



THE BREEZEWAY

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

 **UTHealth**[®]
The University of Texas
Health Science Center at Houston

McGovern
Medical School

SCRAPBOOK

Check out pictures from some of our recent alumni events below.
For more pictures, please visit our website at med.uth.edu/alumni.

Reunion



Wendy Lawler-Sisler, MD '92, and
Robin Carder, MD '92, at 2017 Alumni Reunion



Frank Montemayor, MD '92, Bryan Townsend, MD '92,
Frank Lutz, MD '92 and Manish Gandhi, MD '91,
at 2017 Alumni Reunion



McGovern Medical School Alumni Association President
Moise Levy, MD '79, at 2017 Alumni Reunion

Student Welcome Receptions



Van T. Ngo, MD '93, with prospective students
at College Station Student Welcome Reception



College Station Student Welcome Reception
at the home of Tom Wagner, MD '90, and wife Jeanne Wagner



Austin Student Welcome Reception
at the home of Bryan Townsend, MD '92,
and wife Pamela Townsend

Greetings from THE BREEZEWAY



Hello,

McGovern Medical School just graduated its 45th class on May 18, 2018, and I could not be prouder. We had a momentous day filled with the family, friends, and supporters of our graduates at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Our keynote speaker and honored guest was Dr. Howard Bauchner, editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association and the JAMA Network, who gave an inspiring send-off to the Class of 2018.

Our new graduates are beginning their careers at an exciting time for science and medicine. We welcome the increased focus on improving the quality of care and increasing value for our patients. At the same time we are mindful of the stresses attached to an ever changing healthcare landscape and the day-to-day pressures of the profession. Physician burnout is burdening our profession and rising to the attention of national media. The University of Texas System recently charged all UT health institutions with addressing this issue, and we are responding.

A Faculty Assistance Program in the Office of Employee Assistance provides a dedicated Faculty Assistance Specialist and Wellness Coach, who is attuned to the specific needs of our faculty. A newly formed Physician Burnout and Resilience Task Force, composed of faculty and administrators, is developing a plan to enhance the well-being of our faculty.

We recognize that burnout is an issue to be addressed early in a physician's career. The wellness and resilience program developed by the Office of Admissions and Student Affairs includes McGovern Societies in which eight students are aligned with one clinical faculty mentor beginning in their first year. In addition, year-round programs for our students include:

- › Occupational Development
- › Professionalism and Leadership
- › Personal Health and Self-Care
- › Interpersonal Growth
- › Cultural and Environmental Proficiency

Recognizing that art enhances well-being and strengthens resiliency, our new Arts and Resilience series brings guest performers and speakers to campus and is open to the entire McGovern Medical School community.

Through these efforts, and others, we are creating an environment to discuss and prevent physician burnout so that doctoring can be the satisfying profession we all want it to be.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara".

Barbara J. Stoll, MD
Dean, McGovern Medical School

MCGOVERN MEDICAL SCHOOL **CLASS OF 2018**

CELEBRATES **MATCH WEEK**

AND BEGINS A **NEW TRADITION**

written by

Derrick J. Miller

Office of Alumni Relations
McGovern Medical School

On the evening of March 11, 2018, McGovern Medical School Alumni Association hosted the inaugural “A Week to Remember” reception at Webber Plaza. The purpose of the event was to give MS4 students an opportunity to come together to celebrate the beginning of Match Week. The event was organized by the Office of Alumni Relations and McGovern Medical School Alumni-Student Network, a recently formed student organization focused on connecting students and alumni.

The soon-to-be graduates viewed videos and photos featuring special moments from their time in medical school, and compiled letters about what graduation means to them. The letters will be returned by mail to them during their tenure in residency. In addition, the group connected with each other during one of the final months before commencement and interacted with faculty, staff, and alumni.

Champagne toasts were provided by Mark Chassay, MD, '92, associate dean for alumni relations, and Pedro Mancias, MD '88, assistant dean for diversity and inclusion, to congratulate the students on their achievements and encourage them to be active in McGovern Medical School events as alumni. Congratulatory toasts were also delivered by Matt Whited, MS4 class president and others from the class.

Nida Hassan and Claire Ellis, McGovern Medical School Alumni-Student Network co-presidents, conceived the idea for the reception to start a new tradition for future graduating classes. “We wanted to have an event that was dedicated entirely to our class reuniting and celebrating each other, the journey we've been on together, and the growth and change we've all experienced along the way,” Ellis said. “We wanted to make this event a new tradition for future classes to enjoy because it gave our class the chance to come back to each other, reconnect, and remember how strong we are together. It gave us the chance to have a defining, undistracted moment when we all felt a resolution to keep this sense of connection, and to continue to support and appreciate each other in the future. Match Day and graduation are incredible >>



A Week To Remember Reception



A Week To Remember Reception



A Week To Remember Reception



A Week To Remember Reception

milestones, but they necessitate immediately orienting toward the future at full speed, without giving us the chance to stop for that brief moment of in-between, to take in where we are right now, and appreciate the scale of what we've accomplished together. We wanted to fill that gap."

"We received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback! Our classmates were so glad we started this tradition because they felt that it was an intimate gathering where they could spend time with their friends and classmates they hadn't seen all year "Surprisingly, people were still talking about it, even two weeks after the event!," Hassan said. "Some of my friends who attend other medical schools have seen pictures on social media and have told me that they wish their school did something like this for them. Both Drew Bean, our videographer and DJ Dustin Luse did an excellent job and were a huge help to our team. We are really lucky to have had such an amazing support group and the opportunity to plan such an event for our class."

Moise Levy, MD '79 (Austin), McGovern Medical School Alumni Association president, had this message for our new graduates, "As the current president of the alumni association, I want to congratulate the Class of 2018 for the inaugural 'A Week to Remember' event. Like your graduation, this will stick with you as you progress through your careers. We are so happy to have been able to help support this important milestone." ■



LIKE MOTHER LIKE DAUGHTER

UTHealth graduates feeling on top of the medical world

written by

Victoria Tagg

Office of Public Affairs

UTHealth

Anesthesiologist Vivian Porche, MD '85 could be considered the Texas Medical Center's very own Mary Poppins and now her daughter Bobbi is following in her high-flying footsteps.

Bobbi, 28, graduated from McGovern Medical School in May, just like her mom did 33 years ago. The similarities don't end there because she has chosen the same specialty of anesthesiology.

"I always wanted to be a doctor. But I thought anesthesia was boring and because my mom did that, it was last on my list. Then I felt an unexplainable joy when intubating for the first time in a simulation lab," Bobbi said. "I started this journey with the aim of making kids not as afraid of going to the doctor as I was. Anesthesiology is a great way to do this because you learn how to ease people's pain and fear. I love kids, so I try to put them at ease by really empathizing with their situation and having a joke."

Behind Bobbi's beaming smile, there's her own story of blood, sweat and tears. At just 4 years old, she was struck with pneumonia.

"My mom knew something was wrong and took me to the doctor. But because I was running around and not acting sick, they sent me home," she said. "That night I got really sick and the next thing I remember was being in an emergency room."

It turned out to be a rare and very severe case of infection, causing an abscess that required emergency surgery. The hardest part for Vivian was not being able to treat her own daughter.

Bobbi said: "They let her start my IV line, and then that was it. I got so upset because I was too young to understand why she wasn't allowed to help me."

After two weeks in the hospital she made a full recovery. Her interest in medicine grew five years later when her grandmother Bobbye, her namesake, was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"The breast cancer later spread to her pancreas. I really admired her doctors but it bothered me I couldn't help. That marked the start of my journey," Bobbi said.

Through the challenges of medical school, she was always able to lean on her mother.

"The process of becoming a doctor is long and hard – nothing quite prepares you for the struggle. But I've been very fortunate to have excellent teachers, awesome classmates and, most importantly, my mom's amazing support," Bobbi said. "When I was tired and crying, she picked me up and said, 'You've got this.' I owe her so much – I simply wouldn't have made it without her."

Passionate about helping young people, Bobbi served as president of the Student National Medical Association and she mentors children from disadvantaged communities. Bobbi graduated May 18 at a ceremony in the George R. Brown Convention Center before she embarked on her residency at Baylor College of Medicine, as Vivian did back in 1985.

Vivian's own path to success was also inspired by her mother, Bobbye Jean Harris, who was principal of MacArthur Elementary School in the Third Ward. >>

>> **“She instilled in me compassion and the importance of hard work. I always wanted to help people and make them better,” Vivian said. “Becoming a doctor is an ordeal but she was there to spur me on and help me believe in myself. Nothing good comes easily.”**

After completing her anesthesia residency at Baylor College of Medicine and a cardiovascular anesthesiology fellowship at Methodist Hospital, Vivian went on to finish a pediatric anesthesiology fellowship at Texas Children’s Hospital. She joined the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, where she rose through the ranks to become director of the acute pain service, the Proton Therapy Center’s first medical director of anesthesia and her current position, professor in the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine.

No stranger to impressive accolades, Vivian was the first African-American female faculty member at MD Anderson to be promoted to professor, and she was named the 2012 Distinguished Alumna of McGovern Medical School. She mentors and teaches residents and fellows from McGovern Medical School, as well as being active in the National Medical Association, having also served as the immediate past chair of the anesthesia section.

Despite the string of formal titles, Vivian still enjoys nothing more than cracking jokes and singing to her patients.

She said: “‘Mary Poppins’ is my favorite – I sing ‘Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious’ or ‘A Spoonful of Sugar!’ We’re all children at heart, so I try to

take everyone back to that happy place of feeling safe and loved. If a patient stays calm, the whole anesthetic procedure works better.”

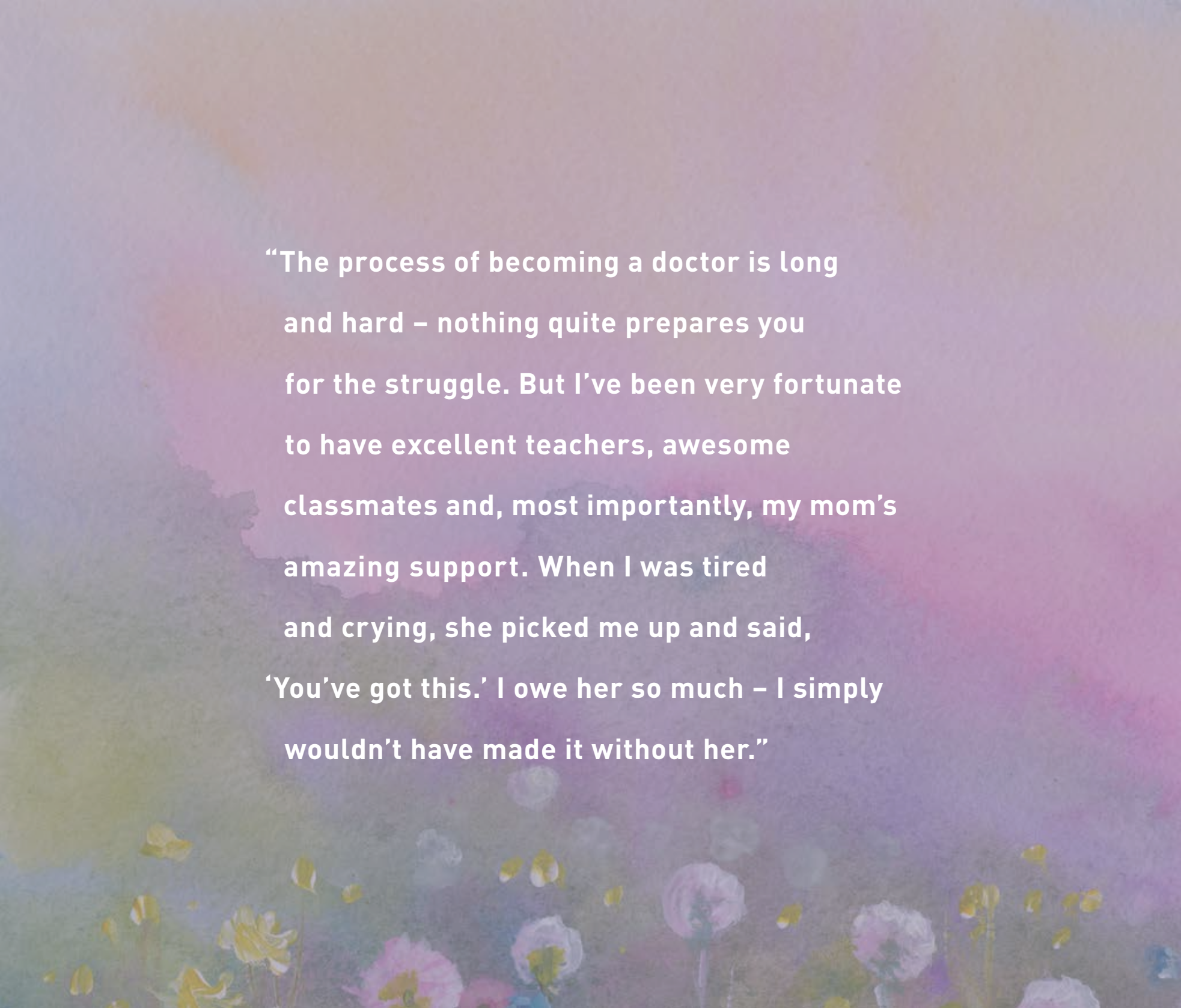
On top of her busy schedule with work and family, Vivian still makes time to give back and go to church. She volunteers as an ambassador, delivering presentations to schools, health fairs, clinics and community groups across the city. In recognition of this work she has been a recipient of the IMPACT award from Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church.

“My faith has always been a source of inspiration and hope. I feel so blessed,” Vivian said. “I just wish my mom was able to be part of all this because she’s the reason we have both come so far. As the poem goes, ‘Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair’ but she kept encouraging us to aim high and stick at it,” she said.

Bursting with pride and struggling to hold back the tears, Vivian saw her daughter graduate and be rewarded for all her hard work.

“Education is key and McGovern Medical School offers the very best. I’m over the moon about Bobbi’s achievements. Words can’t describe how grateful I am – it’s like walking in a dream,” she said.

“Having been through medicine school myself, I know how tough it gets, and there are always knockbacks and moments of self-doubt. But as long as you pick yourself up and persevere, you can achieve anything. Like mamma would say, ‘Take your lemons and make lemonade!’” ■



“The process of becoming a doctor is long and hard – nothing quite prepares you for the struggle. But I’ve been very fortunate to have excellent teachers, awesome classmates and, most importantly, my mom’s amazing support. When I was tired and crying, she picked me up and said, ‘You’ve got this.’ I owe her so much – I simply wouldn’t have made it without her.”

AMY MIZE CHRISTMAS

SCHOLARSHIP ESTABLISHED

Class of 1998 Honors Friend and Classmate

written by

Jessica Vanderpool

Office of Development

Twenty years may have passed since the class of 1998 received their diplomas, but time has not weakened the bond of these graduates from McGovern Medical School at UTHealth. Following the death of fellow 1998 alumna Amy Mize Christmas, MD, several classmates joined together to set up an endowed scholarship in her memory.



Amy Mize Christmas, MD

Mize Christmas is described with warmth and love by those who knew her.

“Mom was always doing something for somebody else; she was very selfless,” said Ella Prewett, 14, daughter of Mize Christmas. “The establishment of this scholarship means a lot to me. It shows me how much my mom really impacted the world.”

A Houston native, Mize Christmas grew up with a passion for reading. Her desire to go into the medical profession stemmed from a children’s book called “Nancy Plays Nurse.”

“She made up her mind about the path she wanted to take and did not stop until she was a doctor,” said Molly Atlas, Mize Christmas’ sister.

Mize Christmas was an ophthalmologist and was living in Fairhope, Alabama, when she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in October 2016. Her death on September 24, 2017, at the age of 45, spurred her medical school friends to action.

In late 2017, the UTHealth Office of Development began receiving phone calls and emails from Mize Christmas’ classmates, who were interested in establishing an endowed scholarship in her honor. Among those who reached out was Benjamin Lucas Harper, MD, a member of the class of 1998, who now practices emergency medicine at Peterson Regional Medical Center in Kerrville, Texas.

“Several of Amy’s medical school friends and I wanted to initiate the scholarship because we could not think of a better way to honor Amy,” Harper said. “Her name will continue to be associated with helping people, and this will go on in perpetuity. We hope that the scholarship will be something that makes her family proud that their daughter, wife, and mother positively influenced those around her and reminds them that she will be missed.”

In a matter of months, the pledges and donations of nine classmates and one of their family members established the scholarship and brought its total to \$29,000.



Virginia Craig, director of annual giving in the Office of Development, said this is the fastest she has personally seen a fund like this grow and that it is one of only a handful of endowed scholarships in memory of alumni that have been created at the medical school in recent years.

"It is incredible how this class has come together to celebrate Amy's life," Craig said. "It is rare to see such a strong response to a scholarship fund, and it says a lot about who Amy was as a person. This outpouring of love will have a huge impact."

This year marks the 20th reunion of the class of 1998.

As an endowed scholarship, a portion of the interest it earns will be used to award the scholarship funds while the corpus remains invested. This structure will allow the scholarship to continue being awarded for years to come so it can continue supporting medical students as they train to become the health care leaders of tomorrow.

Scott Christmas, husband of Mize Christmas, said he cried when he heard about the scholarship.

"It was touching to see how quickly her friends and classmates came together to honor her and to help create a legacy for her," he said. "I know that she would have been honored and touched and would have appreciated everyone honoring her and, by doing so, honoring her kids."

He said he hopes the scholarship will help recipients achieve their dreams. He also hopes it helps them "realize that even doctors can become patients, too" and inspires them to treat patients well, understanding they are real people, full of emotions, who are entrusting them with their futures.

Richard Mize, father of Mize Christmas, said his first thought when he heard about the scholarship was that it would preserve his daughter's memory and help others reach their goals.

"Amy wanted to help people, and this will be a wonderful way to do that," he said.

In addition to being an ophthalmologist, Mize Christmas was a devoted wife, a loving mother to her children, and an avid runner.

For more information about the scholarship, contact **Mandy Boyce**, leadership annual giving officer in the Office of Development, at **713-500-3205** or **Amanda.Boyce@uth.tmc.edu**. ■

Photo top left of Amy and Scott Christmas with children Houston, age 16 (back), Ella, age 14 (front left) and Kaylea age 12 (front right). Photo bottom left of Amy and Scott Christmas (right) with Amy's sister Molly Atlas and husband Scott Atlas (left).

KOTT, FITE ACCEPT

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

written by

Jonathan Garris

Office of Communications
McGovern Medical School

It was an evening of well-wishing and congratulations for Marylee Kott, MD '77, and Diana Fite, MD '78, the 2017 recipients of the McGovern Medical School Distinguished Alumnus Award, at the annual awards ceremony.

Established in 1987, the award recognizes outstanding contributions of alumni in the areas of medical science and education, or the prevention and treatment of diseases, as well as continued interests in McGovern Medical School and its students.

Kott serves as an associate professor in the McGovern Medical School Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, and currently is retired from active pathology practice. She works part time as informatics medical director of pathology with Harris Health System developing the Beaker Laboratory module to interface with the health system's electronic medical record. She had plenty of doctors to thank for her award and talked about how she found her place at McGovern Medical School and how she came from a "family of old-fashioned doctors."

"I had worked in their offices since I was a teenager," Kott said.

While she originally sought to be a teacher, her husband encouraged her to give medical school a shot. She had applied to medical school and her brother was also accepted at the time she was – something Kott joked was "very unpleasant" because her brother was younger than her.

"I have to say that I learned from my family of doctors how to care for patients, the importance of diagnostic skills, and how to be kind to all," Kott said. "I found at McGovern Medical School I came into contact with more physicians who embodied the qualities I wanted to emulate."

Kott thanked her family and friends in attendance, along with a long list of doctors, for her positive experiences at the medical school. She praised the faculty for giving her an "excellent foundation for the future." Kott recounted the process of choosing a specialty and how she had taken some time off after graduation after the birth of her first daughter, and eventually filled a position in pathology with no regrets.

Kott said her happiest time was likely interviewing prospective medical students, as she also served on admission committees. She called it a "tough job" but said it was rewarding to see students grow, venture into residency, and even maintain contact with them as they further their careers in medicine.

"I hope that I have been successful in fostering learning in the students," Kott said. "McGovern Medical School has given so much to me, and I hope I've been able to give a little bit back to the community, the students, and even the faculty."

Fite currently serves as an emergency physician at ER Katy in Katy, Texas, and as medical director of the emergency department and the hospital at Memorial Hermann Tomball Hospital. She spoke about growing up in Amarillo, and mentioned that she had no memory of being encouraged by her parents to become a doctor. Her mother was a registered nurse and her father was a neurosurgeon who emigrated from England because he "wanted to get away from socialized medicine."

"He was the only neurosurgeon around for years in the whole Panhandle and parts of Oklahoma and New Mexico," Fite said. "All I remember him saying is that the profession will be ruined someday by socialized medicine coming to America just as it was in England."

While attending college, Fite married, and said she was unsure of the direction she wanted to take but during her second year noticed others said their plans were to attend medical school.

"A lot of the people in the classes are saying they are going to medical school and they can barely keep their grades up, and they don't even work, and I thought, well, maybe I should consider being a doctor," Fite said. She joked that she didn't know it at the time but those people would never be accepted to medical school. Nonetheless, Fite said it was a good impetus for her to start thinking about attending medical school.

She had originally aimed to remain in the Dallas area, but after her husband was accepted to a program at the University of Houston, she opted to swap places with a student enrolled at McGovern Medical School. Fite admitted she was "horrified" by the heat and humidity in Houston at first, but said it is a privilege to be an alumnus of the medical school.

"There is no question that I realized how everything fell into place that this was God's purpose for my life to become a physician, and then eventually an emergency physician, because I wanted to take care of all patients," Fite said.



Distinguished Alumna Marylee Kott, MD '77, with family and friends at the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner



McGovern Medical School Alumni Association President Moise Levy, MD '79, with Distinguished Alumna Award recipients, Marylee Kott, MD '77, and Diana Fite, MD '78, at the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner



Distinguished Alumna Diana Fite, MD '78, with family and friends at the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner



An interview with

Belinda Gonzalez, MD '93
Physician/Owner at Family Health Physicians

Residency:
Southwest Memorial Family Medicine Residency Program

CONVERSATIONS From The Leather Lounge

written by
Derrick J. Miller

What are your hopes for today's McGovern Medical School students?

I hope that they will highly consider a career in primary care. Primary care physicians are a dying breed, yet we are most needed as we are at the front lines of care. Primary care may not be as flashy or lucrative as other fields, or other jobs, but it's never boring and it's truly rewarding. I love being a family medicine doctor and can't imagine doing anything else.

What inspires you?

People who overcome the odds. People who never give up on their dreams and work hard to achieve them, even when everybody seems to count them out or not give them any support.

Who is your mentor?

That would be my mother, the best person I have ever known. She was kind, honest, genuine, and stern when she needed to be. She always supported me in all my decisions, whether I succeeded or not, and her words of affirmation were truly inspiring. Even when her health finally failed her, she never stopped encouraging me or my siblings. Her last pearl of wisdom to me was "you don't stop living just because I do." I owe her everything and she's the reason I became a physician.

What skill is most vital to your job?

I really feel listening is the best skill to possess. Patients will always tell you what's wrong with them if you're willing to listen to them and hear them out fully, making sure to not cut them off or jump to conclusions.

What is the one thing you can't live without and why?

I could not live without exercise. I exercise one hour a day, seven days a week. I use this time to think, de-stress, pray and talk to God. I feel so energized after my daily work out and feel more productive during the day. Exercise also helps me sleep like a baby at night.

What fulfills you most?

Making a difference in a person's life. Whether it's helping them to change bad habits and become healthier, teaching them to believe in themselves, or encouraging them to go after what they want. Giving back to my community via volunteerism is also fulfilling.

Who would you most like to meet (alive or deceased) and why?

Denzel Washington. Aside from being my favorite actor of all time, I admire his philanthropic work. I also love his devotion and dedication to his family, something that is hard to find in Hollywood. I think Denzel has gotten better with age, and I've seen almost all his movies.

What has been your greatest adventure?

My greatest adventure began when I left a group practice, which I had been a part of for many years, and went solo. This was one of the best, and scariest, decisions I've ever made. But had I not made this decision, I would never have learned how to run a practice (business), hire/fire/manage employees, negotiate leases, how to work with contractors, and prioritize office/business expenses. I'm still learning new things, but I can honestly say I've never been happier in private practice. These last 12 years have truly been an adventure.

Where is your favorite vacation spot?

That would definitely be Alaska. I absolutely loved it! It truly is the last frontier. The majestic scenery, the wildlife, the national forests are truly breathtaking. I'd love to go back someday and see some more of Alaska. It's hard to believe that there are still places in Alaska where human footprints have not touched.

What is your favorite word?

Invincible. Sometimes we all need to believe that we are invincible to get through the hurdles, challenges, and surprises life throws at you.

CONTACT

Send in your Class Notes!

Let us know what is happening with you and find out what your classmates have accomplished. Please email us at ms.alumni@uth.tmc.edu regarding your personal and professional accomplishments for our "Class Notes" section of the website, med.uth.edu/alumni.



UPCOMING EVENTS

August 10-11 McGovern Medical School Student Retreat at Camp Allen

October 19 Distinguished Alumni Awards at Third Coast

October 20 Alumni Reunion at La Colombe d'Or

For more information on these events, please visit our website at med.uth.edu/alumni or contact Derrick J. Miller at Derrick.J.Miller@uth.tmc.edu or 713-500-5181.



UPDATE YOUR INFO

Have a new phone number? Changed your email address? Want to receive the bimonthly electronic version of The Breezeway? If so, please take a moment to update your contact information at www.uth.edu/index/alumni-form.htm or fill out and return the attached self-mailing form.



**McGovern
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McGovern Medical School Photos
2018 Match Day (Photo Top/J. Daniel Escareño), 2018 Commencement (Photo Center/Dwight C. Andrews),
2018 Match Day (Photo Bottom/Maricruz Kwon), 2018 Commencement (Photo Return Card/Dwight C. Andrews)
Photo of Dean Stoll (Page 3/Robert Seal Photography, Inc.)



The University of Texas
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