

“A Legend,” “A Giant”: Faith Fitzgerald, MD (1943-2021)

You Gotta Have Faith. That’s what I wanted to name Faith Fitzgerald’s column, because, as one member of our editorial committee once said about her stories, “You can never have enough Faith.”

That’s as true as it gets. I had the pleasure of meeting her and working with her to bring her unique recollections to print. Over the past few years, I’ve learned about the Russian aristocrat “Mrs. One-Arm” who was her childhood housekeeper and friend, how she crossed paths with rogues, thieves and gamblers in the ER, and even — as she told the story in our last issue — of the unfortunate and unlikely named Mrs. Lot, who passed away from being overwhelmed by the salt in her system in an eerie coincidence to the biblical tale.

One of her favorite subjects was the importance of teachers in her life. Of course, for so many she was the teacher who left an indelible mark in the hearts and careers of countless physicians scattered across the globe.

We had talked just a few weeks before her death on December 3 at the age of 78. She had more stories to tell and, faced with health issues and a computer that was

a never-ending source of frustration for her, she had suggested that we get together so I could help her write them. Unfortunately, that never occurred and those stories remain untold to the detriment of us all.

She was an essential cog in giving our quirky little magazine its special personality. I only knew her for a relatively short time, but others whose lives she touched over many decades, as you’ll see below, can do a much better job than I at recalling someone who was always curious, devastatingly funny and a source of inspiration to physicians of all ages.

We will miss her terribly. But she left us with wonderful stories in our journal and others, physicians who are better because of what they learned from her, and a legendary reputation as one of the best damned internal medicine doctors and teachers you could ever find. This legacy is the one ray of sunshine on a dark day because of what it means to so many:

We will always have Faith.

— **Ken Smith**
Managing Editor

“My fond remembrances of Dr. Fitzgerald are primarily related to her interest in medical history. She stood out always, not only because of her interest in medical history, which is unique and rare, but due to her personality, enthusiasm and fascinating approach to the topic. She generously provided numerous programs for our Medical Museum Lecture Series over the past 17 years and was always the attendees’ favorite lecturer. Her ‘Magical Medical History Tours’ always packed in the crowds. She will be missed... and also remembered as a part of our history.”

— **Bob LaPerriere, MD, Curator,**
SSVMS Museum of Medical History

“Wow. We just lost a legend. I don’t have the words to describe how amazing Faith Fitzgerald was at being a doctor, teacher, and exemplary human being. She was larger than life in all the best possible ways. I keep thinking about the first time I met Dr Fitzgerald. I asked her a question about my skin. She took my hands, felt how rough they were from years of rowing, then said, ‘Oh, callouses. That’s a pleasant surprise. Hands like these are rare around here.’ Every time you talked with her, you came away smarter and feeling better for the experience. I wish I could be a fraction of that.”

— **B. Bobby Chiong, MD,**
Radiology Chair, St. Barnabas Hospital, The Bronx



“She was a giant in the field of medicine. What she was to me was a brilliant colleague, a friend, at times refreshingly sardonic, at other times annoyingly sardonic, warm, kind, friendly, funny, not afraid to speak her mind — ever. Someone unafraid to re-examine what we do and why we do it, and someone who is always 110% about patients, their stories, their lives, each patient’s uniqueness. She will be missed for all that she was to so many of us.”

—Paul Aronowitz, MD,

Clerkship Director of Internal Medicine, UC Davis

“I was saddened to hear of the passing of Dr. Faith Fitzgerald, a giant among internists and an inspiration to generations at @UCDavisMed. I’ve been reflecting for the last few days since hearing this news — she was such an incredible force for so many.

I met Dr. Fitzgerald on my medicine clerkship. Morning report was like a well-crafted mystery tour with a master storyteller — she loved a good case. She loved all cases — the simple and elegant, the esoteric, the frustrating, and she was a master teacher. She was happiest and proudest, though, when one of us asked the right question or got the dx. That twinkle in her eye was magic.

I think her magic and prowess came from her insatiable curiosity. She wondered and asked. She knew more than all of us yet marveled at the mysteries of medicine. She was brilliant yet made you — somehow — think you could be, too.

She loved what she did and loved us learners. What a legacy. Thanks, Dr. Fitzgerald.”

— Andrew Olson, MD

Associate Professor, Pediatrics, U. of Minnesota

“She’s a legend who inspires me to use this phrase when faced with diagnostic uncertainty: ‘Gotta have Faith.’ I, too, can work through dx challenges and have joy in medicine.

Thank you for laying the groundwork for women in medicine, Dr. Fitzgerald.”

— Heather Hoffman, MD

“We should all celebrate a life well lived.

I remember reading her articles and seeing her discuss unknown cases at the IM meetings. I was in awe of her reasoning and her eclectic knowledge. Faith always put patient care and physician responsibility as her guiding star.

She leaves an incredible legacy. She epitomized the consummate internist. She loved and excelled at the cognitive side of internal medicine. Her reasoning was impeccable and she beautifully shared her thought process to teach us and role model for us.

She loved patients. She loved getting to know them. Read her essays in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and you will start to know Faith.

When the Emperor or Empress was walking around with garb, she would quickly tell everyone. And moreover express that thought with brilliant humor.

Her legacy includes the many learners she influenced, the patients she for whom she cared, and the many educators who found her an important role model of clinical education. I only wish (as do many) that I could have one more wonderful conversation with Faith. Every conversation we had was a privilege and a growth opportunity.”

— Robert Centor, MD (@Medrants)

“Faith was an exceptional storyteller — her stories were meant to demonstrate empathy and humanism. She also was not afraid to speak truth to power.”

— Keith Armitage, MD

IM Program Director, Case Western Reserve University

“With all due respect to... every other author ever, Curiosity is still my favorite article ever written.”

— Todd Barton, MD,

IM Residency Program Director, U. of Pennsylvania