



Humanitarian Award

Carl A. Hammerschlag, MD '64

I was 25 years old when I graduated from Upstate in 1964, and now I'm 80 and retiring after 55 years of practice. Here's a brief synopsis of what I've learned about what it means to be a doctor and practice medicine.

The seminal influence in my life was being the first-born son of Holocaust survivors. Born in New York City in 1939, I learned early on that my birth was living proof they could not annihilate my tribe, and it was my responsibility to speak for those on whose ashes I stood who could not speak for themselves. I've always identified with the powerless and persecuted, and generally root for the underdog.

I was raised in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan along with 100,000 other refugee German Jews. I'm the grateful recipient of a great New York City public school education; graduated from Stuyvesant High School in 1956, CCNY in 1960, and then came to SUNY Upstate as the first class of that tumultuous decade.

I was engaged to be married and planned to wait until I finished my first year so I could focus on getting through. Being apart proved distracting, however, so Elaine and I decided to get married at Christmas break after the "head and neck" exam. By the time I graduated we had two daughters.

Marriage, parenthood, medical school . . . it was an intense time and we got through it with the support of great teachers who planted the seeds for our "sacred profession," holy work. Don Samson taught the freshman physical diagnosis course

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and told us that the most important tool in our medicine box was our ability to look and listen. While we examined each other, he'd drop in to look and listen. He pointed to a little brown spot on my chest and asked me if I knew what it was? I said, "It's a birthmark, I've always had it," and he said, "No, that's a supernumerary nipple." Every time I look at it, he reminds me to practice that kind of medicine.

Dave Whitlock made Anatomy a magical journey into inner space. We learned about pathology from a great teacher, Bob Rohner, who had a show-stopping flair for colorfully explaining the disease mechanism. And Tom Szasz challenged us to look differently at the disease model as it applied to mental health.

Much was happening . . .

the day and night grind that's medical school was physically and emotionally wearing, plus being a new husband and father, and a nation in turmoil after JFK's assassination, the struggle for civil rights, and an escalating war in Vietnam. It was also a time of Camelot dreams and believing that we could make a difference in changing the world. We became doctors in 1964 and the Beatles made their inaugural visit to the U.S.

I joined the United States Public Health Service, Indian Health Service to satisfy my military obligation with plans, upon completion, to follow a traditional medical path. I knew nothing about Indians, except that I cheered for their side in the movies. But Native Americans filled me with a sense of romance, and I identified with their struggles to survive.

What I thought would be a two-year commitment turned into 20. After completing my military obligation, I began my psychiatric residency at Yale in 1967. It, too, was a tumultuous time, with the National Guard called in to quell rioting. It proved to be an extraordinary training ground for someone interested in Community Psychiatry.

In 1970, I returned to the IHS as Chief of Psychiatry at the Phoenix Indian Hospital; I learned to fly a single engine Cessna and traveled weekly to Indian Reservations throughout the state, where I taught doctors, nurses, teachers, judges, and probation officers the principles and practice of community mental health.

In Indian Country, I was also exposed to traditional healers and learned from them what it



Dr. Hammerschlag with a Syrian family in a refugee camp near Mafraq, Jordan, 2013



Dr. Hammerschlag with Soloho, Whistling Arrows Hopi medicine man, friend and mentor, 1975



Dr. Hammerschlag with his family at Thanksgiving in Sayulita, Mexico, 2018

meant to be healthy, something we were not taught in medical school (where health was a diagnosis of exclusion—if you weren't sick then you were healthy).

The Navajo word for health is Hozho, which is also the same word for truth, beauty, balance, harmony, and the Great Spirit. What a wonderful concept that you're healthy when what you know in your head, reveal by your actions, and feel in your heart are all telling the same story. Then you're in truth, balance, and harmony.

Most of us trained in the Western medical model tend to dramatically overemphasize what we know in our heads and subordinate what we feel in our hearts. If what you are saying, believing, and doing are not telling the same story, you will get sick. The science of medicine is the genius of our diagnostic and interventional skills; the art of medicine is in connecting with patients at a heartfelt level, to trust our intuition, be totally engaged in the process, and hopefully inspire them to take better care of themselves.



An all-night Native American healing ceremony for Dr. Hammerschlag on the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation, Dec. 2017

From medicine men and women, and from Milton Erickson, the genius American hypnotherapist, I learned about the power of words, rituals, and the therapeutic impact of trance and creating ceremonies, sometimes even ordeals. It was a transformational journey from doctor to healer. I learned how to intensify my healing power and become totally involved in the

healing process rather than a dispassionate clinical observer.

In 1986, I began a private practice and started writing books (*The Dancing Healers; The Theft of the Spirit; Healing Ceremonies*, and later, children's books too). I also began speaking publicly, which unexpectedly led to a professional speaking career that continues still. I talk about what I've learned about

how people get sick and the many ways they can get well and about the practical applications of what we now call the science of psychoneuroimmunology.

With Native healers, I co-founded the Turtle Island Project, which conducts workshops integrating indigenous wisdom with Western science to help doctors and patients to magnify their healing power.

In 1991, I met Patch Adams, MD, perhaps the world's most recognized humanitarian clown, who opened me up to the power of a "red nose" to connect with people at a heartfelt level.

Clowning is the best way I know to get out of my head and into my soul; it gets me away from my preconceptions, judgments, and analytic head-tripping and into an open-hearted place.

Over the last 30 years, we've clowned in war zones, disaster areas, refugee camps, hospices, orphanages, mental institutions and prisons. It doesn't matter what conditions people face; having a chance to play and laugh reminds them and us of our shared humanity.

My clown character is a Flamingo Ballerina. I'm 6' 6" tall and I wear pink tights, a tutu, and a flamingo headdress. At the very least, people giggle, but mostly it elicits hysterical laughter which is a great equalizer. My size, degrees, and voice don't matter.

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These experiences became the model for The Healing Corps (founded in 2015), which conducts clown healing workshops for healthcare professionals, training them how to deeply connect with people in a short time.

Participants become "truth fairies" and we talk to people in public places (street corners, parks, shopping malls, homeless shelters, and treatment facilities.) No filling out insurance forms, HIPPA releases,

or liability waivers, no diagnoses or drug prescriptions, just a sensitive ear and an open heart that makes a difference.

I am so grateful to have begun my medical career at Upstate and to end it here. Whatever I may have done since graduating to deserve this honor is testimony to Elaine, my wife of 59 years. She has tolerated my peculiarities and loved me in spite of them. We have three daughters, five grandchildren, and a great-grandchild, whom I adore. And I'm surrounded by relatives and friends from all over the world who've walked and are walking this healing journey with me. I accept this honor for them all. Mi Takuye Oyasin (For All My Relations). ■

Bio Submitted by Dr. Hammerschlag