

Steve Katz

JA: Thank you for meeting with me. I first met you last year at a Thursday Breakfast at the Patio. I learned then that we were both from The Bronx.

SK: I was born and grew up in The Bronx. It is interesting that we both went to the same junior high school, high school and college, albeit, not at the same time.

JA: What is your education background?

SK: I attended City College of New York (CCNY) as a pre-dental major. Afterwards I attended the University of Pittsburgh School of Dentistry.

JA: Tell me about your family.

SK: My wife, Fran and I are married 55 years. She is the world's best wife. I have been fortunate to have a wife that has been my inspiration and worked with me in all my endeavors. Fran is a trained dental hygienist. She's a great cook – makes the best matzo ball soup and kugel. We have two children. Michael, our oldest, lives in Naples and has three children. He is the general manager and executive chef at the Naples Yacht Club. Karen, our daughter, lives in Massachusetts with her husband and two children. She has had a long career in sales and management in the liquor industry. Fran and I are very fortunate to have some of our family members live close by. I have a younger brother, Dan, who lives in Boca Raton and has a very successful commercial real estate business. My parents spoke Yiddish at home when they didn't want me to understand them. My mother was born in Czechoslovakia and kept a kosher home.

JA: So, after graduating from dental school did you open a dental practice?

SK: This was during the Vietnam war period, and I signed up for two years with the Army as an officer. I was assigned as a dentist to various bases but found myself in Vietnam for one year. This, while Fran stayed behind in the states.

JA: What did you do upon discharge from the army?

SK: Within several years I opened dental practices in New York City, Harriman and Newburgh, New York. Eventually I only practiced in the Harriman office and sold it at the age of 50.

JA: **Why** did you decide to give up practicing dentistry?

SK: After practicing for 35 years, I just did not have the same passion as I had when I started my career. Also, dealing with the insurance companies was not easy. I just felt that it was time for a change.

JA: It sounds like you were making a major change in your life at a relatively young age.

SK: From that point on, I made numerous changes to my residences as well as businesses. We moved to Ft. Myers where we lived for 20 years. At that time, I enjoyed playing golf and the area suited me well. I found that I needed to be active, so Fran and I purchased an ice cream and coffee establishment on Marco Island. After operating the business for five years we decided to move to The Villages, where we lived for five years. At that time, we founded “Vacations Unlimited”, an online brokerage of RV’s. Next, we moved to Blue Ridge, Georgia where we lived for 15 years. It wasn’t too long when I decided to invest in an Alpaca farm, where we now own 10 alpacas. Remembering our experience with the Marco Island ice cream business, we proceeded to open a coffee shop, which evolved into a full deli restaurant by the name of Katz’s New York Deli. It was a very successful operation and we sold it to our manager.

JA: Being from New York, I am familiar with Katz Delicatessen on Houston Street in New York. Are you related to that famous restaurant?

SK: I am related to the original Katz family who, by the way, are no longer the owners of the New York establishment. Our website states that we are not affiliated with Katz Delicatessen in New York.

JA: How did you end up in Naples?

SK: We wanted to be closer to our son who was living in Naples. But of course, it didn’t take long when we decided to open Katz’s New York Deli as an online business. And as of three months ago, we are in a brick-and-mortar store joining Gourmet Mama on Pine Ridge Road.

JA: I find it quite unusual that you stopped practicing dentistry and operated several retail food establishments. It must be very difficult to run such an operation at any age. Why are you doing this now?

SK: I am not doing this to support my family. Fran and I are working together six days a week from 10:00AM to 6:00PM. The business gives me the opportunity to

meet customers and keeps my mind busy and sharp. I very much enjoy being active in my business.

JA: Do you have a hobby?

SK: Fran and I do travel throughout the year. I love to read novels on my kindle and do so every chance I get. We also play canasta with friends. Few people know that I have a full set of woodworking tools and have built cabinets and other wood items.

JA: Since you are in the food business, do you eat much at home?

SK: **We** go out to dinner approximately 3 -4 times a week. My favorite food is Asian – Chinese and Vietnamese. On Sundays I make great ribs.

JA: As an MCA member, what activities do you participate in?

SK: I go to some of the Thursday breakfasts, dine arounds, bocce and some lectures.

JA: I must admit that I am fascinated by your background. You are a “wanderer” and a true “entrepreneur.” It is not every day that you meet a person who has dramatically changed professions, careers and physical locations as you have. And even now, when most people your age have slowed down to a full retirement, you are still going strong.

Dr. Katz, on a final note, I will tell you that the pastrami sandwich I had at your store was delicious.