

# The Planner

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## In Memoriam

## FAMILY PLANNING TRAINING INSTITUTE

DR. BESSIE L. MOSES—1893-1965

24 WEST FRANKLIN STREET  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

By ALAN F. GUTTMACHER, M.D.

Delivered by MANFRED GUTTMACHER, M.D., May 18, 1965.

Dr. Bessie Moses was quite a woman. It seems strange to use the past tense in speaking of Bessie. She was so vital, so real—that I for one, took it for granted she would always be here.

She was born during the sunny days of the horse-car and the Wellsbach lamp, into a Baltimore family which had lived here for many, many years. . . . As I recall, her grandfather dealt in horses and bore the singularly repetitive name of Moses Moses, which represents the prime example of lack of parental imagination. Bessie's gracious and beautiful mother had the manner of a benignant queen who appeared to rule her kingdom of four unusually attractive daughters with great equanimity. Her father Bernard was an intelligent business man vitally interested in the affairs of his community. . . . I believe I am correct in stating that he published more letters in the Sunpapers—may I add on all subjects—than any past or present contributor, save perhaps Henry Mencken, who used such a series of pseudonyms to fit his topic that it makes comparative scores between the two impossible. Judge Jacob M. Moses, Baltimore's first Juvenile Court Judge and a member of the original Board of the Birth Control Clinic, was Bess' uncle.

After attending the public schools she graduated in 1915 from Goucher College, spending the summer between her junior and senior years at the Woods Hole Biological Laboratory. During the subsequent academic year, 1915-16, she was a graduate student in the Department of Biology at the Johns Hopkins which at this time was headed by the distinguished geneticist Herbert S. Jennings. She spent her twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth years teaching, first as Instructor in Biology at Sophie Newcomb in New Orleans and then as Instructor in Zoology at Wellesley. Dr. Moses received her medical degree at the Johns Hopkins in 1922, one year before me or might I say—before us. She graduated with honors, receiving Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha Omega Alpha. I recall that she was very popular among her classmates. The year after graduation was spent as intern in obstetrics, under the Bull, the great Dr. J. Whitridge Williams. She worshipped him, as did we all. Her second and last year of post-graduate medical training was spent at the Woman's Hospital in Philadelphia.

Bess started private practice in Baltimore in 1924 and practiced without interruption until the day before her death, a period of more than 40 years. At first she practiced obstetrics, as well as office gynecology, delivering patients at the Hopkins, Sinai and Church Home Hospitals. Bess was constitutionally ill equipped to be an obstetrician; she wasn't rugged enough,

either physically or emotionally. She was so involved in the outcome of a birth that she became constantly anxious about her patients. She was a wreck after a tough all night vigil as a Lady Stork. Realizing this she gave up obstetrics after a few years and concentrated her talents on office gynecology and contraception. I am sure many in this audience had the good fortune to be her patient, no doubt some were taken to Dr. Bess by their mothers just before marriage. The same deep concern and personal involvement which made Bess ill equipped to do obstetrics made her the ideal physician for premarital and marriage counseling. Few physicians were loved by patients as much as Bess; she gave of herself unstintingly.

Dr. Moses was an Instructor in Obstetrics at the Hopkins, consultant in Gynecology at Sinai and lecturer in Public Health Administration at the School of Hygiene and Public Health. To be sure these were not insignificant academic connections, but Bess is best remembered as Miss Planned Parenthood. It was she who saw the first birth control clinic patient in Baltimore at 1028 N. Broadway in 1927, and it was she who was the Medical Director and guiding spirit of the Clinic for 29 years, retiring as medical director in 1956.

The first birth control clinic in America was opened in 1916 by Margaret Sanger in Brooklyn, New York. A decade later a group of liberal leaders determined to open a similar clinic in Baltimore. Among this founding group were four distinguished members of the Hopkins faculty—Dr. Raymond Pearl, Biometrician; Dr. Donald Hooker, Physiologist;

Dr. Adolph Meyer, Psychiatrist; and Dr. J. Whitridge Williams. It was he who chose Bess to be Medical Director. He knew her well since she had trained under him. The choice was most fortunate. Dr. Moses gave to the post of Medical Director exceptional traits: great intelligence, dedicated effort and exceptional scientific curiosity. This led to her very important book, "Contraception as a Therapeutic Measure" published by Williams and Wilkins in 1936. With statistical guidance from Dr. Pearl, she reviewed the first one thousand cases seen at the Baltimore Clinic. This publication was well received and in part was responsible for the Lasker Award in Planned Parenthood given to Bess in 1950.

I hope that this recital does not make Bess sound like a seriously dull pedant. She was not. She had a good sense of humor and told many stories from her clinic experiences. I recall her telling about the patient who substituted strawberry jelly for

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*contraceptive jelly with apparent success; the woman who plaintively asked Bess for a "bosom builder," and the lady who became pregnant despite Bessie's efforts and when quizzed as to whether or not she had used her diaphragm as directed, replied, "Yes, well every other time."*

*I could recite the many nice things that happened to Bess, such as Presidency of the Johns Hopkins Women's Medical Alumnae Association for two terms and the Citation "for distinguished scientific achievement" by her alma mater, Goucher College in 1954. I could list the community organizations on whose Boards she served but I want to close on a more personal note. We had the privilege of living across the street from Bessie in Windsor Hills for several years and saw evidences of her exquisite taste in her beautiful home in which she entertained with grace and enthusiasm. She loved children, friends, travel, literature, art—she loved life. She left life reluctantly—but she left it bravely. Baltimore and the American Planned Parenthood movement lost a great lady and an exceptional leader.*