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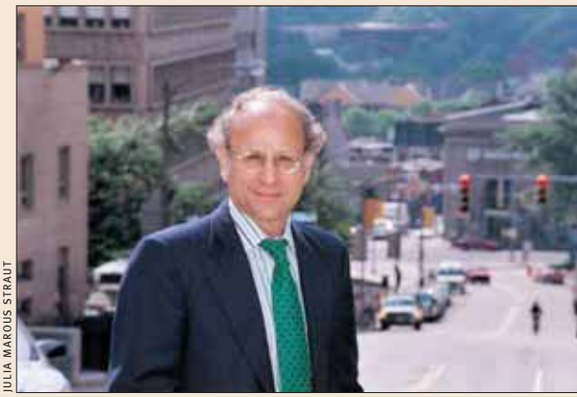
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JULIA MAROUS STRAUT

Life levels all men: death reveals the eminent. —George Bernard Shaw

The world has lost two great women in the span of a week. No person is ignorant of the life of Coretta Scott King—a force for peaceful social change and an icon of grace and courage. Fewer know the circumstances of the life of our own Katherine Detre, for many years one of our university's most distinguished faculty members, who came to Pitt in 1974. As a young, Jewish woman in Budapest, Katherine survived the German occupation by cloaking her religion and ancestry as she worked as a streetcar conductor and lived in a Catholic convent. While in medical school, she learned that her father and brother had perished in concentration camps, and she immersed herself in her medical studies as an antidote to despair. Later, to escape the Communists, she managed to slip across the border to Austria.

Katherine completed her medical studies in Canada—no small feat after landing on North American soil without speaking English. A friend from Budapest, Thomas Detre (who would become her husband and my predecessor as senior vice chancellor for the health sciences at this university), encouraged her to join him at Yale. There she studied biometry. She blossomed into an important and singularly creative scientist.

At Yale in 1970, Katherine served as the principal epidemiologist and biostatistician for the first clinical trial to compare the effectiveness of surgery to that of medical treatment for coronary artery disease. Not everyone welcomed the results, which demonstrated a survival benefit for surgery for left main-stem coronary artery disease but not for other manifestations of coronary artery disease. Despite making many "experts" unhappy, the trial results became highly influential and remain widely respected. This would become a recurring theme in Katherine's life. As she built the Epidemiology Data Center in Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health, she was steadfast in her assertion that therapies could be proven safe and effective only through rigorous science. The center, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year, has coordinated the design, data management, and analysis for more than 60 major medical research projects. Katherine's work persuaded a generation of physicians and epidemiologists at Pitt and elsewhere of the importance of careful statistical analysis and well-managed clinical trials. Her work has had major implications for patient care—notably in determining the most effective approaches for treating coronary artery disease in diabetic patients.

Katherine had many of the traits that we associate with this city. This Distinguished Professor of Epidemiology was resilient, diligent, civil, generous of spirit, and creative. I think of her now while Pittsburghers wave their Terrible Towels and pray for touchdowns. By the time you read this, the Super Bowl will have been played. But as I write, an entire city is inspired to perform at its finest. Dr. Katherine Detre was another kind of champion. The millions who suffer from diseases ranging from cardiovascular disease to depression will profit from her labors to identify the very best available treatments for them.

Katherine was the kind of scientist and person we all aspire to be.

Arthur S. Levine, MD
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