

Dr. Carl Henry Nacht

The great vitality of Dr. Carl Henry Nacht will be honored by the creation of a fellowship in his name at Transportation Alternatives.

Henry (the name his family used) dearly loved this city. Growing up in Brooklyn and Queens, and later practicing medicine here for thirty years, he walked its neighborhoods, ran its streets and bicycled to his medical office, hospital and homebound patients.

Infused with insatiable curiosity and a desire for optimal experiences, Henry found innovative ways to promote health and well being (let's call it happiness!) in his own life, and was determined to spread it around.

To patients...“ You'll love the way you feel on a Mediterranean diet, and while you're at it, get a bike, you'll love that too!”

To the little soccer players on his team...“I'll pay one dollar to every kid who can circle the field three times!”

To his wife and friends...“Let's run the city's bridges, then go to the Aquarium and have pizza at Totonno's”

There were very few who could refuse Henry's delightfully engaging diplomacy and enthusiasm.

He explored the boroughs on foot (training for 29 NYC marathons), by bike, and even driving a yellow taxi while putting himself through college. After graduating Temple Medical College in Philadelphia, he returned to New York, and completed his Residency in Primary Care Internal Medicine at Roosevelt Hospital. For several years he practiced at The Bronx Municipal Hospital where he became the director of their medical clinic. Back to Roosevelt in 1985, Henry began a private practice on the Upper West Side, co-founded River to River Medical Associates, and became the Medical Director of West Care (setting up group practices around the city). He taught clinical medicine to medical students at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons.

We were fortunate, Henry and I, having thirty-three years to explore our world together, much of it on foot and on a bicycle. The bicycle figured into our lives going to work, taking our kids to school, and traveling for weeks at a time. Many a good chunk of cheese, and loaf of bread were enjoyed in the open space of a foreign city's plaza, bikes at our sides. We loved open shared space, the possibility of public conversation and the anticipation of the next town or country we were headed toward, and all we'd learn along the way.

As Henry's partner for thirty-three years in marriage, parenting, and crime (we met when he picked me up hitch hiking), I am very happy to create a fellowship at TA to which Henry himself would have applied. Reclaiming the street from the automobile was a passion of his. Street games, learned as a kid in Brooklyn were passed lovingly along. He even flew to

Albuquerque with his stickball bat, determined to teach his friend's children the love of the game. (They're still playing).

Streets with protected bike lanes were still an unrealized dream when Henry died in 2006, as were dedicated bus lanes, or the open pedestrian plazas, such as those at 42nd Street and Madison Square.

When Henry died after being hit by a tow truck while we were riding our bikes, I knew I had to transform my grief and rage into something positive. Henry and I had become members back in the late 70's when TA was just a two person operation. With Henry's untimely death at age 56 I knew how relevant TA's mission was to preventing further unnecessary deaths. TA's effectiveness is something of legend in the world of advocacy. My work with them over the last four and a half years was the best choice I could have made. Working alongside TA has been extremely meaningful and healing for me, and very important to my family.

Now, each year a fellow with scholarship in urban planning, public policy, or health and medicine, will apply and be selected to work on a project that they will design that will help actualize Henry's dream city. Play streets, safe routes to schools, clean air, trains running on time, reductions in obesity, urban gardens, open public space, and of course safe protected bicycle lanes are all a part of that dream. This is what TA is all about. They are extremely mindful, and highly effectively advocates for a livable healthier city for us all.

Through this fellowship there will be one more advocate at work on the dream. I know it would have made a happy guy even happier.

Mary Beth Kelly