

Dr. Eugene W. Friedman (1919–2005)



AT MOUNT SINAI we often speak of the “days of the giants” – the era of our medical center’s great innovators and pioneers. For most who labor at this remarkable institution, those days are in the distant past. However, a few of us had the happy experience of walking in the shadows of such giants as Colp, Dack, Friedberg, Crohn, Garlock, Ginzberg, Horn, Klemperer, King, Master, Popper, Berson, Rabin and Siltzbach. Very few remain. On April 18, 2005, Mount Sinai lost another giant, Dr. Eugene W. Friedman.

Gene graduated cum laude from New York University in 1939 and the NYU College of Medicine in 1943. A surgical resident at the Morrisania Hospital and the Mount Sinai Hospital, he completed a fellowship in head, neck, and breast surgery at the Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital in 1952. Although he returned to Mount Sinai only one year prior to my arrival, when I arrived it was already common knowledge among the house staff and faculty that Gene was the surgeon to consult for breast, head and neck surgery.

In addition to his clinical excellence, Gene was an innovator. As director of the Division of Head and Neck Surgery, he was among the first to apply the CO₂ laser. He instituted the first head and neck surgical laser program in New York, and taught courses in laser surgery at Mount Sinai and throughout the world. He was a founding member of the Society for Head and Neck Surgery and the International and American Societies of Laser Surgery and Medicine, and a diplomate of the American Board of Surgery and the American Board of Laser Surgery. He was also a founder and editor of both the *Journal of Clinical Laser Medicine and Surgery*, and *Lasers in Surgery and Medicine*, a fellow of the American College of Surgery and the New York Academy of Medicine, and a member of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the Society for Surgical Oncology and the American Medical Association.

Gene had a special relationship with Israel. Using the Israeli-made Sharplan 791 CO₂ laser, he lectured at the first meeting on the surgical use of lasers, in Tel Aviv in 1975, and became a leader in the efforts of the Israel Cancer Research Fund. He also founded and for many years was chairman of the Israel Bond Medical Division of the State of New York. Many dollars were raised by this group, and many elite figures in American medicine have proudly displayed the Maimonides Award given by Gene at the Israel Bond dinners.

Gene’s clinical excellence was coupled with a calm, approachable, winsome demeanor. As a result, he was not only esteemed by his students and peers, but also beloved by his patients. He greeted all with an ever-present welcoming smile.

The Jacobi Medallion, the highest award of the Mount Sinai Alumni Association, was presented to him in 1988 as a measure of his colleagues’ high esteem. Appreciation of his superb surgical skills by his grateful patients and his fellow surgeons was best expressed by Dr. Daniel S.J. Choy, who described a Friedman surgical procedure with these words: “His art and precision were Da Vinci-like.”

The entire Mount Sinai family and his vibrant wife Jerry, sons John and Robert and their wives Jane and Elissa, and his four grandchildren Elizabeth, Meredith, Kate and Caroline will experience an enormous void with his loss, but there is solace in recognizing his extraordinary contributions to healing, knowledge and society.

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