



Carol and Mark Fischer

A Passion Born Of Experience

When Mark Fischer joined the La Jolla Institute for Allergy & Immunology's board of directors, he brought with him a deep-seated concern for public service, but also something infinitely more personal — thoughts of his lovely wife of 31 years. "My wife Carol was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 24 years ago," he notes. "There is still no cure for this very debilitating disease." Research, Mark notes, offers hope and he's determined to aid the battle. "The La Jolla Institute is one of the top research institutes in the world focused on finding new treatments for many diseases that are immune system driven, including MS. I'm happy to serve on their board and support these important disease-fighting efforts," says Mark, who joined last year.

Carol is also enthused, and helping the institute has become a family affair. Last fall, the couple hosted a "friend-raising" event at their home and made several charitable gifts. Carol has also begun discussing her illness more publicly to raise awareness of the importance of immune disease research and to offer hope to other sufferers. "I once heard a speaker say, 'the biggest disability is attitude.' I thought, wow, that is so true. How many people have everything, but have the worst attitude and so are basically paralyzed. I always try to stay positive."

Vivacious and brimming with enthusiasm, Carol is a testament to living fully in the face of chronic illness. While raising their two daughters, ages 24 and 16, she has often volunteered with the schools, Rady Children's Hospital, and the MS Society, which have also received generous support through their company, Sullivan Moving and Storage.

And while she has advanced to secondary progressive MS, Carol feels fortunate and remains resolute. "I've had to cut back some because of my illness. However, I enjoy being involved when I can."

Anna Deavere Smith: The Ultimate Impressionist

Anna Deavere Smith is bringing her newest one-woman show, *Let Me Down Easy*, to the Lyceum Theatre. Onstage April 27 through May 15, it was conceived and written by, and will be performed by Smith, an admired actress, widely published author, teacher, and — yes — a comic. She has the timing of a stand-up comedienne, the keen observational skills of a journalist, and has played feature roles in *The American President*, *The Human Stain*, *Rent*, and *Rachel Getting Married*. Recently, she was the subject of PBS' *Bill Moyer's Journal*. Her sense of irony and comic absurdity feed her curiosity about people, and she transforms before audiences as she takes on various persona.

Explaining the process of creating the current play, Smith says, "I interviewed over 300 people on three continents." Those interviews generated the characters of more than 20 people who inhabit the play. The portrayals "are all drawn from the words of people who speak to the vulnerability of the human body, the resilience of the spirit, the price of care." Smith also notes, "The *Let Me Down Easy* journey began when I was invited to be a visiting professor at the Yale School of Medicine. My first thought was, 'Really, me, a clown, to create something in such a serious elite environment?' I walked away from the experience with an increased compassion for doctor and patient alike. The stories stayed in my heart."

Thanks to San Diego REP, La Jolla Playhouse, and Vantage Theatre for bringing Smith's play to S.D. It's a big deal to have this brilliant woman in our midst. She's a recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, a Pulitzer Prize nominee, a winner of multiple Drama Desk Awards, and has twice been nominated for Tony Awards as both actress and playwright. *Let Me Down Easy* was touted by *Entertainment Weekly* as one of the top ten productions of 2009. The *New York Times* said it so well and succinctly when it described Smith as "the ultimate impressionist: she does people's souls." DARLENE G. DAVIES



Anna Deavere Smith