Naomi M. Kanof, 1912–1988

Sleepe after toyle, port of stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please
(Spenser, The Fairie Queene I, ix. 40)

Naomi Kanof was born in Brooklyn on January 6, 1912. Her parents, Benjamin Kanof and Anne Bernstein, both came from Russia on the same boat in 1905 unbeknownst to each other. Both settled in Brooklyn and were married on the fifth anniversary of their arrival. Naomi grew up in Brooklyn and attended the Thomas Jefferson High School where she was voted the beauty queen and the girl most likely to succeed. How true was this prediction as attested to by the long list of her accomplishments and honors in dermatological and other medical societies. Many of her dermatological friends are probably not aware that her dermatological accomplishments were matched by her accomplishments for the recognition of women in medicine.

After high school graduation, she went to George Washington University where she received her B.A. in 1931 and her M.D. in 1934. She interned at the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn in 1934–1935 and then, the following year, spent another year as an intern at the Children's Hospital in Washington, DC. She returned to New York to do postgraduate training at the Skin and Cancer Unit of the New York Postgraduate School and Hospital, Columbia University (now New York University) under the tutelage of Marion B. Sulzberger. Early during this time her devotion and skill at writing and at verbal expression was recognized by Marion Sulzberger and she worked with him in his preparation of his text on Dermatological Allergy. Marion paid tribute to her in the Festschrift issue of The Journal of Investigative Dermatology, volume 49, number 1, July 1967, when he stated that her abilities were so outstanding that he recognized that she was his logical successor as editor of The Journal of Investigative Dermatology. During Marion’s 10-year tenure as editor from 1938 to 1948, Naomi was an associate in editing the journal. The year the Journal and the Society was founded Naomi returned to Washington to open her office, treating both the famous and the unknown for half a century. She was a dedicated dermatologist who was beloved by her patients. One thing you quickly learned was that her patients wanted her treatment regimes. If you saw one of her patients and wanted to change treatment, you had better be prepared to argue long and hard. Such was her patients’ love for her.

Her overwhelming and unbridled energy and devotion allowed her to give equal time and effort to other projects. She edited the Journal for 18 years, retiring in 1967. Dr. Sulzberger summed up Naomi’s qualities by stating “I believe the greatest of Naomi’s accomplishments is not any single one but her ability to do so many different things so well.” The Journal grew in stature during her tenure and kept pace with the rapidly expanding field of dermatology during the 1950s and 1960s. With her co-partner, Herman Beerman, on the administrative side, she shared her enthusiasm of the Society, and as a result the Society grew from a small organization with uncertain financial pinnings to a Society with a distinguished Journal and a solid financial base. Much of the financial gain resulted from her unselfish commitments to the Journal. She and Dr. Beerman were frugal and not wasteful of the Society’s resources. Her greatest salary at the time of her retirement was in the range of $4,500. Furthermore, in her final year as editor the total expenses of her editorial office including the salary of the editor were only $7,749 in 1967. Further intangible contributions were made through her husband, Max Tendler, who served as the general counsel of the Society without remuneration during Naomi’s term.

A banquet honoring Naomi’s achievements was held on June 18, 1967 at the annual meeting of the Society at the Hotel Dennis in Atlantic City. A scroll given to her on this occasion, was inscribed:

Tribute to Doctor Naomi M. Kanof by the Society for Investigative Dermatology, Inc. Remarks extended to Naomi M. Kanof, M.D. at the Twenty-eight Annual Meeting of the Society at Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Whenever human beings join together in high endeavors there are some whose zeal and dedication inspire all others. Such a one is Dr. Naomi M. Kanof. She has served for 17 years as Editor of our Journal. Its success is in greatest measure due to her competence and altruism. Dr. Kanof accomplished the often delicate and difficult editorial tasks with justice and grace, unruffled in the face of obstacles, undismayed by criticism, unspoiled by praise. Her tact, wisdom, and fairness have served this Society well.

In gratitude we now present this scroll to her. It conveys the thanks, the affection, and the good wishes of every member of the Society.

May all who read these words be ever mindful of the years of fruitful service which Doctor Kanof has given to this Society and its Journal, to Science, to Medicine, and to Mankind.

June 18, 1967

Her dedication to her role as editor is best expressed by repeating her words: “I have not previously expressed to you the sense of the esthetic and the feeling of history I have in handling the words and meanings of the manuscript, no matter how minuscule the
expression. I am almost never without the eagerness of the curator in a
discipline not without its sensitivities for all its immediacy. My concern
has been that some of the endless and often pitiful details must accrue to
the pre-eminence of the Journal, so that in the Journal's survival and
achievement will remain and be preserved, that which will prove to have
been useful to Medicine.''

William Passano, then President of the
Williams and Wilkins Company, paid tribute to Dr. Kanof: ''We wish to
give her the lion's share of the credit for the position in the world of
scientific research which The Journal of Investigative Dermatology
occupies today (1967). The high standards which each contributed paper
must meet before acceptance has made the Journal the unquestioned
leader in its field. But Dr. Kanof did not stop with the text. She applied the
same rigid control to the accuracy of statements and the suitabilility of
illustrations appearing in the advertising pages of the Journal. With all of
her firmness, she was always just and fair.''

The journal has now had seven editors. Marion and Naomi set the
standards that have been expanded upon by the subsequent editors. Their
jobs have been made easier by the uncompromising standards of
excellence established by these two outstanding leaders.

Naomi was exceedingly proud of her contributions to the Society and
the Journal. She deservedly was elected Vice President of the Society for
Investigative Dermatology in 1971 and was made an Honorary member
in 1979. Her contributions to the Journal did not end with her editorship.
She wanted to make certain that the Journal was widely read, and to this
end it was her idea that summary statements of several papers should be
printed in the Journal each month. With the help of her friend, Barbara
Culliton, news editor of Science, she saw this idea to fruition, thus
bringing an understanding of articles to members of the Society who
otherwise might not benefit from their content.

The respect that all of us had for Naomi allowed her to function as a
matriarch for the Society, a role that she thoroughly enjoyed. She
frequently entertained the members of the Board and others in her home.
She gave a festive dinner for the combined Boards of the European
Society for Dermatological Research and the Society for Investigative
Dermatology on the occasion of the first joint meeting of the two
Societies in the United States.

Naomi's influence in medicine went far beyond her contributions to
the Society for Investigative Dermatology and are too numberable to cite.
She participated actively in the American Medical Women's Association
and was editor of their journal, the Journal of the American Women's
Medical Association, from 1972 to 1976. She was devoted to the
recognition of the role of women in medicine, but she could not be
considered to be a crusader. As a physician, she sought no special
privileges for women physicians; she only asked that they be recognized
based on their credentials. She was active in the Washington
Dermatologic Society and its prior organization, the Baltimore-Washing-
ton Dermatologic Society, the Pennsylvania Academy of Dermatology,
the American Medical Association, the Medical Society of the District of
Columbia (particularly the section on Dermatology and Syphilology), the
American Dermatological Association, and the American Academy of
Dermatology. She was made an Honorary member of the American
Academy of Dermatology in 1980 and received the Gold Medal of the
Academy in 1986. These were proud moments for her, as was her receipt
of the Practitioner of the Year Award in 1982 from the Dermatology
Foundation. She was a Clinical Professor of Medicine and Dermatology
at Georgetown University and received their bicentennial medal in
October of 1968. The same year she received a Jacobi Medical Society
Citation from President Lyndon B. Johnson.

If Naomi were alive today, she probably would tell us that the
creation of the Marion B. Sulzberger Chair and Professorship at the
Uniformed Services University School of Health Sciences was her
greatest achievement. Naomi shepherded this Chair throughout its
creation in her role as Vice President of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation
for the Advancement of Military Medicine. The late Senator Jackson and
his wife, Helen, were old and dear friends. Unfortunately, the final
congressional bill authorizing this Chair was not adopted until July
11,1988, 14 days after Naomi's passing. She was aware that the bill

Figure 1. Naomi M. Kanof as a young adult.

Figure 2. Naomi M. Kanof, M.D., and Marion B. Sulzberger, M.D., at the
meeting of the American Dermatological Association, 1983.
would be passed but even in her final fight for life, she expressed her concern and continuing desire to do more to see that the monies accumulated for his professorship were sufficient and put to good use. This forever will be a living memorial to Naomi. Her connection with Gallaudet University was another proud achievement and she fought to improve the health care for the blind. She was a guiding spirit in seeing that prescriptions for blind persons were printed in Braille; for this she received special recognition from the medical society of the District of Columbia.

It would be easy to go on and on in describing her virtues. She was always thinking; her ideas were always upbeat and forward looking. Her dedication to specific causes was spectacular, and she freely offered both solicited and unsolicited advice. Many of us received frequent phone calls with suggestions as to how to make something work; her suggestions were always appropriate. Even though the telephone calls at all hours have now been silenced, we are all richer for what she has contributed to us.

Although Naomi concentrated her efforts so heavily on organized medicine, she also conducted a large private practice and had a rich family life. She met her husband, Max Tendler, during her college years and they were married in 1935. Max predeceased Naomi by 13 years. Their two children, Robert, born in 1942 and now a practicing patent attorney in Boston, and Rebecca, born in 1945 and now a practicing psychologist in Philadelphia, were a joy to both Naomi and Max. In addition to his law practice, Max became an art dealer and he and Naomi were able to share their love for fine art. Their home was a miniature gallery in its own right. She also leaves her grandson, Seth Munoz and her brother E. Lee Kanof.

After the happy celebration of her 70th birthday in 1982, Naomi’s last years were years of illness related in part to aging and arteriosclerotic vascular disease. She courageously fought back her bouts of illness, surviving at least three events that could easily have been the end. Her terminal weeks of suffering were met with hope and strength until she passed on June 26th.

Hugh Clegg in the journal *International Record of Medicine*, 1960, wrote a medical editor should be a “keeper of a conscience of a profession.” He stated “For better or for worse, an editor and Journal are or should be inseparable until retirement, resignation or death do them part.” This statement befits the role of Naomi Kanof. Naomi Kanof Tendler was buried on June 30, in Washington, DC, in a cemetery near the Potomac River. A celebration of her life was held July 15, 1988 at the Cosmos Club in Washington, attended by several hundred of her friends, patients, and her colleagues.

**Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:**

**Thy had a voice whose sound was like the sea:**

Pure as the naked heavens, majestic free,

So didst thou travel on life’s common way,

In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart

The lowest duties on herself did lay.

Sonnet, London, 1802

William Wordsworth, Poet Laureate

7 April 1770-23 April 1850

George W. Hambrick, Jr., M.D.,
and John S. Strauss, M.D.

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