

OBITUARIES

Lois H. Feinblatt, a pioneering sex therapist at the Johns Hopkins Sex and Gender Clinic, dies at 100

By Frederick N. Rasmussen
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Lois H. Feinblatt, a pioneering sex therapist who practiced with the Johns Hopkins Sex and Gender Clinic for more than three decades and was also a philanthropist, died in her sleep Friday at the Warrenton Condominiums in Guilford. She was 100 years old and a month away from celebrating her 101st birthday.



“Lois inspired us all and was the best of Baltimore and the best of the human condition,” said Freeman A. Hrabowski III, who has since 1992 been president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. “She had a certain joie de vivre which was the essence of her. Lois was a power and a force and we’re so much better because of her.”

Alicia L. Wilson, vice president of economic development for the Johns Hopkins University and the Johns Hopkins Health System said: “I first met Lois when I was 18 through Walter Sondheim, and she’s been my friend, mentor and confidant for more than two decades.”

“She was a multifaceted person, and what drew me to her was her love and understanding of people and she inspired them with her words and deeds,” Ms. Wilson said. “She understood people, was invested in them and wanted to know their life stories and go along on their journeys. She was the friend that everyone deserves to have and was just a genuinely lovely human being.”

[Rebecca Hoffberger](#), former president of the American Visionary Art Museum, is a longtime close friend and member of the Hoffberger family by marriage.

“Lois is irreplaceable and as the theologian Bonhoeffer said, ‘There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so,’” Ms. Hoffberger said. “She became everyone’s best friend and it was on a level I’ve never seen before in my life. She was constantly adding new friends to her quiver.”

The former Lois Hoffberger, daughter of Samuel Hoffberger, a lawyer and a major shareholder and director of the National Brewing Co., and Gertrude Miller Hoffberger, a homemaker, was born in Baltimore and raised on Eutaw Place.



Aimee Adashek, left, of the Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts, and Lois Blum Feinblatt, mental health counselor and philanthropist, during the Baltimore Sun's 25 Women to Watch event at the Baltimore Museum of Art. (Steve Ruark, for The Baltimore

She was a 1938 graduate of Forest Park High School and attended Hood College in Frederick for three years, before transferring to Goucher College where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1942.

"Her father told her she could go to any college she wanted as long as it was 50 miles from Baltimore," said a son, Jeffrey D. Blum, of New York City. "She picked Hood, which was 47 miles from the city." She was on spring break from Hood when she met her future husband, Irving Blum, six years her senior, at a friend's engagement party. The couple ended the evening at the Belvedere Hotel dancing in the Charles Room. "It's 75 years ago now, and I can remember it so well, seeing myself dancing

with him," Mrs. Feinblatt said in a 2019 interview with Health & Wellness, a Johns Hopkins publication.

The couple became engaged in 1941 and wed later that year in a ceremony that was held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel. During the World War II years while her husband served with the Army in Europe, Mrs. Feinblatt was busy raising their first child and volunteering with the American Red Cross.

The couple eventually settled in a home on Fallstaff Road in Northwest Baltimore, and had two more children. In 1957, with encouragement from her husband, she began her professional career as a social case worker for the adoption division of the Department of Social Services, where she screened prospective adopted parents.

"It was pre-birth control pill and pre-Roe v. Wade; there were lots of babies being placed for adoption. We told the adoptive mothers, 'Raise her as if you gave birth to her. She need never know who her biological parents are,'" Mrs. Feinblatt explained in a 2013 interview with The Jewish Times. "Birth mothers would never see their babies after they were born. Today, it is understood that children have the right to know their parents and heritage."

In 1966, Mrs. Feinblatt saw an ad in The Sun whose headline proclaimed, "Hopkins to Train Housewives as Psychotherapists." In order to be a candidate for the job, an applicant had to have raised a family, be at least 35 years old, college educated, and "happily married."

Out of a field of 400, she was one of eight chosen for the program. She earned a master's degree in mental health from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and a degree as a mental health counselor from the Johns Hopkins Hospital Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic.

In 1970, Mrs. Feinblatt joined the staff of a new Johns Hopkins program that was known as the Johns Hopkins Sexual Behaviors Consultation Unit, that was modeled after the work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson, pioneering sex researchers, whose frank public talk about orgasms and sexual dysfunction, were considered shocking topics at the time.

In those early years of the clinic, she explained in The Jewish Times interview, many of its patients were gay and lesbian and came to the Hopkins clinic with “hopes” of fixing sexual orientations, a process that has since been renounced by mental health professionals. The clinic then began seeing heterosexual couples where they were seen by male and female therapists.

“It was a wonderful job from the beginning,” she explained in the Health & Wellness interview. “People had all kinds of sexual problems. Some people were very shy about sex, or some people had their own ideas and their wife or husband didn’t think they could go along with that. Everybody’s needs and wants are so different.”

Mary Jane Blaustein, a nurse practitioner and assistant professor of psychiatry was co-director of the clinic.



Figure 1 Left to right: Lois Feinblatt, Stiles Colwill and Liz Moser at an event marking Carla D. Hayden's 20 years at the helm of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. (Karen Jackson, For The Baltimore Sun)

“We worked together for more than 30 years and she is one of my closest friends,” Mrs. Blaustein said. “What Lois brought was an incredible ability to read and relate to people authentically and successfully. She was incredibly patient and understanding when working with the clients and had a natural ability as a psychotherapist.”

She added: “Lois had an amazing ability in working with her colleagues and her relationships were very powerful and strong. I always felt knowing her made me a better person.”

“If there is anyone who might be an expert on the secrets and nuances of love — and sex — it would be Feinblatt, a pioneering therapist who has seen four decades worth of patients: woman, men, straight, gay, transgender,” observed Health & Wellness.

Her husband, who had been president of Associated Jewish Charities, died in 1973, and in 1983, she married Eugene M. Feinblatt, a lawyer and a founding partner of Gordon, Feinblatt, Rothman, Hoffberger & Hollander, and lived in Federal Hill. He died in 1998.

Raised in liberal circumstances, Mrs. Feinblatt and her family marched in 1963 to desegregate Gwynn Oak Amusement Park and was the first woman appointed in 1977 to the board of the Sheppard Pratt Hospital. She endowed scholarships for the

Maryland Institute College of Art and was a founder of Court Appointed Special Advocates — CASA of Baltimore — that provides advocacy and resources for child victims of abuse and neglect.

A year after Mr. Feinblatt's death, she founded the [Blum Mentoring Project](#), a teacher mentoring program, for Baltimore City Public Schools. She had been a benefactor and member of the board of the Baltimore Museum of Art.

"She had grace and was always on the right side of things," Ms. Hoffberger said.

"Lois was a pioneer in so many ways," Dr. Hrabowski said. "She worked for desegregation and for the rights of children who were abused. And what was so unusual was that she could connect with generations of people. I always called her my 'fellow educator' because she was always teaching me about life through her words and actions."

He added: "Lois went beyond her age because she was ageless. And once you became part of her orbit, you stayed, and she was always shining her light on people."

She was inducted into the Jewish Hall of Fame and honored by the Open Society Institute — Baltimore.

As the years advanced, Mrs. Feinblatt, with the aid of a walker, continued to attend gallery openings, enjoyed going out for dinner and regularly entertained friends at dinner parties in her home. She also enjoyed painting landscapes in oils.

"Whatever she did, she wanted to do well," Mr. Blum said.

"The two things that have made my life as good as it's been are love and luck," she said in the Health & Wellness interview. "You have to have luck, too. But I really believe that love is like a cushion. If I'd been sitting here all this time on a hard, little iron chair, I would be miserable. But love is like the cushion that's around you, that makes you be able to think about things in a sweeter way."

She was a member of Beth Am Synagogue where funeral services were held Tuesday.

Mrs. Feinblatt is survived by another son, Lawrence A. Blum of Cambridge, Massachusetts; a daughter, Carolyn P. Blum of San Anselmo, California; two stepsons, Eric Feinblatt of Hankins, New York, and John Feinblatt, of New York City; 13 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

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