

# Activist Doc

Although his resume reads like a road map to activism, Dr. Bob Sloves says he became an activist "almost accidentally."

by Bev Morse

Gangly, lanky and tall, this young, older man has an enthusiasm for life that grows with the years. Dr. Robert Sloves' own kids, Max, Sara and Sam, may be the apples of his eye, but his heart belongs to Peggy, the stunning young registered nurse, whom he met at County-USC and married just before enlisting in the army.

"The 101st Airborne - 12 jumps," says the OB/GYN, "and just in time for the Cuban missile crisis, (Oct. 22, 1962), the beginning rumble of Viet Nam, and James Meredith, desegregation and civil rights, and the legalization of abortion." He grins, "Talk about timing."

It's been a full life for an MD, a life that includes being an activist in civil rights, human rights, and particularly women's rights; an art collector, professor emeritus, high seas and mountain adventurer, journeyman, biker, public speaker and gourmand. And, since Rosh Hashana, last month, battling a metastasized cancer, having fought off the enemy, melanoma, four years ago.

Their home nests on a tiny, winding lane in Rolling Hills Estates. Its sunning Mexican-style architecture leads to hand-hewn, oversized wood door opening to a world of, well, the world. Really. Over 40 countries and nearly every state in the Union are represented in the antiques, paintings, sculpture, pottery, furniture, baskets, medical and precious Judaica.

Recalling his years from 1962 to 1964 as an Army captain, medical paratrooper with the 101st Airborne, Sloves said, "I was lucky. They sent me to Ft Campbell, Kentucky, just as the Cuban missile crisis escalated, Viet Nam began, and then I was sent as part of a rescue unit for James Meredith and college desegregation at the University of Mississippi.

"After that excitement, some of us noticed there was an excess of paratrooper-trained general surgeons. A friend suggested I do some work in OB/GYN, and I found what I wanted to do."

A patient remembers her first visit to his office, and being shown into his business office for an introductory pre-examination meeting, before being led to an examination room. Following the exam, "Dr. Sloves asked me to dress and meet with him again in his business office."

An activist herself, she says, "I told him how respected I felt, once again fully dressed, and meeting with him, as an equal, in his business office afterward. I will never forget his response.

"He vowed to himself after those army textbook exam procedures, that when he

got into private practice, he would never, ever subject women to the indignity of sitting with their stockings rolled down around their ankles and clutching a paper modesty gown, while trying to hold a dignified conversation, before the next woman was ushered in."

"I will never forget that," she said.

After completing his residency at County USC in 1968, Sloves did another life jump, this time leaping into his own medical practice in Torrance. He and another post-residency doctor from Hermosa Beach opened Torned Women's Group.

With a young growing family, Peggy began collecting cookbooks, the first of the couple's many collections. The books now number 1,600, plucked up like treasures along their travels around the world. Peg has catalogued them for quick reference in her computer and, as Bob says, "She also learned to cook."

She enlarged and redesigned the kitchen to suit her skills, artistic and culinary, designing the ceramic tiles on the counters and walls as well. The Sloves, ardent food and wine enthusiasts, are members of the American Institute of Wine and Food and the Culinary Historian Society of California. Throughout the house, other than the family den (three-quarters-devoted to wrap-around cookbook shelving), from stairwells to closets, bathrooms and dining rooms (yes, plural) are more trophies of travel. The home joyfully bursts with color and shape, from art and object d'art meant to be held and beheld; to be used, walked on, sat, bathed and cooked with. Living art.

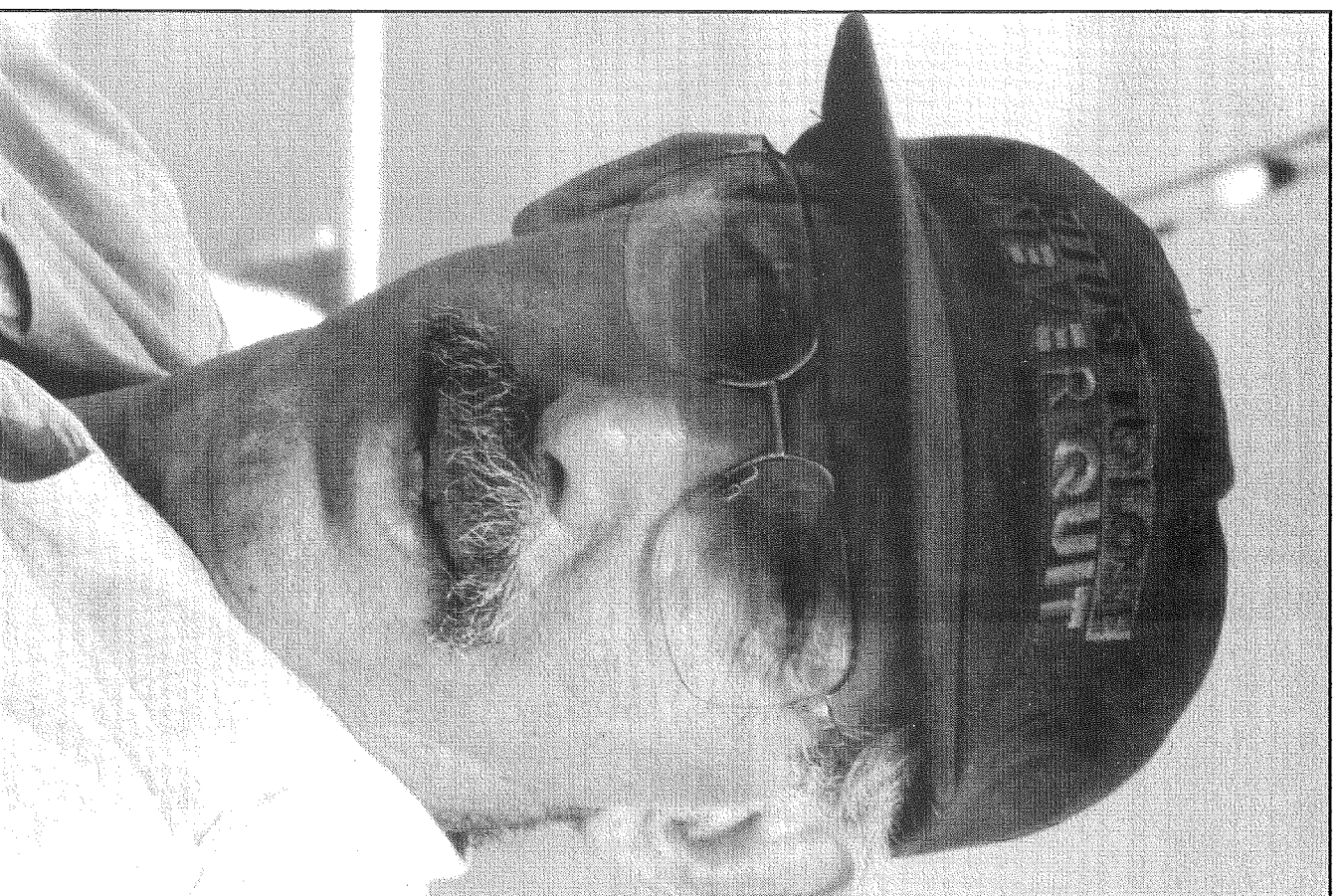
They have visited most of Europe, most of the Mid East, much of African America, and much of Asia; discovering, digging, collecting, bargaining - bringing home museum-quality treasures - and equally treasured memories.

"More often than not, we pay the asking price for folk art," Peggy confides. "The work is so beautiful and they ask so little. They have so little," she adds, shaking her head.

It sounds like a doctor's prescription for the art of living well - and for all the right reasons.

Their favorite trip was in the Yerunda Mountain range of Rawanda and Zaire with author Penelope Bodry-Sanders. She wrote the book on the naturalist-artist Carl Akeley, biologist and conservationist, an original expert in the field and 'diorama' designer of the habitat jungles of the area's gorillas, at the Museum of Natural History of New York.

Bob recalls, "We would wake early each morning and follow the trail of



Bob Sloves, MD, on a small sailing boat heading into a research project in the Philippines, shortly after a typhoon had sunk the large ferryboat normally used between Manila and Corregidor. Photo by Peter Keller, Bowers Museum of Cultural Arts

gorillas from the day before, all day, 'til near sundown, until one day we saw them.

"We stood still, they knew we were there - large silverback gorillas - and they let me sit right next to one of them. It was stunning, took our breath away. I call her my 'girlfriend,'" he smiles, "and keep a picture of 'us' in my office at Torned."

"We were lucky," he says, with a slight shrug. "We were there when it was safe. The Rawandan civil war is destroying the country. It's very poor, desperately poor. Food banks sponsored by multinational corporations, organized to sell powdered milk, discouraged mothers from breast feeding.

"Later on, the guerrillas would hijack the food and supplies, and it didn't get to those for whom it was intended. What little did had little culturally pertinent instructions from government health

agencies. Mothers would mix the powder with contaminated water, creating even more problems and distrust of what we were trying to do."

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Forest Hills, Queens, New York, Sloves seems an unlikely gorilla advocate. His father, who was in the bookbinding business, an amateur oil painter, and became a political speechwriter later in life. "So far to the left," Sloves laughed, "Well, so far to the left..."

"I came to my activism almost accidentally," he muses, although his resume reads like a road map to it:

Private OB-GYN Practice, Torrance, 1968-present; Obstetrics & Gynecology, LA County General Hospital; Research - Determination of Fetal Sex by Amniotic Fluid Examination; Research - Determination of Fetal Maturity by Amniotic Fluid Examination; Chairman, 2 years, Dept. of OB/GYN, Torrance