

Editorial • Remembering Fitz

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On February 14, 2001, I met Dr. David FitzGerald when I arrived on the SUNY campus in Manhattan to interview for his residency in Pediatric Optometry. Although I did not realize it at the time, that meeting would prove to be the beginning of a deep friendship that lasted for two decades. It is with great sadness, but also a profound sense of privilege and honor, that I write this tribute to my cherished friend and mentor.

Fitz, as many of us knew him, was a lifelong New Yorker, born and raised in Newburgh in the Hudson Valley. Following graduation from Providence College, he earned his Doctor of Optometry degree from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, graduating with honors. He served as a Captain in the United States Army, after which time he returned to Newburgh to practice, where he remained for 30 years. Fitz was also a lifelong educator, serving on the faculty of the Optometric Center of New York from 1968 to 1971 and the faculty of the State University of New York College of Optometry from 1971 until his retirement in 2005. During his tenure at SUNY, Fitz helped to develop both the Infant Vision Clinic and the residency program in Pediatric Optometry and served as the residency supervisor from 1995 to 2005. In addition, he authored numerous professional posters, articles, and book chapters; lectured extensively; and was active in both the College of Optometrists in Vision Development and the American Academy of Optometry. Fitz earned fellowship status in both COVD and AAO, and he was the first Diplomate in Pediatric Optometry in the Academy's Binocular Vision, Perception, and Pediatric Optometry Section. In addition to his many optometric accomplishments (there are far more than can be mentioned here), Fitz was extremely active in his community, serving on Boards and volunteering for committees nonstop. He was especially active in the Newburgh Lions' Club, serving as President twice and being honored with an array of well-deserved awards.



The clinical setting is where Fitz truly shone. He was unmatched in his ability to obtain exam findings on even the most reluctant children! He displayed his compassion and skill every time he entered a room, and he was unfailingly patient and kind to all. (I will forever hear him calling patients "Petunia!") No one could ask for a better mentor, for both patient care and a career in academia. (It is largely due to his influence that I chose to pursue optometric education.) We shared an office from 2002 to 2005, and I remember fondly the discussions that we had about patient care, faculty life, our families...and good Irish whiskey! Wednesday afternoons at Annie Moore's after clinic will always be a cherished memory.

It is easy to list the accomplishments of such a man as Dave FitzGerald (always with a capital G!), but such a list does not begin to describe the impact that he had on so many—students, residents, colleagues, and friends. Several of these have provided remembrances:

Dedications

Dr. Dave FitzGerald has touched and changed so many people's lives: his patients, his students, his residents, his colleagues, and most importantly, his friends. His contribution to optometry is immeasurable. We all stand on the shoulders of this giant in our profession. For those of us who knew him personally, the echo of his laugh will always be in our hearts. Dave, I know you are making the angels smile, my friend.

***Diane Adamczyk, OD; Director of Residency
Education, SUNY***

Dave is a one-of-a-kind colleague and friend. One of the blessings in my professional life was being Dave's office mate for many years. It was eating breakfast with him four days a week, in our office together, that I came to appreciate the dedication he had to students and to mentoring junior faculty, which I was how I first met Dave. I want to honor Dave with this Irish blessing that embodies who he was:

May good luck be with you wherever you go, and your blessings outnumber the shamrocks that grow. May your days be many and your troubles be few, may all God's blessings descend upon you, may peace be within you, may your heart be strong, may you find what you're seeking wherever you roam.

I miss you Dave.

Ida Chung, OD; Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Western University College of Optometry

"Fitz" was my mentor in pediatric vision. After completing my residency, we became colleagues and friends. We co-authored over a half a dozen papers, and it was his urging and support that prompted it all. He would never accept less than 100% effort. I can say firsthand that he had the patience of a saint. Even with my constant barrage of questions and comments, he always listened patiently and never dismissed me, although on occasion, through his sarcastic humor, would let me know I was wrong. For close to 25 years, until his retirement from SUNY, I continued to learn from this giant who had a heart the size of one. A few weeks before he passed away, I contacted him to thank him for everything, and this was the reply I received from him:

It was my pleasure to have you as a student, resident, colleague, and friend,

Good luck and GOD BLESS you and yours.

ENJOY!

Dave / Fitz / Dr. FitzGerald / Your Co-author

The consummate teacher, teaching until the end. To see how children related to him was unbelievable, and his impact on thousands of pediatric patients throughout his career is his legacy. Irish eyes are smiling knowing he is in a better place.

Ira Krumholtz, OD; Assistant Clinical Professor, SUNY

Dave was a great man who touched many lives. From the patients whose lives he improved by helping their vision, to the generations of students who he taught, to the colleagues he taught with, he was a

paramount professional who truly made the world a better place.

I miss his sense of humor, his telling it like it is: "your lack of planning does not constitute an emergency for me." Dave was truly one of a kind. Although he had a crew cut and could come across as tough, he was caring and loving.

I feel honored to have been his student, colleague, and friend. He inspired and mentored me to become board certified in vision development and achieve my FCOVD. He was there when I received my COVD Fellowship. I fondly recall several professional meetings that we attended together and had fun sightseeing together.

May his memory be a blessing to us all.

Andrea Thau, OD; Past President, AOA

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and get to know "Fitz," as many of us affectionately referred to Dr. FitzGerald. He was a warm and caring doctor, mentor, and friend. His vivacious laugh brought a smile to everyone's face, and his wisdom and life lessons have been a wonderful guide over the years.

Marilyn Vricella, OD; Assistant Clinical Professor, SUNY

My own residency year was 2001 – 2002. Just over two months into my residency, New York City was devastated by the events of 9/11. There is no way that I can articulate what Fitz' presence meant to me during that time. He was a rock on which to learn,



and he quickly became my "New York Dad." I was honored to share a special dance with him at my wedding. While we, too, co-authored papers (including my first publication) and book chapters, it was his friendship that meant the most. I will always remember Fitz' laugh, his jokes (some of which are better left unpublished!), and the warm, caring spirit with which he approached life. The

last time that I spoke to Fitz, I made sure to tell him again how very much he meant to me. He closed our conversation with "I love you, dear." I love you, too, Fitz. Thanks for everything.

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