Dear Colleagues,

We are saddened to announce the passing of Willys Silvers, PhD, a great educator, geneticist, mentor and role model and one of the founding members of what is now the Department of Genetics at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Silvers passed away on January 24, 2024.

As a Johns Hopkins undergraduate student, Dr. Silvers (who went by Will) entered the residential summer program at the Jackson Laboratory (Bar Harbor, Maine). There he came under the tutelage of Dr. Elizabeth Russell, a pioneering mouse geneticist, who influenced his future education and scientific direction. He received his PhD from the University of Chicago with Dr. Sewall Wright, Dr. Russell’s mentor, however his thesis research was done at the Jackson Laboratory. He did a postdoctoral fellowship at Brown University with another of Dr. Russell’s colleagues, and then returned to the Jackson Laboratory to complete his postdoctoral work in her lab. There he met his future wife Abigail Adams, who was enrolled as a summer student. They married, he accepted a Staff Position at the Jackson Lab and from there was recruited to the Wistar Institute by Rupert Billingham, while his wife Abigail Adams Silvers attended Penn Medical School. Dr Silvers joined the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine as an Associate Professor 1965 as a faculty member in a new department known as the Department of Medical Genetics (now the Department of Genetics). Dr. Silvers ultimately served as an acting chair of the department for 9 years. He retired in 1996 but continued to do research at the Fox Chase Cancer Center as a visiting scientist.

Dr. Silvers’ primary research interests were in the field of transplantation biology and the genetics of pigment-forming cells. His first book, published with Rupert Billingham in 1971, was “The Immunobiology of Transplantation”. Later, a simple request to compile a list of loci affecting coat color in mice turned into Will’s lifelong “hobby” and resulted in a book “Coat Colors of Mice”, published in 1978, which is still a go-to classic of the scientific literature. During the eighties and nineties, as the field of pigment biology was transitioning from genetic studies based on a visible phenotype, i.e. coat color, to molecular identification of genes and their allelic series, Dr. Silvers’ pigment book served as a primary guide for a cadre of scientists. At the Fox Chase Cancer Center, he collaborated with Dr. Beatrice Mintz on the development and potential immunotherapy of melanomas in the mouse.

Will was a kind, compassionate mentor and a great teacher who loved working with graduate students. “In my three decades at Penn”, Silvers once said, “what I enjoyed most was my association with students…”. He chaired the Genetics Graduate group for 12 years and in this role established thesis committees that ultimately evaluated students’ accomplishments (and protected them from their sometime over-demanding thesis mentors). Will won the university’s Mary F. Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching and a Dean’s Award in Graduate Teaching. In 1990, as Will was nearing his retirement, the members of his department, along with his other colleagues and friends, sponsored the painting of a portrait by Martha Erlebacher which now graces the Clinical Research Building where he worked.

In addition to the University of Pennsylvania, the Jackson Laboratory represented a lifelong academic and research home for Will. Eventually, he would serve on the Laboratory’s Board of Scientific Overseers, chairing it from 1986-1989.

In 2013, Will welcomed members of the Department of Genetics to his home in Gladwyne, PA and showed us a gallery exhibiting an impressive collection of Pennsylvania (New Hope School) Impressionist paintings that Will and his late wife Abigail had assembled, starting in the 1980s. The visit also provided an opportunity to introduce Will to recently recruited faculty. Will was intrigued by a highly interdisciplinary expertise of faculty in the genetics department.

Our hearts go out to Will’s children, his daughter Deborah, his son Kent, and his grandsons. Contributions in Dr. Willys Silvers’ memory can be directed to the Abigail Adams Silvers Scholarship Fund c/o the Baldwin School 701 Montgomery Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010. OBITUARY & CONDOLENCES [www.chadwickmckinney.com](http://www.chadwickmckinney.com)