



Dr. Mitchael Alan Meznar

August 31, 1960 - October 2, 2025

Dr. Mitchael Gatéyaské Alan Meznar (formerly Metzner) began his spirit journey on October 2, 2025, at the age of 65 years, on Mvskoke land in Tulsa, Oklahoma, due to complications from severe spinal cord and nerve compression. At the time of his passing, Mitch was a resident at Clarehouse of Tulsa, a very special place he had long held dear and knew to be a rare and exemplary nonprofit residential hospice house. He found peace and comfort in the compassionate care of former colleagues and staff, and in the nurturing and serene interior spaces and gardens. His primary care while on hospice was provided by the dedicated team at CompleteOK Hospice, whose skilled and attentive support guided his final chapter with dignity and grace. Mitch had been living in Tulsa with family since November 2024—Dr. Pam Mdwésenajewen Vrooman and Samuel Harris III—alongside his beloved Great Pyrenees service dog, Luna, and

family dogs Ruby, Clifford, and Cassie.

Mitch was born on August 31, 1960, in San Pablo, California, the eldest of three children. Proud of the former republic's Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican roots—he considered San Francisco his hometown for much of his life. He also spent many of his formative years in the rural farm country and Sierra Nevada mountains near the edge of California's Great Basin; in the state capitol, Sacramento; and later in the San Gabriel and Santa Monica Mountains, especially cherishing the magical and Bohemian community of Topanga.

Mitch graduated from Bella Vista High School in Fair Oaks, California, in June 1977.

During high school, he left home at age 14 and moved multiple times—changing schools four times, skipping a year, and graduating in three. Though he did not enjoy high school, he attended early morning and late afternoon extracurricular classes to accelerate his education and spend less time in a challenging home environment.

Despite being a neurodivergent introvert with dyslexia and autism, Mitch had a deep love of learning and was the first in his family to graduate high school and college. Over the course of his life he attended 14 colleges and universities, including several in the

greater Sacramento area and others across the country—in Virginia, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, Illinois, and Massachusetts.

While working initially in gerontology and later at the American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., Mitch was inspired to complete one of many majors he had pursued (favorites included theater and dance, military chaplaincy, architecture, medicine, and public service)—ultimately earning a Bachelor of Arts in Management and Organizational Development. He followed this with a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, a Ph.D. in Human Services, and a Postdoctoral year in Epidemiology. Mitch completed his master’s thesis examining the dark history of Indian Boarding Schools, *Adult Education in Native American Communities: Environments and Strategies for Learning*, at the Washington, D.C. campus of National-Louis University, a satellite campus of one of the oldest educator schools, originally National Teachers College of Chicago, Illinois. He went on to complete his doctoral dissertation research, *Public Health Policy Implications for HIV Behavioral Risk Reduction Interventions: Unintended Recovery Outcomes among Methamphetamine-Using MSM*, at the University of California, San Diego, and earned his Ph.D. in Human Services from Capella University’s School of Public Service Leadership. During his

postdoctoral

Epidemiology research year, he examined Applying the Public Health Model to Hospice

from a Neuroscience and Disease Mortality Perspective.

Mitch was a grateful alum of Harvard University, having completed programs in Public

Health and Human Rights through a joint initiative of the Harvard and Boston University

Schools of Public Health, and later attending as a Fellow in the Senior Executives in

State and Local Government Program at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS-2006).

Mitch went on to teach all grades of school, including primary and secondary schools in

Vänernsberg and Växjö, Sweden; Stuart Hall School for Boys in San Francisco, California; and Cobblestone School in Rochester, New York. He also taught at both the

undergraduate and post-graduate levels as an adjunct professor and psychology

lecturer at San Diego City College and San Marcos State University in California, and at

Carlos Albizu University in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

A dedicated generalist, Mitch cultivated an intentional academic track and a wide-

ranging public and human services career that reflected his curiosity, compassion, and

lifelong commitment to health education and public policy affecting marginalized and

vulnerable populations. He also built a long and varied side-career in fine dining, and

owned and operated Café Rico in San Francisco, California, alongside his mother. He toured with the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C. during their 10th Anniversary Season, performing in a joint concert with the Denver Gay Men's Chorus at Boston's Symphony Hall in March 1992. Mitch renovated and rebuilt several homes over the years, obsessively unable to leave untouched anything he felt could be enhanced more functionally and beautifully. He was widely known for his handyman skills—the origin of which he attributed to lessons learned from his grandfather and his mother's stepfather, Bert Mears. Later he would hold a General Contractor's license in Virginia and was an Associate member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in Washington, D.C. where he once led the AIA Historic Resources Committee. His human services and social work began in the 1970s and his hospice service and epidemiology work began at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in 1982. Over the decades that followed, he held leadership and support roles in several organizations and nonprofits, contributing to both program development and management, as well as provider training, publishing many technical training manuals and other materials. These opportunities included the American Red Cross National Headquarters

HIV/AIDS

Education Program; The Twilight Brigade, serving veterans receiving hospice care at

U.S. Veterans Administration Medical Centers in San Diego, Long Beach, and Los

Angeles; Gabriel's House at Anam Cara of Topanga, California, supporting individuals

under hospice care; as a Chaplain for Amedisys Hospice and the American Red Cross

of Orange County, California; and as a Board Member and Trustee for Evergreen Life

Services, a multi-state organization serving people with disabilities.

Mitch produced and published much of the earliest and most broadly distributed print

and video public education and prevention materials in multiple languages for the U.S.

response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic while with the American Red Cross and funded by

the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). His work included the 1991

Cine Golden Eagle Public Health award-winner Reasons to Care: The Many Faces of

HIV, which premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. He worked for the

Red Cross for 10 years, and for another 20 years as a volunteer in several states,

-serving as a Disaster Mental Health worker and Chaplain. In addition to his own lived

experience with disability, Mitch was a long-time contributor to the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA), beginning in the late 1980s and continuing until the bill was signed into law on July 26, 1990. Mitch was subsequently invited to train White House staff, numerous federal agencies, and major U.S. corporations on the meaning, provisions, and implementation of the ADA, writing and executive producing AIDS in the

Workplace with President Bill Clinton as the spokesperson—fortuitous career experiences that helped shape a more inclusive future for millions of Americans.

As a public health educator and epidemiology research scientist, the majority of his

work was federally funded by the CDC and the National Institute of Allergy and

Infectious Diseases, addressing HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Avian Influenza, Swine Flu,

Hepatitis C, Substance Abuse, the COVID-19 pandemic, and including refugee

quarantine, isolation, and vaccination programs. Additionally, in recognition of his public

service, Mitch was commended in 1995 by President Clinton for his contributions to the

President's Memorandum on AIDS, was a Presidential Management Fellowship

nominee for President Obama, and later also received a COVID-19 Pandemic Civilian

Service Medal in 2022 for his work with the Administration for Strategic Preparedness

and Response within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The final years of Mitch's work history involved serving as a hospice Executive Director and later as a chaplain, then in Disaster and Emergency Management, serving as a Chief Finance and Administrative Officer, both with the California Emergency Medical Services Authority and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Disaster Medical System. Following the COVID-19 Pandemic, he was honored to have briefly served in his lifetime "dream job" as Chief of Staff Officer with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in Washington, D.C. During his work years he frequently volunteered with a number of nonprofits, was a philanthropist supporting a great many community programs, and served as a board member for several organizations. He loved working and retired early in 2023 after receiving an unexpected terminal deteriorating spinal cord diagnosis. His retirement marked the culmination of a long and impactful career as a federally funded research scientist and epidemiologist working in public health education and policy, as well as in emergency and disaster response. He also dedicated decades of his life to hospice care—providing volunteer services and training both volunteers and professionals. Beyond his professional life, Mitch was a passionate nature enthusiast,

climate collapse
researcher, and an avid genealogist for more than 50 years, ultimately
documenting his
lineage to the Citizen Potawatomi Nation through his Charles Neddo (1802-
1864) family
bloodline and other direct Indigenous bloodlines including Antoine Duclos
(1775-1834)
via Nicolas Panis and Marie Louise Gareau aka Garo, Doyon dite
Laframboise, as well
as Archange Duchêne aka Duchene, Duclos (1787-1830). Gatéyaské had
lineage to
both Jigwé (Thunder) clan and Mko (Bear) clan through his Potawatomi line.
Mitch was
also of French, English, Scots Irish and Portuguese descent on his maternal
side and
Slovenian on his paternal side.
He considered himself fortunate in many ways, never a victim, having
experienced a
great deal of love during his life, and was deeply grateful for the
companionship of dogs,
other animals, and the natural world throughout his life. He identified as two-
spirit, and
was an amazing gardener with a true green thumb, and carried himself
gracefully his
whole life thanks to years spent in professional dance.

He traveled extensively across six continents, spoke multiple languages, and
lived in
Sweden, Puerto Rico, Canada, and Brazil. Mitch survived a number of critical
events

and illnesses and also learned a great deal living with chronic diseases much of his life, believing love, illness, and death to be life's greatest teachers. Not without faults, he was often described as one who had lived a thoroughly unconventional and courageous life—rich and expansive enough to fill multiple lifetimes—inspiring those who knew him and well-remembered by many.

He is survived by his mother, Pat Metzner of Tyler, Texas; his son, Erik Ryan Metzner of Sacramento, California; and his granddaughter, Aubrey Metzner of Modesto, California.

He is also survived by his brothers, Marty Metzner of Tyler, Texas, and Mike Metzner of Auburn, California; his half-brother, Dr. Thomas Metzner of Jacksonville, Florida; and his

uncle, Ed Mahon of Tyler, Texas. Mitch is additionally survived by his long friend and ex

Steven J Bernstein, of San Diego, California, dear ex-husband, Saulo Cardoso Bruno of

Presidente Tancredo Neves, Brazil, and extended family of the Citizen Potawatomi

Nation in Oklahoma and California, particularly his cousins Czarina Thompson and

Jayne Fleischfresser. He was predeceased—and profoundly shaped—by the deaths of

his father, Bob Metzner of Tracy, California (1991); his partner, Chuck Lilly III of

Alexandria, Virginia (1994); his grandmother, Anna Belle Mears (2002); his beloved

husband, Gabe Gelbart of Topanga, California (2014); and his former wife, Patti Jean

Healy of Carmichael, California (2023).

Mitch's cremains will be scattered in several places close to his heart: The Citizen

Potawatomi Nation Eagle Aviary in Shawnee, Oklahoma by his beloved sister-cousin,

Dr. Pam Mdwésenajewen Vrooman; in the village of Vernek, Slovenia—where his

father's ancestors long lived and surviving descendants still do—by his dear friend Dr.

Monica Williams; and in a created coral reef dropped off the Gulf of Mexico by his dear

friend Ron Corona. In lieu of flowers or a memorial service, Mitch requested that those

who wish to honor his memory consider donating to the Citizen Potawatomi Nation

Cultural Heritage Center (tax ID number 73-0945447) at

<https://www.potawatomih heritage.com/donations/1129/> or 1899 S Gordon Cooper Dr,

Shawnee, OK 74801; or Clarehouse, Inc. (tax ID number 73-1603851), a residential

social model hospice house and pioneer of the Omega House home-like hospice

movement at <https://www.clarehouse.org/donate/> or 7617 S Mingo Rd, Tulsa, Oklahoma

74133; or Evergreen Life Services at <https://els.givecloud.co/> at 2101 Hwy 80, Haughton, LA 71037 (tax ID number 72-0537029). In February 2023 he

received his

Indigenous name, Gatéyaské, and eagle feather, from his sister-cousin Dr.

Pam

Vrooman after being told his spinal cord deterioration was terminal, at a naming ceremony in Topanga, CA, where his many friends and family gathered to witness. He considered this his memorial service, adding that he was a fortunate man to be able to attend and hear tributes from loved ones while still living.

Tribute Wall

AV

“ *Amaya Victoria lit a candle in memory of Dr. Mitcheal Alan Meznar*



Amaya Victoria - November 18, 2025 at 09:25 PM

OL

“ *Mitch was a remarakable human. His passion for inspiring and uplifting others, for improving care for those at the end-of-life and for continuously studying to deepen his connection to the divine was exemplery. God Bless you Mitch. And may your mother and family and all those who tenderly cared for you be touched by Grace in these days ahead. See you on the other side Brother! THANK YOU for everything. I love you. ❤️*



Olivia - October 31, 2025 at 02:58 PM

AV

“ Dearest Mitch,

Our meeting at the healing circle was beyond auspicious. For from there you moved, quickly, to Los Angeles and met Gabe. I will always remember the magical "dinners" you and Gabe invited me to. I met the most magnificent men and women sitting around your dinner table. The gatherings of healers and seekers in your home.

You and Gabe coming to me and asking me to be part of your walk as you two found your place in Topaga. The coming onto your land there, the elder trees. So wonderful. I was and am honored.

My dearest Mitch, I am very sad. I will miss you here in the physical. I am very humbled, and filled with joy to have known you so. We were family coming back together again.

I am sure you are in the place of true magic, joy and love. God speed Mitch, God bless. Rest easy and then get on with your magic, from your place perhaps you will help light up our world. Wonderful man/being you are.

See you soon in the all, one place or another. Wado! Aho Mitakuye Oyasin Amaya

Amaya Victoria - October 08, 2025 at 02:44 PM

SG

Dearest Mitch, my very precious friend...I was never ready for you to leave. God bless and happy trails...until we meet again. 🙏❤️

Sondra Gabriel - October 17, 2025 at 07:51 PM