

# Dr. Liebe S. Diamond of Pikesville, pediatric orthopedic surgeon, dies



Dr. Liebe S. Diamond, an internationally acclaimed pediatric orthopedic surgeon, died May 17 at her Pikesville home. (HANDOUT)



By **Frederick N. Rasmussen**  
The Baltimore Sun

MAY 22, 2017, 4:00 PM

**D**r. Liebe S. Diamond, who despite being born with several missing fingers and toes went on to become an internationally acclaimed pediatric orthopedic surgeon, died Wednesday from lymphoma at her Pikesville home. She was 86.

"She was a very bright woman who had an unbelievable drive. There was nothing she wouldn't attempt to do," said Dr. Jerome P. "Jerry" Reichmister, chief of orthopedic surgery at **Sinai Hospital** and a former student of Dr. Diamond. "She was just an amazing woman."

The daughter of Max Sokol, an attorney, and Anne Hirschhorn Sokol, a homemaker, the former Liebe Sokol was born in Baltimore at Sinai Hospital.

She was born with constriction ring syndrome, a rare condition that resulted in the loss of several of her fingers and toes in utero. By age 13 she had undergone more than two dozen surgical procedures on her hands and feet.

"Her club feet had to be corrected so she could walk, but she did have her thumbs. On her left hand mom had two full digits, thumb and pinky, and on her right hand, she had a full thumb, but the remaining digits were truncated," said her son, Joshua Moses Diamond of Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

"In that era, there was a general assumption that any child with such deformities must also have severe learning and mental impairment," her son wrote in a profile of his mother. "Luckily, this notion was dispelled by Dr. Moses Gellman, her principal orthopedic surgeon, who was determined to ensure that she could grown up normally into a fully accomplished adult."

On the advice of her doctor, her parents were encouraged to send her to public school, where she would not be treated differently because of her abnormality.

"I was lucky to have parents who didn't spoil me and made me fend for myself," she told Dr. E.F. Shaw Wilgis, who edited "The Wonder of the Human Hand." "This is the way you are. This is the way you are going to be."

This acceptance became the defining force in her life.

"You can either bitch or moan and make everyone around you miserable or accept what is reality and get on with your life," she told Dr. Wilgis, a noted Baltimore orthopedic surgeon who was among the founders of the Raymond M. Curtis Hand Center at [Union Memorial Hospital](#).

"Her parents expected her to succeed, and she said that she had no choice, and never saw it as an obstacle," her son said.

Dr. Diamond was raised on Auchentoroly Terrace and later Wallis Avenue. She was a graduate of the old Robert E. Lee School 49 on Cathedral Street and graduated in 1947 from Western High School.

She was 16 when she entered Smith College in Massachusetts and completed a bachelor's degree with a major in chemistry and a double minor in physics and zoology. She graduated cum laude in 1951.

She earned her medical degree at the [University of Pennsylvania](#), then completed a pediatrics internship and surgical residency at Sinai. After working briefly as a pediatrician, she returned to the University of Pennsylvania and in 1955 obtained a degree in orthopedics, then completed a residency and chief residency in orthopedic surgery.

Dr. Gellman, who died in 1960, had a profound influence on Dr. Diamond — including getting her 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 in a Sinai Hospital interview. "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 was the first female resident at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and the hospital's first female orthopedic surgical resident in 1957.

She was only the 14th woman in the nation to be certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery, "a field that, at the time, boasted more than 7,000 male counterparts," according to the Sinai profile.

She established a solo practice in the early 1960s in the 800 block of Park Ave. in the city's Mount Vernon neighborhood, and later moved it to the Pikesville Plaza Building.

Dr. Diamond's specialty was pediatric orthopedics, especially in the care and treatment of children with hand and limb deformities. She was able to operate because of custom-made surgical gloves that were made from molds fashioned by Ansell Perry Inc.

"She learned from Dr. Gellman that function was more important than appearance and that was her philosophy, giving people good function," her son said.

She credited Dr. Gellman, whose bedside manner she experienced as a child, for her own professional outlook.

"I always felt little kids were my specialty; that I could communicate with them on a level that sometimes others could not," she said in the Sinai interview. "On Saturday mornings at the synagogue, kids would come parading to my seat to show me their casts."

In addition to her private practice, she treated children at the James Lawrence Kernan Hospital in Dickeyville and served as president of the medical staff. She later treated patients at the Raymond M. Curtis Hand Center. Parents brought children who had hand and limb deformities for treatment, but also came to observe how Dr. Diamond overcame her own difficulties.

"She had the ability to relate to the kids and their families and give them the best possible expectations. It takes a special person who could speak with authority because she had lived through it," Dr. Reichmister said.

"She gave them not only hope but expectations," he said. "She was a woman of great compassion and empathy."

Dr. Diamond was professor of orthopedic surgery at the University of Maryland Medical School from 1961 to 1996, and also served there as clinical associate professor of pediatrics.

In 1971, she and seven other surgeons founded the Pediatric Orthopedic Society of North America. She was also president of the Maryland Orthopedic Society in 1971-1972.

She was also a founder and first president of the Ruth Jackson Society of Female Orthopedic Surgeons, and chaired the board of Baltimore Hebrew University.

She stopped performing surgeries in 1995, and retired from practice two years later.

Dr. Reichmister recalled her sense of humor — he said once, at a buffet supper, Dr. Diamond was going the wrong way in the line, and he told her, "Liebe you're going the wrong way."

"She replied, 'I've been swimming upstream all of my life,'" he said with a chuckle.

When she was inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 2006, the organization stated her success could be "counted in the faces of the thousands of children she has helped."

Dr. Diamond traveled and enjoyed visiting the West, especially the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park. As recently as last year, she drove there in her Chevrolet pickup truck, her son said.

Her husband of 42 years, Earl L. Diamond, an epidemiologist and biostatistician at what is now the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, died in 2002.

Dr. Diamond had been a longtime member of Beth Tfiloh Congregation, where services were held Friday.

In addition to her son, she is survived by two grandchildren.

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