



Editorial

Dr. Wilma Fowler Bergfeld: A Woman of Substance, Role Model, and Founder of the Women's Dermatologic Society[☆]



AMAZING, TALENTED, INNOVATIVE, SMART, DEDICATED, GIVING, MENTOR, FIRST, PROFESSIONAL, FAMILY-ORIENTED, SUPERWOMAN!

These are all terms that apply to one of dermatology's most outstanding women. Dr. Wilma Bergfeld fits them all.

I was honored when asked to prepare an article about her. So as I write, please understand that she has earned the accolades that the WDS and others have bestowed upon her. When one thinks about Wilma, the term "first" has to be part of the equation. She is, in fact, a remarkable woman.

First, let us address her professional accomplishments—which, by the way, are only part of the story.

Dr. Bergfeld completed her undergraduate work at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, and is a graduate of the Temple University School of Medicine in Philadelphia. She did her dermatology residency at the Cleveland Clinic and her dermatopathology fellowship at Armed Forces of Pathology in Washington, DC. She joined the Cleveland Clinic as a Clinical Dermatologist, Department of Dermatology and, later, after an AFIP Dermatopathology Fellowship, she was appointed as Head and Codirector of Dermatopathology, Departments of Dermatology and Pathology. She has been the Director of the Cleveland Clinic's Dermatopathology fellowship since 1975.

Dr. Bergfeld has many leadership and organizational accomplishments. Among her "firsts": the first woman President of the American Academy of Dermatology, first woman President of the Cleveland Academy of Medicine, and founder and first President of the Women's Dermatologic Society. Additionally, she served as President of the American Society of Dermatopathology, the Hair Research Society, the Cleveland Dermatology Society, the Ohio Dermatological Association, and the Cleveland Clinic Staff. She was also elected to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors of the Cleveland Clinic. She holds an honorary membership in the American Academy of Dermatology, Women's Dermatology Society, Cleveland Dermatology Society, Ohio Dermatological Society, Pacific Dermatologic Association, Canadian Dermatology Society, and the Italian Dermatology Society.

Dr. Bergfeld is a former chair and current consultant to the Food and Drug Administration's Dermatology and Ophthalmology Advisory Committee, and more recently a consultant to the Device Advisory Committee. Since 1977, she has been the Chair of the Cosmetic Ingredient Expert Panel, which determines the safety of cosmetic ingredients.

She is a nationally and internationally recognized expert in the clinical and pathologic aspects of hair disorders, in addition to being a renowned dermatopathologist. Her expertise in clinical practice led to the AAD's 2012 Master Dermatologist Award. She has recorded and shared her knowledge base by her many publications (600 articles, 4

books, and 80 book chapters). She has also shared her expertise via lectures and other educational activities at medical meetings and universities. Dr. Bergfeld has engaged in significant clinical research and has long been a supporter of basic science research. She has served on many journals' editorial boards and has been a reviewer in both her professional fields of clinical dermatology and dermatopathology. Other activities include serving as a consultant/scientific adviser to many pharmaceutical companies.

In 1996, she received the Women's Dermatologic Society's Rose Hirschler Award, honoring an outstanding physician who has contributed to medicine and dermatology while enhancing the role of women in dermatology. She received the American Academy of Dermatology's prestigious Marion B. Sulzberger Award in 1997 and was the recipient of the 2000 AAD Golden Triangle Award for Community Service. Additionally, in 2000, she was the first recipient of the Wilma F. Bergfeld, MD Leadership Award, presented by the Women's Dermatologic Society. In 2005, the Cleveland Academy of Medicine awarded her the John Budd, MD, Distinguished Member Award. The American Society of Dermatopathology, in 2007, awarded her the prestigious "Founders Award," and she was awarded the Maria Duran Leadership Award and medal by the International Society of Dermatology in 2009. Finally, in 2010, she received the Samuel J. Zakon Dermatology History Award from the Dermatology History Society.

Her American Academy of Dermatology volunteer activities have included Chair, Council of Communications and long-time member of the communications committee; original member and long-term member of "Dialogues in Dermatology"; Chair of the Scientific Council (annual meeting committee); and Chair of the Volunteer Circle, "Members Making a Difference." She has also served on several AAD and Women's Dermatologic Society Visionary Committees. Dr. Bergfeld has received many AAD Presidential citations, including Leadership in AAD Communications and The Volunteer Circle. Since 1995, she has been cited in "Best Doctors in America," "Top Doctors," "Top Pathologist," and in numerous Who's Who publications. She is a very accomplished public speaker, and believes in being informed and educated across the board, including media and crisis management training.

Even though her CV and Bio address her many contributions to dermatology and to the community at large, I want to comment on what I know to be true. She has a passion for dermatology, for teaching dermatology, and for her patients, who she also educates daily in her practice. She is willing to help other dermatologists by consulting with them on patient management and is not averse to asking other dermatologists for input on her own patients. She is extremely dedicated to communicating with her patients and imparts this to young trainees as an essential aspect for good patient care. She wants to ensure that dermatology patients have positive outcomes and that those who care for them have the necessary tools and education to make that happen. Dr. Bergfeld has accomplished much in her career, but the bottom line is that she cares about her patients.

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So now that we have established that she is a doctor extraordinaire and provided an impressive recitation of her many professional accomplishments, it is time to move on to the fun, personal aspects of this remarkable woman.

Dr. Wilma Bergfeld is married to John A. Bergfeld, MD, an internationally known sports medicine orthopedic surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic who currently oversees the operating rooms at the Cleveland Clinics. He served as team physician for the Cleveland Browns for 30 years and the Cleveland Cavaliers for 27 years. They recently celebrated a 50th wedding anniversary. She is the mother of two daughters, Onee Bergfeld Lowe (deceased) and Sigrid Bergfeld Grieco, and has five granddaughters. Her parents recently celebrated their 100th birthday(s) together, and Wilma and John were involved in the ongoing care of her mother and her father, who was a surgeon; they lived independently in the home that Wilma grew up in until their recent passing. She has a twin brother (dentist), a sister (nurse), and numerous nieces and nephews. In fact, family dinners at the Bergfeld home conservatively include about 40 family members and various strays—me included. Of interest, her daughter Sig is largely responsible for the wonderful WDS book, *Petals and Pearls*.

Wilma is a good sport about almost everything; she has followed her husband on many exciting and challenging adventures, including cross-county expeditions in mountain winter cabins (cold and hard), fishing where there are too many snakes to be comfortable, cooking breakfast with him on New Year's morning at the river by their home with over 100 attendees (also cold), tours in China, and safaris in Africa. She has also accompanied John as they spent many hours sailing in Lake Erie, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Greece.

She is absolutely devoted to her family. Her husband, who is very accomplished in his own right, noted during a tribute to her that she always had a home-cooked meal on the table each evening (I know, I know, hard to fathom in this day and age, but true nonetheless). She loves shopping, fashion, and jewelry. For the holidays, she decorates and entertains to the hilt (I do not know where she finds the time); she has a beautiful home and does things that many of us have forgotten or are too busy to make time for, such as dragging out the good china and polishing the silver. What is really interesting is that, at home, one would never know about her amazing accomplishments, as she is actually quite modest. She never talks about them.

However, to my mind one of her greatest attributes is her willingness to give. And I don't mean just presents, but of her time and wisdom. She had the vision to create the WDS and, frankly, dragged some of us into the Society when it was not popular to be part of a women's group. She was generous in promoting all of us into all kinds of leadership positions and encouraging us to "go for it," especially when we were feeling excluded. I have never seen her retaliate, even when she had reason to think about it, nor have I ever seen her intentionally harm anyone, even those who might have not have been as kind to her as one would hope. It is important to note, however, that she is not a pushover. She has and will stand up to injustices, take on the power brokers when necessary, and risk it all when the cause is just.

She continually encourages both women and men to maximize their potential, keep to the high road, and always consider the greater good of one's actions.

There have been times when I wondered at her inclusion or promotion of someone who had acted in a less-than-professional manner, and instead of being critical, she opted to create an inclusive environment and bring them into the fold.

She can also be tactfully funny. After being elected as the second woman President of the AAD, I was about to walk on stage to give my Presidential address when Wilma informed me that my earrings were "unacceptable." She then took her own earrings off and said "wear these," which I did and have continued to do so for the last 15 years, and every time I wear them I am reminded of her generosity.

So, mentoring comes in many forms. By the way, the saga continues—she is now after my "unacceptable purse."

It has been my pleasure to call her my friend, one that could always be counted upon, no matter what.



1. Wilma and husband, John, hosting their annual New Year's Day Brunch at Wiley Creek on their property.

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