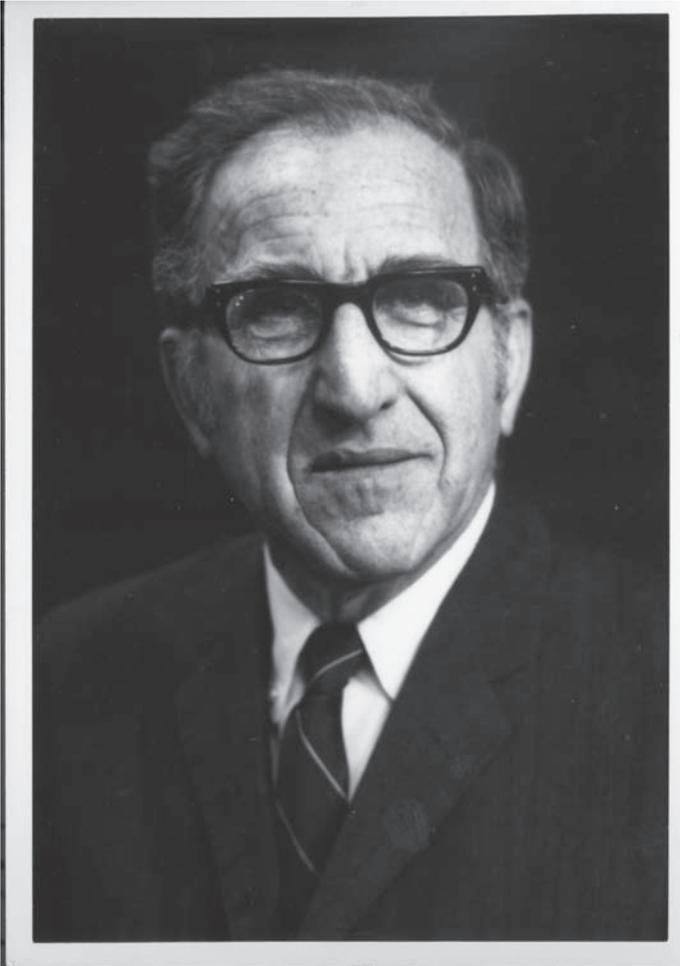




Abraham Freedberg



Abraham Freedberg had a long and illustrious medical career at Harvard. He was outstanding in all the metrics of academic excellence. In addition to his research, teaching and patient care, Al (Freedberg preferred to be called Al or A. Stone) had a multidimensional fourth quality that set him apart. Colleagues and students who crossed the threshold of his open door always met a compassionate man with a sympathetic ear extending a helping hand and offering the gift of wise advice. His open-door policy was modeled after the habit of Herrman L. Blumgart (Beth Israel's Director of Medical Research 1938, Chair of Medicine 1946-1964) whose office Al entered in 1938 and exited to start a continuous 65-year career at Beth Israel Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

Abraham Freedberg was born in Salem, Massachusetts on May 30, 1908. That is where his Eastern European immigrant parents settled and were to raise six children – all boys. Early interests were sports and the violin. Learning was easy because of a life-long exceptional memory.

At Harvard College, he was a violinist in the school orchestra and developed an interest in science through the inspirational teaching of zoology professor Leigh Harley. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then governor of New York, spoke at graduation, the same year as the 1929 stock market crash and harbinger of the Great Depression. The social and economic turmoil that followed compelled Al to defer medical school in favor of earning enough money to launch a postgraduate education. An earlier career consideration was that of a rabbi, the calling of his maternal grandfather. Following advice to take a different course because each congregant would be his boss, Al chose medicine and with a smile recounted that “each patient became my boss.”

After graduating from Rush Medical College of the University of Chicago, completing two years of post-graduate training in Chicago and a pathology residency at Rhode Island Hospital, he returned to his roots hoping to establish a medical practice in Salem. Dr. Freedberg quickly recognized that his religion was a barrier to obtaining hospital privileges when the director of the local establishment advised him to go to Boston where there was a “more suitable hospital.” Recalling that his grandfather was an early patient at Boston’s Beth Israel Hospital, Al applied in person, found open door access to Dr. Blumgart, and became a staff member. During the following 62 years, he authored approximately 126 papers most of which related to cardiac reflexes, hemodynamics, coronary circulation, arrhythmias, and pharmacology. Thyrocardiac disease became a fruitful field of inquiry, as did the clinical effects of radioactive iodine. Classic studies were performed with Drs. Blumgart, Milton Hamolsky and George Kurland on radioactive ablation of the thyroid gland in patients with angina or congestive heart failure. Although a leader in cardiology, thyroidology and nuclear medicine, Dr. Freedberg’s first independent research study became a pioneering landmark in understanding peptic ulcer disease. In 1940, he asked, “Is there a relationship between microorganisms and gastric ulcers?” Spirochete-like organisms were identified in fresh surgical specimens of resected gastric tissue. After four frustrating months failing to culture the organisms, Al took Dr. Blumgart’s advice to terminate the study in favor of other questions begging to be answered. Forty-two years later, the organisms were identified as *Helicobacter pylori* by Australia’s Robin Warren and Barry Marshall who shared the Nobel Prize in 2005. They, like Freedberg, had difficulty culturing the organism. Marshall invited his predecessor to recount the circumstances of his 1940 discovery for a compilation of pioneering efforts which defined the pathophysiology of peptic ulcer disease. That publication, in the year 2002, was Dr. Freedberg’s last. The man and his research effort were not forgotten; each was mentioned in Barry Marshall’s Nobel lecture.

Freedberg had a broad array of medical interests and held leadership positions in some. He was Director of the Cardiac Unit (1964-1969) and was acting Physician and Chair at Beth Israel Hospital (1973); Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School (1969-1974); President, Massachusetts Heart Association (1963-1965); President, New England Cardiovascular Society (1971-1972); consultant and member of the thyroid uptake calibration committee medical division of Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies (1955-1956); editorial board, *Circulation* (1956-1960) and (1962-1967), and Vice President, American Thyroid Association (1962-1963). Other memberships included the American Society of Clinical Investigation; American Physiological Society; Association of American Physicians and the Royal Society of Medicine, London.

Dr. Freedberg directly served Harvard as a member of the committee on admissions starting in 1969 and in 1978 established a fund to encourage student research. He derived enormous pleasure from weekly luncheon meetings at the medical center with his grandson, Daniel (HMS 2008). To keep current, Al occasionally joined Daniel at an HMS basic science class and with unrestrained curiosity, he kept up to date with medical issues in depth and breadth. His knowledge, powers of observation, deductive logic and inductive insight often led to diagnosis of uncommon illness. There is a legendary story of Al and his medical student going to a Boston hotel room to treat a traveling visitor with complaints of disabling muscular pains. In the hotel, without any laboratory data, they correctly made a diagnosis of trichinosis, a parasitic invasion of muscle from eating undercooked infected pork.

The quintessential professor was serious about his role in educating the younger generations of doctors and aspiring doctors. Al must have smiled when he read the accolade "...he has long been a favorite teacher at the hospital" which appears in the Beecher and Altschule volume "Medicine at Harvard: The First 300 Years". Many family members were encouraged and inspired by their role model to enter the medical field. There were ten physicians, four of which he taught at HMS. On an occasional pleasant summer day, Al walked with his students to the Red Sox baseball game at nearby Fenway Park. Between innings, they discussed the morning's clinical cases.

When Dr. Freedberg was subject to mandatory retirement in 1973 at age 65, he followed in Herrman Blumgart's footsteps and became a full-time physician at Harvard University Health Services with assignment to the Longwood Medical Area. He served Harvard well, remaining active in that role for an unprecedented 32 years until relinquishing responsibilities in 2005 at age 97 years. Many physicians throughout the Harvard system remain grateful for his care during a personal illness. A strong doctor/patient relationship was essential to his healing mission. He was constantly aware of the weighty charge to maintain the health of his flock. Al felt responsible for the outcomes of his own and his consultant's decisions and actions, often accompanying a patient to the x-ray department with a syringe of epinephrine in his shirt pocket to treat the possibility of an allergic reaction from contrast material. He would appear in the operating room or by his patient's side during a consultation. Even after retirement, an unofficial role was to reassure some closely bonded patients that they were receiving state-of-the-art care.

Al developed several methods to reduce stress, the constant companion of a totally committed physician. As an inveterate Red Sox fan, he often attended the opening day and other games. He enjoyed playing golf and watching the major tournaments. Although shoulder bursitis ended his violin play at age 40, Al's love of music was constant with a frequent presence at concerts and as a distant appreciator. Classical music from an extensive library resounded in his home. He was a long-term subscriber to the Boston Symphony where friends and family fittingly gathered for a private recital and celebration to mark his 100th birthday. Dr. Freedberg was a connoisseur of fine art. A physician colleague brought him to a friend's gallery which led to a deep appreciation of art, knowledge of the contemporary art scene and establishment of long term friendships with artists. One such friendship was with Hyman Bloom, a local artist of international repute. A recently released documentary about Bloom is dedicated to A. Stone Freedberg's memory.

Dr. Freedberg and Beatrice Gordon, a Bostonian, knew each other for seven years before they married when Al was graduated from medical school. The couple returned to Boston to launch his career and start their family. They had two sons, Richard followed by Leonard. Richard became a teacher and left for Europe to work in The Hague, Leonard became a psychiatrist in suburban Boston. The couple traveled to visit Richard twice a year. They also spent a full year at Oxford when Al was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship to study thyrocardiac disease in the world famous laboratory of E.M. Vaughn Williams. Free time was spent visiting Richard's family and former trainees who had settled in Europe, many who with time had grown in academic stature. The Guggenheim sponsored research resulted in two publications. European travel ended with retirement at age 95.

Bea was the central figure and love of Al's life. After her death in 1999, Al was comforted by family and the joy of being a grandfather to four children and great-grandfather to three. He kept up to date in science, medicine, the arts and sports. Music was constant, home-made reproductions of works from his recording collection were sent to friends for their continued pleasure. He followed the progress of the art world and frequently met with friends and colleagues.

Montaigne wrote "The utility of living consists not in the length of days, but in the use of time..." Abraham Freedberg used his time well charting an extraordinary journey of extraordinary length while maintaining extraordinary memory, perspective, alertness and control at the helm to the very end.

Respectfully submitted,
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