

Mark Mason Biography

Walter Wallace Stevens Award, 2016

My very young years were spent in Riverdale, the Bronx, before we moved to New Rochelle, New York. This was the height of the great and hip move to the Westchester Suburbs. I mingled with kids whose parents were professionals or pot heads, or both! Dentistry was not on my agenda. Rock concerts, girls, and just hanging out with my peers was usually the order of the day.

The day after high school graduation from New Rochelle High, I set out to hitch hike cross country. I would not recommend this to anyone nowadays, but this was an experience that I still talk about to anyone who might care to listen. Got arrested, slept in the desert, got arrested again, ran fast from weird predator drivers, woke up on the beaches of Monterey with hundreds of seals around me. I still don't know how I ended up there, but I was almost in San Francisco to meet up with some friends. After this, it was time to face college. I was ready.

I got scholarships for Crew from the University of Oregon and Marist College, but decided to forego them to go to University of Dayton for Pre med. However, being the wild kid that I was, I went sky diving and broke my ankle! This pretty much ended my wild days and I left Ohio in a cast. My college

career turned serious when I went to the University of New Hampshire for Pre Veterinary School. I immersed myself in college life. This is where I developed a skill I knew I had, but now had the medium and the scene to pursue. I formed a committee, which I spear headed to raise funds, through entertainment. The aim was book rock bands and singers to play in our auditorium, for a minimal fee, to make it affordable for college students.

One of the first bands I engaged was the Beach Boys. Yes! THE Beach Boys. I got them to play for 2 days, for under \$10K. Chicago was a very successful concert too, which only cost a measly \$6K. One of the best bands was the Marshall Tucker Band, which Rose and I got to see again very recently in Florida. The money we raised was not as important as the sheer entertainment we provided for the students.

I received my Bachelor's Degree in Animal Science and Nutrition from UNH, and was immediately accepted straight out of college to work for the Canadian Government to set up a farm for the Social Welfare Board in St. John's, New Brunswick. You might say I delivered quite a few cows and pigs in my time there.

I was also offered a job by Purina Company, but decided to continue post grad and applied to Cornell University Veterinary School in NY. This was the only vet school in the state and it was flooded with

thousands of applicants. My chances of getting in was close to nil. I then decided to look into other Vet schools. I heard from the Vet school in the University of Parma in Italy. I immediately flew there, and lived la dolce vita, immersing into the Italian life style. While attending school in Parma, I also worked in Florence and tried to learn the language. It was a lovely and romantic experience, but I wasn't learning anything since all the classes were in Italian.. I finally decided to leave during the Pueblo Incident when Carter was president. I kissed Italy a warm Arrivederci, and moved on to...

The Philippines. I didn't know too much about the country. It was important that universities were taught in fluent English, by mostly US trained graduates. Several expats lived and went to school there and I was excited to join the crowd. I started out in Veterinary School, and on my second summer, decided to take Anatomy 1 Class in the Dental College that was offering it that time. Sitting in the same classroom was Rose, my future wife. It was love at first sight for me, not so much for her. It took some persuasion to even have her go out with me. That was a special summer, and I finally won her over. All I know, is I didn't want to live without her, and not even a month later, I proposed and asked her to marry me. I also decided to go to dental school. When I asked her father's blessings, he told me to wait 1 year. Rose was barely 19 and he made me promise that she will finish dentistry even after getting

married. Rose comes from a family of dentists. Her father and brother and sister, several cousins are dentists, not to mention that one of her great aunts was the first female dentist in their town. It was not exactly an epiphany when I decided to switch my major to Dentistry. This time, more than ever, the path was clear, Rose and I will do this together, and there was never any question on my mind about what was ahead.

One of the things I did in dental school was try to raise money to bring modern American equipment and dental materials for use at the clinics. This is where this persuasive talent came again. I managed to persuade several dentists in New York to donate xray equipment, dental chairs, amalgamators, handpieces, etc. The university really appreciated all the donations. It was a good feeling when I went back to the US, to see the dental clinic equipped with a lot of the donated items I managed to put together.

My stay in the Philippines allowed me to visit other neighboring countries such as Japan, Hongkong and Macau, and a brief step, in forbidden China. It was an amazing adventure, of which I grew as a man who fell in love and saw the other side of the world.

One of my most memorable experiences when I was there was meeting non other than Muhammad Ali in the Thrilla In Manila. I skipped classes one day and went to the Manila Hotel to try to see the "Greatest" himself. While I was queueing to catch a glimpse, Ali

came up to me and said " Hey Kottherr! " I wasn't sure what he meant and he then referred to me as Gabe Kaplan. At the time, I was not familiar with American television shows, and apparently, a comedian named Gabe Kaplan played a teacher named Kotter, in a sitcom called Welcome Back Kotter. And I was his doppelganger! Ali invited me to join his entourage and I did not go to school for a whole week, and just hung out with Ali, George Frazier and Larry Holmes and their gang. A few days later, I got a call from my father in NY asking me if I had quit school to join Ali's entourage. He read an article in the New York Times, NY Post and the Daily News about a Veterinary Student in Manila named Mark Mason, being interviewed about Ali and his relationship with Belinda, and his mistress. It was a whirlwind paparazzi moment, and that was my 15 minutes of fame. It was a sweet moment of celebrity life. Truly an awesome experience.

My family easily accepted Rose when we got back to the States. They can see that she was, and still is, a grounding influence on me. I was staying on track and was focused. I got accepted for a residency in Prosthetics at the Medical College of Georgia.

Melisa, our eldest, was born soon after we went back to NY. We lived by Glen Island in New Rochelle in a charming apartment by the sound. We became very active in the Alpha Omega Dental Fraternity, and I

got very involved in getting vendors for the AO International Dental Convention in NY. This helped raise funds which the fraternity used to pay for meetings and give to give back to the community. Soon after, I became AO President, Westchester Branch, NY.

In 1985, Rose and I moved to Dutchess County, where we purchased a practice in Fishkill. I immediately joined DCDS ,and joined the Dental Staff at Vassar Brothers Hospital, where I attended until 2014.

Rose and I worked together for over 30 years in the same office. Two years ago, we decided to retire early and now live full time in Florida. We have three lovely daughters, Melisa, Rachel and Jade, and a beautiful grand daughter, Olivia. Melisa and Jade work in Manhattan for CCS, a Fundraising Development and Strategic Consulting Service Company. Rachel currently works as the Tech Coach, Library and Information Connections Department Chair at the prestigious Leman Manhattan Prep School. All 3 girls are married to 'mensches', outstanding gentlemen that I am proud to call my sons, Michael Bergener, Jeff Kaplan, and Mark Alderson. Our grand daughter Olivia is the light of our lives.

In 1989, I finished the first given Implant AAID Maxi Residency at Brookdale Hospital and University of Medicine and Dentistry in New Jersey. This was a grueling 2 year long process and I was really excited

about the future of dentistry. I received my fellowship and diplomat in 1991 from the International Congress of Oral Implantologists and the American Academy of Implant Dentistry, and became a fellow and diplomat of several Implant Institutions and Societies. I was also one of the pioneers in Laser Dentistry. In the late 1990's, I was approved to be a consultant for the Dental Advisor and Dental Products Magazine, and lectured in many seminars all over the world, where I met very prominent speakers. This is when I had another epiphany. I pitched world renowned speakers to come for full day seminars for the DCDS membership, and had no problem booking celebrity speakers for minimal fees. A committee was formed, chaired by me for what we now refer to as the DCDS Annual All Day Seminar. I managed to book celebrity speakers such as Bill Dorfman from extreme make over, Bill Dickerson of LVI (for 2 days), Ross and Debbie Nash,etc. I also managed to get tons of sponsors to pay for the speakers and the venue, food, etc. I used to spend the whole weekend at the NY Convention harvesting dental companies to sponsor our All Day Seminars. Rose used the term "Shameless" about my dogged pursuit to raise funds for DCDS. I should say that she helped me tremendously.

For the 15 years that I chaired All Day Seminars, we raised a conservative sum of \$100,000. This has kept the DCDS in the black and able to keep membership dues to a minimum, subsidize for the monthly

meetings, and pay for Board Membership meetings, among other things. I was very happy and confident to hand in the reins to the committee upon my retirement.

Rose and I were sad to leave but also excited with the promise of new and invigorating pursuits. I served on the Board of the 9th District as editor, program chairman (2x) and on the board of governors for 10 years. I am one of three Past DCDS Presidents who served for two terms. I have always encouraged all dentists to get involved to cause a difference in a very positive way. Dissent was never an intention, but commonality for the over all well being is a good course to go. Continuing education is more than just going to courses, it also paves the way for congeniality with your colleagues.

Married now for 39 years, Rose and I have common pursuits. We established Quantum Resolutions Inc. over a year ago to pursue Real Estate Investments and hopefully other ventures. We attend REIA meetings weekly and look at properties almost everyday. I have also been very involved and active as a Free Mason, Scottish Rite and York Rite member and officer, as well as a Knight of Malta, Honor Emeritus. You can call me Sir Dr. Mase!

Our mornings start with 45 minutes of Tai Chi at the YMCA and off to the gym. Of course I do this to make room for all the amazing food that the South has to offer. I highly recommend it! Life begins again at 60.