

Charlotte Ferencz

1921-2016

By Richard Behles

Dr. Charlotte Ferencz was born on October 28, 1921 in Budapest, Hungary. Her father, an engineer, had an acquaintance living in Toronto, who arranged for him to bring his family to North America in conjunction with an employment opportunity in Montreal. After spending the formative years of her upbringing in her native Hungary, the seventeen-year-old Charlotte and her sister very excitedly accompanied their parents embarking on a new life in Canada. They arrived in Montreal on May 8, 1939, just a few months before the devastating horror of World War II exploded across Europe.

Dr. Ferencz earned a Bachelor of Science with distinction from McGill University in 1944. She followed that up in 1945 with her Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery, also from McGill. In 1951, she received a Diploma in Pediatrics, once again from McGill. Following her medical school education, she was a rotating intern at the Montreal General Hospital, the Saskatoon City Hospital in Saskatchewan, and the Kingston, Ontario General Hospital. After completing these assignments, she interned at the Children's Memorial Hospital in Montreal. That position led to a Research Fellowship in the Cardiology Department at Children's Memorial from 1948-49, her professional initiation into the field of Pediatric Cardiology.

She first came to Baltimore in 1949 as a Fellow in Pediatrics at Johns Hopkins, working under the direction of Dr. Helen Taussig. She later returned to Children's Memorial in Montreal in 1952, but then headed back to Johns Hopkins once again in 1954. Her association with Hopkins included earning a later Master of Public Health degree there in 1970.

After interim appointments in Pediatrics and Cardiology at the University of Cincinnati, and the State University of New York at Buffalo between 1959 and 1973, Dr. Ferencz came to the University of Maryland in 1973 as Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Associate Professor of Social and Preventive Medicine. Here she eventually rose to become Professor of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine in 1978 and Professor of Pediatrics in 1985. Concurrently, in 1981 she became Senior Associate, Department of Epidemiology in the School of Hygiene and Public Health at Johns Hopkins.

With funding from the National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute, Dr. Ferencz embarked upon the most important project of her professional career in 1981. She was the Principal Investigator for the comprehensive Baltimore-Washington Infant Study, 1981-1989, a population-based etiologic study of congenital heart disease. Drawing upon the resources of 53 participating hospitals and more than 800 physicians, the study included 4,390 cases and 3,572 controls over its period of eight years. The published findings of the project comprise volumes 4 and 5 of the series Perspectives In Pediatric Cardiology.

Dr. Ferencz nurtured a personal interest in the Health Sciences & Human Services Library over the years, and in 2005 she collaborated in the sponsorship and development of a new web site for the Library, entitled "[Congenital Heart Disease, a Public Health Perspective](#)." Building upon the discoveries learned throughout the Baltimore-Washington Infant Study, and with an even wider focus, the web site serves as a comprehensive portal into a wealth of information for investigators of congenital heart disease.

In 2008, Dr. Ferencz further celebrated her relationship with the Library by donating her book collection, allowing us to establish this Ferencz Historical Collection. In honor of her many forms of support and assistance, she became the Library's Theodore E. Woodward Award recipient in June, 2008. Additionally, she graciously agreed to participate as the Library's first oral history subject in 2010.