



Michael Dietz, M.D. 1949-2009

My partner and friend, Michael Dietz, died January 17, 2009, from complications after a medical procedure. I met Michael shortly after Suzanne and he moved to Humboldt County from Martha's Vineyard in late 1992. Bob Brenman had hired him for Northcoast Medical Group just before Tim Edell and Dan Brandenburg moved out of the area. Even before Michael arrived, Bob joined Eureka Internal Medicine and brought the new rheumatologist with him. Michael used to say that practicing on Martha's Vineyard was great for 1/4 of the year, when the summer folk swelled the population, but a struggle for the other 9 depopulated months.

Being an island, it also made visiting family and traveling a challenge.

Michael was born in Philadelphia, the oldest of 5 children. He attended Franklin and Marshall College, then got his medical degree from Temple University. His internship and residency were at Barnes Hospital of Washington University, in St. Louis. His rheumatology fellowship was at UCLA, followed by 2 years of basic science research in immunogenetics at Harvard Medical School.

His Mother, Fay, tells of Michael developing post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis at age 10, necessitating 3 months of enforced bedrest. During this time, he asked for a sketchpad and began his lifelong love of drawing and art by sketching objects and scenes outside his window. In recent years, he even had a studio in Arcata, and made a point of painting one day a week.

Michael also loved music. He convinced his Dad to buy him an accordion, and played it up to the age of 13. At an office birthday celebration, one of our medical assistants was playing her accordion, and Michael took it and slammed out a few songs from that distant memory. He also played the acoustic guitar and harmonica, learning them his first year of medical school. A lover of Dylan, many a time he would don his harmonica harness and strum and blow at his house or mine. Not Dylan, but not bad. Listening to classical music was also a passion. I think Bach was his favorite. Michael had a long standing sleep disturbance, which may explain why Bach's Goldberg Variations spoke to him: It was said to have been written by Bach for the Russian ambassador to Saxony, who was an insomniac, for Bach's young protégé, Goldberg to play on the piano during the ambassador's long sleepless nights. (True or not, it makes a good story.)

In recent years, Michael got back into ping-pong, which he learned while working in the lab at Harvard, playing with the Asians at lunch. Michael would play with the big boys at the Arcata Community Center on Wednesday nights. He spun every ball, always threw me off guard. He was good, I'm not bad, and we had many a close game.

Michael always talked about the great fishing on Martha's Vineyard—true or not—and continued to flyfish on our rivers. He was a good caster, knew how to read water, but, like the rest of us, felt our fishing was somewhat overrated.

Yet even with all his varied interests, his son, Isaac, was the love of his life. When Isaac was young, he and Suzanne would keep journals, and weekly write about Isaac. At his family memorial service, Suzanne shared some of those entries, and it choked me up, feeling the love and joy he had having Isaac in his life.

In remembering their brother, Michael's sibs all mention his dancing. They say he taught them all to dance. He loved Motown, but had the "Philadelphia moves."

For me, Michael died too soon. He was a great doctor, artist, fisherman, musician, father, and friend. I, with many others, will miss his greatly.

by Richard Wolf, M.D.