



HUMANITARIAN ALUMNUS

Mark H. Katz, MD

Class of 1975

Written by Paul Grossberg, MD, Class of 1975

Mark Katz, MD, a native of New York City, moved to Syracuse ("right up the road" from Alma Mater Cornell) in 1971 to attend Upstate. He remembers the link between his interview for medical school and his interest in the humanities which even then defined him: "I had a B average in my college science classes, and virtually straight As in my humanities—believe me, I was nervous! I was supposed to be interviewed by a general surgeon who was delayed in the O.R. that day, so Rolla Hill, MD, then Chief of Pathology, and a member of the Admissions Committee, stepped in at the last minute. We talked about life and travel, philosophy and art, but not at all about science. And at the end of the interview, he told me, 'Our freshman class is completely selected as of now, but I'm going to do my best, even fight, to get you in it. We need people who are more interested in the humanities to become physicians.'"

From the beginning, as our class of 150 eager students learned the art and science of medicine, Mark befriended everyone equally and demonstrated integrating humanism and medicine seamlessly together. Indeed, at the end of medical school in 1975, graduating Cum Laude and Alpha Omega Alpha, he was that year's recipient of The Stuart I. Gurman Award, given to the medical student who best exemplifies that "living and learning go together." After residency in internal medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a few years as a full-time emergency physician, he moved to Los Angeles in 1985, just as the AIDS epidemic was taking hold, in

part, to be in a place where he could be a more "alternative-thinking and acting physician." He had also come out as gay while in medical school, something which he says deepened his sense of compassion, as well as personal activism.

He started out doing volunteer work for LA Shanti, one of Los Angeles' many AIDS-service organizations (ASOs), and within a year was giving medical presentations to persons living with HIV, health care workers, community and political groups, and "just about anyone else who wanted to listen."

"This was a chance for me to combine my interest in teaching, my sense of duty, and, of course, the art of medicine. I wish it had never happened, but being in Los Angeles, the third most impacted city in the country, as an openly gay physician, this exercise of compassion became my passion," Katz said.

At Kaiser Permanente of Southern California, the HMO where he has worked since 1985, he started the first HIV-dedicated clinic in 1988, and wistfully adds, "Two of my patients from that summer *are still* my patients, but, of course, most of them have long passed on. I keep that original roster in my desk drawer, and look at it every few weeks—I just have to keep saying their names." He served as Kaiser's Regional HIV/AIDS Physician Coordinator from 1992 to 2006 (and has stayed on in the capacity of Advisor since then), ultimately responsible for the care of Southern California Kaiser's more than 5,000 identified HIV-positive patients.

Within the Los Angeles community, Mark has served on numerous Boards of



Directors as well as Community Advisory Boards, and he is proudest of two types of presentations that have endured through the years: First, he delivered a monthly HIV Medical Update for another ASO, Being Alive, from 1988 through 1997, to a sometimes frightened, often impassioned, and ultimately informed community. He notes that the Updates stopped after the Internet became a part of everyday life, and also after 1996 saw the successful combinations of anti-HIV medications prolonging the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Secondly, he has delivered, by his estimate, about a thousand HIV-related lectures. These presentations, virtually all done *pro bono*, have taken him to 25 states as well as to India and Japan, to day camps and universities, to political rallies and to the agendas of elected officials. Dr. Katz's awards include Communities Advocating

Emergency AIDS Relief (CAEAR) Partnership Award (2010); Outstanding Teacher Award: Professionalism and the Practice of Medicine (Keck School of Medicine, 2009); Gay Heroes Award (city of West Hollywood, 2008), Community Service Award (UCLA AIDS Institute, 2001); Commitment to Community Through Spirituality Award (Congregation Kol Ami, 1996); Spirit of Hope Award (Being Alive, 1993); Community Service Award (Jewish AIDS Services, 1993), and many others.

At a 2006 Los Angeles commemoration of 25 years since the beginning of the epidemic, Mark organized what turned out to be an event attended by hundreds. He recalls, "As I looked around and noticed the relationships I had forged over the years

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of AIDS-service work I had a bittersweet moment: Every day that I live, I wish this epidemic had never happened, but given that it did, I am humbled beyond words to have been a part of it. The people I have met through this work, including my husband (Robert Goodman) [*they met in 1995, married in 2008*], have brought me closer to peace and closer to God despite the innumerable difficult moments and losses we have had to endure." He and Robert burst with pride when they speak of their adopted son, Marcus Joseph Goodman-Katz — born in 2001, adopted in 2004, and by my own observation, already becoming a humanitarian, embracing his fathers' extraordinary values. Upstate's humanitarian legacy lives on.