

Suburb News *in conversation with...*

...Professor Michael Baum

Diana Brahams talks to a man of many talents

Professor Michael Baum is an international star in the research and treatment of breast cancer and many thousands of women owe their lives (and some of them their conserved breasts) to his development and assessment of evidence based treatment. He is a determined de-bunker of homeopathy and any 'alternative' therapies that cannot be demonstrated to work when reproduced under trial conditions and (like me) a founder member of 'HealthWatch' (www.healthwatch-uk.org) and strongly opposed to the so-called Saatchi Bill. Having retired from the NHS some ten years ago (he was appointed Professor of Surgery in three London teaching hospitals consecutively) he remained in post as an Emeritus at University College Hospital until a few months ago. Michael and his wife Judy have three married children (two of whom live locally) and a flock of adoring grandchildren. Modest, kind and compassionate, yet brilliant and multi-talented as an artist and author in later years, a true Renaissance Man, I asked him why he chooses to live on the Suburb:

"Are you a local man?"

"Well, I was born in London but the family moved to Birmingham during the war where I went to school and

University. I qualified in medicine."

"And in due course you have become remarkably eminent in the field of breast cancer and research."

"I chose Academia rather than to become a consultant with the right to develop and retain a significant private practice." He explained: "My mother died from breast cancer when I was a young man and there was little that could be done to treat it. Since then I have always felt driven to improve diagnosis, treatment and prophylactic treatment and long term survival and better outcomes. Unfortunately, although I was originally in favour of population based screening, the evidence demonstrates that it causes far more problems and morbidity than it saves.

"My wife Judy and I and the family moved to follow the jobs in different parts of the country. In my career, we have moved house 14 times. The longest we've lived in any one place is the Suburb – where we have now been for 15 years. We adore it even to the point that having decided to down-size (we have sold our house) are buying a smaller house nearby because we want to spend the rest of our days in the Suburb."

"Mike – why did you and Judy choose the Suburb?"

"My earliest memories of the Suburb go back to when I was 17 years old: I met an attractive girl at summer camp who lived in Holne Chase so I made the occasional visit from Birmingham and at the time the Suburb seemed to be the most glamorous place on earth and it seemed beyond my wildest dreams that I would live there. Then my late father spent his twilight years nearby and was a member of Norrice Lea Synagogue.

Work dominated our choice of home. When I was appointed Prof Surgery at Kings College Hospital we elected to live in Dulwich Village. Later, when I became Professor of Surgery at the Royal Marsden Hospital where there was little emergency on call work, which meant I could live further away, we moved to NW3. Then our oldest daughter married a young man from the Suburb in Norrice Lea Synagogue and was living nearby. At that point, we joined that Synagogue so we could attend as a family. It's the best move we ever made. Then our second daughter married a local lad. My son and his wife and family live in New York – but they visit us twice a year."

"What is special about the Suburb?"

"The greenery everywhere; the delightful walks through the



twittens that link up streets and closes, the woods and the open spaces and most of all the Heath Extension that stretches into Hampstead Heath and Kenwood and beyond. How beautiful it all looks in the spring when Meadway and many other streets are ablaze with blossoming trees.

"When we have visitors from abroad I fetch them from Golders Green tube station and drive them round the Heath and along Wildwood Road and they are amazed at how lovely it is and yet it is only 20 mins by tube from Central London.

"We have vowed never to live more than a walk away from the Heath and when we move to our new house we will be able to see it from our front door."

"How has your career evolved since you settled here with Judy fifteen years ago?"

"I retired from the NHS about ten years ago, but I continued as a non-clinical Professor at the Hospital and this gave me some spare time to explore some other interests. I apprenticed myself to Highgate artist, Israel

Zohar, who taught me how to paint in oils in the classical style."

A selection of Baum's beautifully constructed paintings (which include stylish portraits, vibrant landscapes, still life and genre scenes) can be viewed on Professor Baum's personal website, www.michaelbaum.co.uk and a

quick Google search reveals a long entry on Wikipedia and much else.

He has written a semi-autobiographical account of his life and work in 'Breast Beating'. There will be a review of his novel 'The Third Tablet of the Holy Covenant' in our next issue.



The Ballerina, Michael Baum, 2010



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Diana Brahams was first introduced to Suburb News readers soon after the paper started in 1983 when we ran a piece about a book she had written at the time. Now it's her turn as she has volunteered to interview some notable residents for us.

A long term Suburb resident herself Diana is no stranger to publishing as she is editor of The Medico Legal Journal.



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