



Photo courtesy of Gary Krupp

Gary Krupp

why is this knight different from all other knights

by Michelle McFaul

On August 19, 2000, Gary Krupp of Long Island, New York, was knighted in front of friends, family and numerous dignitaries. It was one of the most powerful experiences of his life.

No, it wasn't an honor bestowed upon him by the Queen. Even more wondrously, his recognition came from a higher authority, none other than Pope John Paul II. His Excellency Archbishop Renato R. Martino, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, performed the ceremony at Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in West Hempstead, New York. There was plenty of pomp and circumstance, not to mention deep religious significance. Krupp became a Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great.

To make it even more official, a press release was issued by the Holy See Mission at the United Nations. It stated that Krupp was being "recognized by the Holy See for...tireless and outstanding efforts in assisting the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, a health care facility in Italy started by Blessed Padre Pio. Through the generosity and commitment of Mr. Krupp," the release continued, "this state-of-the-art hospital has been

able to acquire some of the most advanced medical equipment in Europe, thereby helping to expand the outstanding medical attention, care and compassion of the Catholic health care system for countless men, women and children."

The Order of Saint Gregory the Great was founded by Pope Gregory XVI in 1831, who named it after his predecessor, Pope Saint Gregory the Great, and is most frequently bestowed as a special mark of favor of the Holy See for persons who diligently serve the Catholic Church, or who have distinguished themselves by their accomplishments benefiting society, regardless of their religion or gender. This would be a remarkable honor for any good Christian but Krupp is a nice Jewish boy from New York. In fact, he is only the seventh Jewish person to receive this particular Pontifical Honor since 1831.

The beauty of the Order of Saint Gregory and much of the work of the Catholic Church for that matter is that it really has nothing to do with religion at all. It has everything to do with helping people in need. You can go to the smallest village in a third-world country and find a Catholic Church or missionary giving aid to the sick, the hungry and the poor through their outreach programs. Just as need transcends religion, it also ignores geography. People need help in our own backyard which

is why Krupp gets calls from his friend Maria Milone to see if he can help a poor family in the program she runs at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, the very place where Krupp's "knighthood" was celebrated. He was amazed to learn from Maria that most of the people she and Monsignor Jim Lisante help are not Catholic at all.

"That's what I love about the Catholic Church," says Krupp. "I respect its universality, which is actually what the word 'catholic' means. But it all goes back to the basic teachings of Judaism that are the foundation of the Catholic Church. Charity and giving to the needy are central to leading a good Jewish life. So, when Sal and Maria Milone asked me if I would intervene on behalf of a hospital in Italy, I didn't hesitate to get involved.

"Years before, I had developed the first diagnostic imaging center on the South Shore of Long Island and built another one in the Bronx. In addition, I was an owner/operator of a kidney dialysis center in upstate New York. I frequently purchased sophisticated medical equipment for these facilities. Through my business relationships, I was able to convince both GE Medical Systems in the U.S. and Phillips Medical Systems in The Netherlands to place state-of-the-art equipment in Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, the 2500-bed hospital in need. In the 11 years I have worked with the hospital, which is located in a town called San Giovanni Rotondo, we have saved many millions of dollars and obtained much-needed equipment that has greatly enhanced the overall level of care. I know we have saved many, many lives.

"It is a thrill to see that my efforts have helped transform the medical care available to so many people in one part of Italy. It also makes me thankful that I grew up appreciating the differences in people so that I could think beyond my personal boundaries and react to need on a basic human level. People needed help. It didn't matter if they were Italian or Indian, Catholic or Hindu. This I owe to my upbringing."

Krupp's mother's family came to America prior to the Revolutionary War and totally assimilated, while the members of his father's family were observant Jews. "I have to say it is quite wonderful to be born a Jew. It is a special part of who I am. But throughout my life I have been exposed to other religions by my parents' friends and in the mixed neighborhood in Queens where I spent my childhood. I attended Hebrew School and was a bar mitzvah, but I also grew up celebrating Christmas. I consider this a gift that has opened many doors for me in my life."

Krupp and his wife Meredith only recently moved to Long Beach, New York after 31 years in Rockville Centre. They brought up two sons, now in their early twenties, and were very active in community affairs. Rockville Centre is the only incorporated village in the world with its own Diocese. Krupp's affinity for the Church and his close friendship with Monsignor Edward Melton (who passed away a few years ago) brought him into situations in which he was able to contribute his business knowledge to church affairs. He helped with a variety of financial challenges and zoning controversies faced by the Diocese.

Says Krupp, "The fact is I would do the same to help my friends Rabbi Barry Dov Schwartz (who only wishes I would go to Temple more often) and Pastor Harald Kuehne of the Lutheran Church in town. These people have been part of the fabric of my life and my family's life. They have given me so much more than I can ever return. In fact, it was their influence and inspiration that contributed in large part to my decision to work on behalf of the hospital."

Krupp continues to make his mark on the business world through his firm, Gary Solutions, as a consultant to companies in need of reorganization and through networking on behalf of his clients. His business life would be much less satisfying if he did not balance it with his involvement in such organi-

zations as the Path to Peace Foundation, which was originated by his dear friend Archbishop Renato Martino.

"I suppose if I were to sum up what I do and why, I would have to say that I feel like a diplomat representing Jewish people in the Christian world, focusing on similarities and down-playing differences."

Since his investiture, he has met many representatives of the Vatican including Angelo Cardinal Sodano, the Secretary of State of the Vatican; Edmund Cardinal Szoka, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Vatican City State; and, closer to home, Edward Cardinal Egan, Archbishop of the Diocese of New York. "Through their intelligence and wisdom, I continue to learn more about life and what I have to give.

"My wife and I have met the Pope on two occasions, both times humbling and memorable experiences. If I have anything in common with Pope John Paul II it is a dedication to keeping an open heart and open mind. He has done more for the Jewish people than any other Pope. He has visited a synagogue in Rome, recognized the State of Israel and made it a sin to be antisemitic. He has begun a dialogue for reconciliation of past mistakes by the Church and visited the Holy Land. He made wonderful gestures of love and solidarity at the Western Wall and the Holocaust Museum. He is a symbol of hope and tolerance to all religions.

"I've saved the message that Archbishop Martino left on my answering machine when he called to give me the news about my 'knighthood,' just so I can relive the excitement every now and again. I highly recommend it. I also hope that my story will inspire others to give of themselves in any way that works in their lives and no matter what their religious background might be. I pray there will be many more Jewish Knight Commanders of the Pontifical Order of the Kings of Saint Gregory the Great. What a difference it will make to the world!"

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