Renowned pediatric orthopedic surgeon Liebe Sokol Diamond, M.D., passed away from leukemia at her Pikesville home on May 17, 2017. In her last interview, we were fortunate enough to sit down with her and talk about her incredible career, her passion for education—and why Sinai Hospital and LifeBridge Health meant so much to her.

A Legacy of Learning

Pediatric Residency Program Receives $1 Million Gift from Celebrated Surgeon and Educator Liebe Sokol Diamond, M.D.

Liebe Sokol Diamond, M.D., was waiting for an appointment at Sinai Hospital when a group of her former medical students got wind that she was in the building. What ensued was a greeting so enthusiastic, others started to notice.

“They were giving me these great hugs and kisses,” she explained. “This woman watching us in the waiting room looked so surprised. She asked me, ‘Who are you?’ I told her I was their teacher, ‘Oh, their elementary school teacher?,’ she said. Well, I thought, not exactly.”

It certainly wasn’t the first time Dr. Diamond surprised people. She made a life out of defying expectations. Born at Sinai Hospital in 1931 with a condition that caused her to lose several fingers and toes in utero—a condition that required more than two dozen surgeries in her childhood—Dr. Diamond went on to become the first female resident at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and only the 14th woman in the nation to be board certified in orthopedics—a field that, at the time, boasted more than 7,000 male counterparts. Her work in the field of pediatric orthopedics—especially in caring for children with hand and limb deformities—is internationally renowned and still taught to this day.

“She’s a legend,” says Jerome Reichmister, M.D., chief of orthopedics at Sinai Hospital and one of Dr. Diamond’s former students. “What she overcame is a classic story that should be in the movies.”

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Dr. Diamond attributed much of her success to the teachers who changed her life along the way. One of those teachers was her childhood orthopedist at Sinai, Moses Gellman, M.D. “[While I was a medical student] Dr. Gellman got me a summer job at Sinai as an operating room tech. He was thinking that I’d get the bug to become a surgeon,” she recalled. “His plan worked. Later in my career, I had the pleasure of operating with him on two occasions, which was a big event for both of us.”

She also credited Dr. Gellman for teaching her the art of bedside manner. “The way he talked to me and my parents when I was little stayed with me. I always felt little kids were my specialty; that I could communicate with them on a level that sometimes others could not. On Saturday mornings at the synagogue, kids would come parading to my seat to show me their casts,” she said with a chuckle.

Inspired by the teachers before her, Dr. Diamond devoted much of her career to educating future generations of physicians through Sinai’s residency programs. “I gave lots of formal lectures, of course,” Dr. Diamond said, “but I was a good hands-on teacher.”

“I tried to show my residents that you can do a good job in practice while still taking good care of patients, too.”

Dr. Reichmister, who once debated between a career in OB/GYN and a career in orthopedics, says his time learning under Dr. Diamond made it clear what he wanted to do with his life. “To see what she did for children—making a real difference in the quality of patients’ lives—that won me over,” he admits. “As a teacher, she encouraged us to be inquisitive. She gave her opinion, but she was not dogmatic. She was always open to listening to other points of view. That taught me a great deal as far as how I wanted to structure my life as an orthopedist.”

Shortly before her passing, Dr. Diamond furthered her lifelong commitment to education through a $1 million endowment to Sinai’s pediatric residency program. The three-year program gives medical school graduates a thorough preparation for general pediatric practice, as well as a strong foundation for training in subspecialties, such as neonatology, pediatric hematology/oncology, and pediatric orthopedics.

“This program is exceptional because it has a strong staff of people who all have a desire to grow and learn,” said Dr. Diamond. “And the fact that it’s a community-based residency program is important. It means that it can serve both pediatric residents and the patients in our community in a way that the big university hospitals often cannot. I felt that the money I could give would do the most good here.”

The pediatric residency endowment was also one of the last acts of generosity in Dr. Diamond’s long tradition of giving back to Sinai. Over the years, her gifts have supported priorities like the building of the Herman & Walter Samuelson Children’s Hospital, and funded new initiatives like the Liebe Sokol Diamond Lecture Series for Sinai residents.

For Dr. Diamond, giving back to Sinai was like giving back to family. It was the hospital where she was born, cared for, learned, practiced, and taught.

“My students...they were my boys. One group of residents even used to call me ‘Mother,’” she said with a laugh. “Since the beginning, I’ve always felt that Sinai was my community and my people. And the pediatric team always welcomed me and made me feel a part of them, even in the days when others saw me as an anomaly. So, whenever I could do something for my hospital, I wanted to.”

She’s a legend. What she overcame is a classic story that should be in the movies.

JEROME REICHMISTER, M.D., CHIEF OF ORTHOPEDICS
AT SINAI HOSPITAL

Earlier this spring, members of the LifeBridge Health Glazer Legacy Society and Carroll Hospital Foundation’s Bridge Builders Society gathered for brunch at the Caves Valley home of Legacy Society members Bonnie and Mark Powers. The private gathering was an opportunity for LifeBridge Health President and CEO Neil Meltzer to thank and recognize individuals who have included a LifeBridge Health affiliate (Sinai Hospital, Northwest Hospital, Carroll Hospital, Carroll Hospice, or Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center and Hospital) in their wills or made provisions for other “planned” gifts.
WHEN SAM PENN TOOK OVER AS PRESIDENT OF PHH CORPORATION’S fleet leasing and vehicle management unit in 1974, he introduced a transformative ordering and delivery system designed to serve customers better. The system had a name: the courtesy delivery system.

In many ways, Penn was the personification of “courteous delivery.” “Sam was a people person,” Beverly, his wife of 59 years, recalls. “He was very interested in people, learning how people lived, and really getting to know them so that he could provide the best service for them.”

Indeed, Penn devoted his entire life to serving others. After serving in the U.S. Army in the 1950s and dedicating his career to PHH—a career that earned him a spot in the Automotive Fleet Hall of Fame—Penn spent his 26 years of retirement giving back to his community. He worked on the Governor’s Insurance Commission, fighting for the rights of the state’s lower-income residents. He taught future generations of leaders at Notre Dame of Maryland University and at Towson University, where he was also an executive-in-residence. And he served as a board director to more than a half-dozen non-profits, including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Jewish Council, WYPR, Sinai Hospital, and LifeBridge Health.

“Sam was a very loyal board member, a true friend of Sinai,” says LifeBridge Health Vice President Barbara Epke. “He very much valued Sinai’s success, and it was very personal for him.”

Epke and Penn worked closely together throughout Penn’s 14 years of service on the Sinai and LifeBridge Health boards, and she quickly came to depend on him as a voice for the people. “He would bring me any issues he heard in the community. When you’re a board member, people approach you all the time, at cocktail parties, at the gym…and it was painful for him to hear if we failed to meet people’s expectations,” Epke explains. “His philosophy was to go beyond customers’ expectations: to exceed expectations and try to delight the customer—even in a hospital setting.”

Now Penn’s wife and three sons are honoring his legacy of service with the new Sam Penn Fund for Service Excellence. Launching as a pilot program at Sinai this fiscal year, the fund will reward staff members who demonstrate exceptional service to patients. Epke collaborated closely with the family to find the perfect way to celebrate Penn’s commitment to Sinai and LifeBridge Health. “Sam always told our kids to treat other people the way they wanted to be treated. The idea of service was ingrained in them from a very young age,” says Mrs. Penn. “In that regard, they felt very strongly that whatever gift we made should go to the people who are actually taking care of the patients. This fund will help us spread Sam’s values to the most people.”

“Sam was able to see the best in everybody,” adds Epke. “But he was also fearless about bringing up issues to make Sinai better. His family’s gift represents all of that. It honors everything that he stood for.”

To learn how you can create a custom gift to honor your loved one, please call the Department of Development at 410-601-GIFT (4438).
LifeBridge Health President and CEO Neil Meltzer recently joined forces with the Green Lantern, Bat Girl, Wonder Woman, and others at the Herman & Walter Samuelson Children’s Hospital at Sinai. The Hope for Henry Foundation organized the superhero party for patients and their families.