "weed" in her luggage. She plea bargained and five months later her record was miraculously wiped clean. She said in a 2002 Dianne Sawyer interview, "First of all, let's get one thing straight. Crack is cheap. I make too much for me to ever smoke crack...Crack is wack." Yet, in 2003, her husband, singer Bobby Brown, was arrested for battery, which left her with facial injuries, but she was hospitalized with so-called food poisoning. She separated from Brown in 2006 and most of their Georgia mansion possessions were sold to cover debts. Tragically, she died in 2012 in Los Angeles and her death was classified as an accidental drowning (possible "hot tub syndrome"), to which heart disease and chronic cocaine use contributed. Marijuana, Flexeril, Benadryl and Xanax were in her system. Cigarettes and drugs likely contributed to her heart disease. Whitney's rendition of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You" has been one of the best selling songs ever recorded. She had seven consecutive #1 hit singles, and 23 Top Ten recordings. This strikingly attractive black lady was once "movie star beautiful" starring in *The Bodyguard* and *Waiting To Exhale*. But, shocking paparazzi photos of her in her latter years showed her to be "frightfully emaciated," "skeletal and frail" and "scarily skinny." During the difficult times with Bobby Brown and her bouts with addiction, she rarely made public appearances. Still, her spectacular voice won her six Grammys: 1985, 1987, three in 1993, and one in 1999.

In the America that I love, please remember Whitney Houston, "I (We) Will Always Love You."

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