



**Marion Kraskin**

### **Linda Sanet**

I first met Marion Kraskin in 1975, when Bob was a Resident and I was enrolled in the Optometric Technician program at OCNY/SUNY.

Bob was attending the Skeffington meeting in Washington, DC, and as a non-OD, I was allowed to sit in the back of the room as a silent observer.

Bob and Marion had invited us to stay at their home, and honestly I was quite nervous. But they were most kind and generous hosts and I felt comfortable soon after arriving.

Marion was a vision therapist extraordinaire, and I hoped that some day I could be like her. She was very supportive and encouraged me to finish my coursework and get my credential. This was at a time when many considered vision therapists to be an “extra pair of hands” in the VT room.

Marion was the epitome of Southern Hospitality. She was also quite a firecracker, who would not take guff from anyone.

### **Margaret Ronis**

I was fortunate to spend 3 summers as a teen working in the office of Dr. Kraskin, working with him and Marion. I learned so much from both of them. I learned about behavioral optometry and vision therapy. I also learned how to relate to others. Marion taught me to not be afraid to stand up for my convictions and not to be afraid to speak my mind. She was a role model of a strong, kind, intelligent woman

to look up to. She was a wonderful hostess. And she always wanted to hear about my family and scolded me if I didn't keep in touch. I will miss her, especially when coming to the annual KISS meeting.

### **Steve Gallop**

The Kraskins for many years hosted SUNY residents for what they called “Live-a-week of Optometry” on the tail end of what was then known as the Skeffington Invitational Symposium on Vision hosted by Bob Kraskin (now hosted by Jeffrey, as the Kraskin Invitational Skeffington Symposium on Vision or KISS in loving tribute to Bob after his untimely passing). I was not a SUNY resident, but was incredibly fortunate to be invited by Bob and Marion to take part in the Live-a-week program with two other recent PCO graduates around 1991, as the official program was winding down. It was an amazing week of optometry, family and unparalleled hospitality. Watching Bob, Marion and Jeffrey at work every day was indescribable. They were like a three-headed optometrist/therapist guiding a stream of patients through a dazzling array of vision training procedures. From that time on, I felt that Marion was my optometric mom. It was always a special moment for me when I would first sight Marion each year at Skeff/KISS and greet her. Though mostly behind the scenes, Marion was a force in the optometric community, and she surely knew her stuff. I will miss her dearly and I suspect my annual pilgrimage to KISS will be a bit less joyful for some time, as I come to grips with another great loss in my optometric family.

### **Paul Harris**

We lost an amazing woman recently who touched many in the profession of optometry and specifically in those practicing from the behavioral model. She was a strong woman, who could and did hold her own with anyone who engaged with her. She also was a loving woman who would take time and give advice to those in need, and you knew when she gave it, that it was from the heart and was well considered.

She worked side-by-side with the late great Robert A. Kraskin and with their son Jeffrey Kraskin in the office, that was part of their homes as well. The dividing line between home and office was always fuzzy, with them opening up their home to many over the years. Come to an IBO (Institute for Behavioral Optometry) study

group meeting a little early and you found yourself upstairs in their living room engrossed in dialogue. The Kraskin's knew how to share and share they did with everything they had.

Marion answered the phones in the office and when I called to chat with Bob or Jeffrey, she and I usually talked for 15-20 minutes at least before I was transferred. She knew how everyone in the profession was, and she knew who needed help and would coopt that help with ease during those phone chats. She knew the politics of optometry inside and out and though she feigned disinterest at times, she would take the bull by the horns when she felt it necessary.

She always spoke her mind plainly and openly, so it was easy to know where you stood with her. She often asked very penetrating questions, some you wondered why you hadn't yet asked yourself the very same question. She was loyal to many and most of all to her husband, to Jeffrey, her family and behavioral optometry.

Marion was an integral part of the Kraskin Invitational Skeffington Symposium on Vision (KISS), for all the years it met. No meeting was complete without an extended chat with Marion. She forged lasting relationships with many including Lucy Johnson. It was a real treat to go on a tour of the Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, given by Lucy herself the year that COVID met in Austin. There was Marion by Lucy's side, walking all of us through the closed museum as we got our private tour. You could tell that the bond they had was so strong and so respectful.

We will miss you Marion, but the lessons you taught many of us, including me, will help keep your spirit alive and well in all of our lives. Thank you for taking the time with all those you did. We are better for it.



**Nat Flax, OD**

### **Leonard J. Press**

Nat was an amazing individual. I first met him at the Skeffington Symposium in D.C. while a Resident at PCO in 1978. Although some of the more seasoned practitioners took issue with my terminology, Nat stood out along with Harold Haynes as maintaining a strong middle ground, bridging the gap between so-called classical and behavioral practice. I was struck by his open-mindedness, and ultimately decided that I would accept the challenge of serving as Chief of the Vision Therapy Service at SUNY. It was in that capacity that I got to see the many facets of Nat. We worked on a monograph together that SUNY published related to VT and Insurance, and he confided that he was having difficulty writing. Puzzled, I asked him why, and he explained that before he could write he had to know the audience that he was addressing, and it wasn't clear to him who the intended audience would be for the monograph. A gifted writer as well as a deep thinker, Nat surprised me one day when he ruminated in his office aloud: "I don't think that people in the profession really know who I am". I hope that by the time he was laid to rest, Nat realized what a profound influence he was on our field. While short in stature, he was one of the giants on whose shoulders we stand.

### **Daniel Lack**

I was sad to learn that Nat Flax passed away. He was one of several teachers at SUNY State College of Optometry who inspired me to practice developmental optometry after graduation. I recall hearing that he had been taught by Daniel Wolff, who had been taught by A.M. Skeffington.

Dr. Flax spoke to my class about his VT-only practice on Long Island and I followed his example by establishing such a practice in upstate New York ten

years later. The first of Dr. Flax's many writings that I read in school was an article that had appeared in the *Journal of the American Optometric Association* a few years earlier in 1972 entitled, *The Eye and Learning Disabilities*. This was a rebuttal to a position paper, disparaging vision therapy and visual disabilities associated with learning difficulty, that had been published by the medical community. Dr. Flax's paper simply reviewed all of the references of that position paper and revealed that they were unrelated to the medical position or that they actually supported the optometric viewpoint. I followed Dr. Flax's template in my 2010 rebuttal of a subsequent medical position paper, again using their references against them. This is something that I would not have considered if Dr. Flax had not been a mentor.

I was a better optometrist for having known Nat Flax and I extend my condolences to his family.

### **Linda Sanet**

I first met Dr. Flax when I was in a clinical rotation at OCNYSUNY. I had gotten permission to observe the students and their OD supervisors in the VT clinic.

Dr. Flax saw me, and approached with a brown paper bag in his hands. He asked me if I was patriotic. I was so shocked that he would even notice me that I froze and couldn't say anything.

He handed me the paper bag and said, "I need to know the prescriptions of these glasses." I looked inside – there were 7 pairs. I had learned lensometry and was quite good at it (this was in the days before automated lensometers), but at that moment all of my confidence went down the tubes. The glasses belonged to a patient who had never been happy with any of his glasses, but I didn't know that at the time. Of course the prescriptions were all quite different, and I was so sure that I must be doing something wrong. I handed my form to Dr. Flax, certain that he would think I was incompetent. He smiled and said, "Just as I suspected." A few years later at dinner I told the story to Dr. Flax and Doris. Of course he didn't remember, but we had a good laugh. Because he was a colleague of Bob's, I was fortunate to get to know him and Doris. He was a thoughtful, warm, and caring man who had a wicked sense of humor.

### **Paul Harris**

Optometry recently lost a philosopher, a clinician, a writer, and a teacher, the late Nathan Flax. I had the good fortune of having him as a teacher while at SUNY in my formative years. He taught case analysis and it was from him that I first heard of the Skeffington Analytical Sequence, commonly known as the 21-point analysis. I learned check, chaining, and typing and how to calculate the gross net and the net net. More importantly, I learned how the findings related to each other and how the patterns in those findings were the critical thing, not any one finding.

He also taught other methods of analysis but it was clear and evident which one he backed when push came to shove. He was a leader in insurance reimbursement for vision therapy by optometrists and he helped to bring us a more critical and scientific evidence-base for what it is we do.

His style of speaking was high-speed with lots of content per unit time. If you fell behind, it was nearly difficult to catch up with him. His brilliance was evident all the time and you learned to never stop paying attention in class as you might get called on to answer a question.

Nat left behind a legacy in writings, and audio recordings but also, he agreed to be interviewed by Greg Kitchener for the Heritage series. I had the good fortune to run one of the camera's and hear the interview in person: <https://www.oepf.org/remote-video/oep-foundation-heritage-series-interview-dr-nathan-nat-flax>

Nat will be missed greatly. The profession was greatly enhanced because of his many contributions.

### **Rick Morris**

We lost a great one when Nat passed away. You won't be able to print this one but I would like to share it with you.

A family came into my office in Florida and said they wanted to continue therapy. They were from New Jersey so I asked who they were seeing. They said "Dr. Flax ... he's kind of tough". Ok. Fast forward about a year and I see Nat at a COVD meeting. I walk up to him and ask if he remembers this family. Off hand, he says he doesn't. I remind him that the family said he was a little tough. That is when he told me this: "You need to get the best acuity you can on the first visit. So I look at the parent and say that I may be a little rough with you child, turn to the child and say "OK now cut the crap, read the bottom line!!!" He told me that he he has never failed to get standard acuity before treating a child with a non-malingering syndrome.