

# DUSTUP AT DARTMOUTH

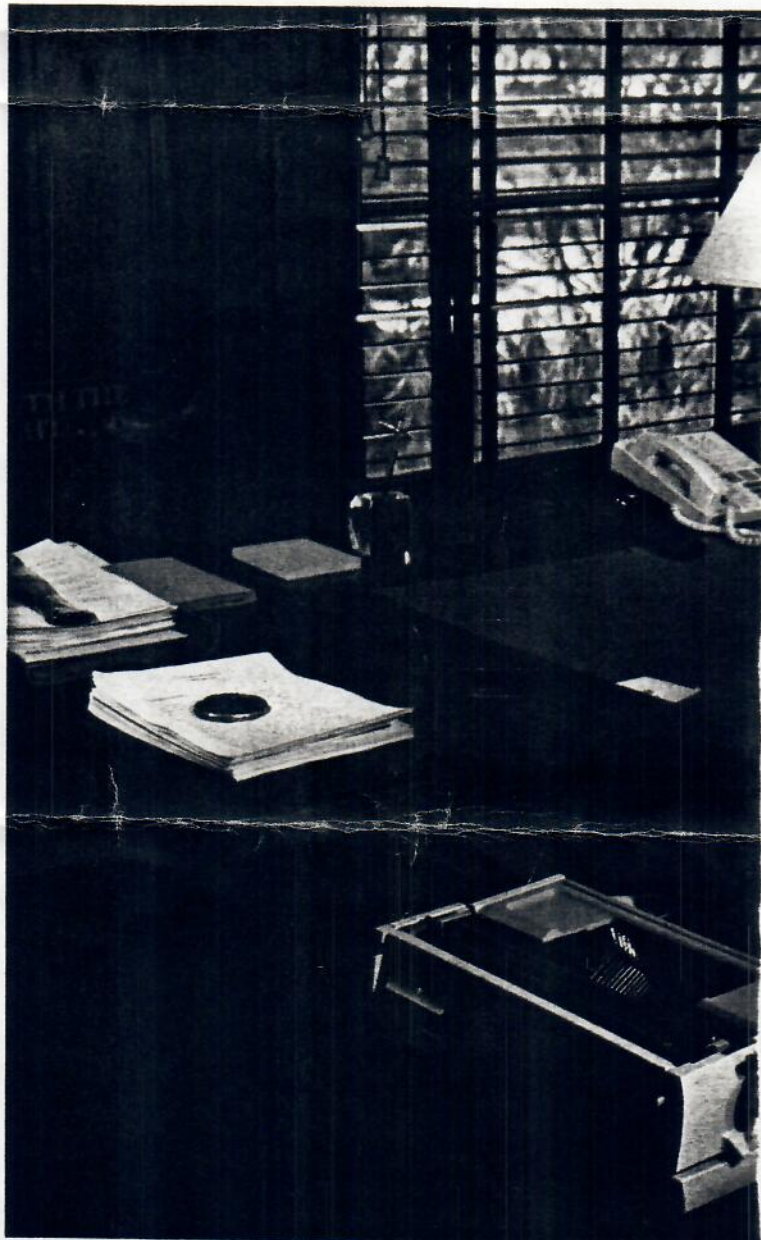
**A**t the age of 53, James Oliver Freedman has been dean of a major law school, president of a Big Ten university, and is now president of an Ivy League college. "We wanted a brilliant academic whose best years lay ahead," says Norman McCulloch Jr., chairman of the eighteen-member search committee that unanimously picked Freedman from 613 hopefuls to be the fifteenth president of Dartmouth College. After Freedman's election professor Charles Braun, a member of the committee, declared, "There is a magic feeling that Dartmouth has a president who will help us refocus on academic excellence as our preeminent goal."

Right from his inauguration in July 1987, however, Freedman has been under steady fire—from faculty members who complain he wants to convert the college into a university, from right-wing alumni who accuse him of anti-conservative prejudice, from other alumni who fear he is undermining Dartmouth's outdoorsy camaraderie. And between shots, many ask where he is headed.

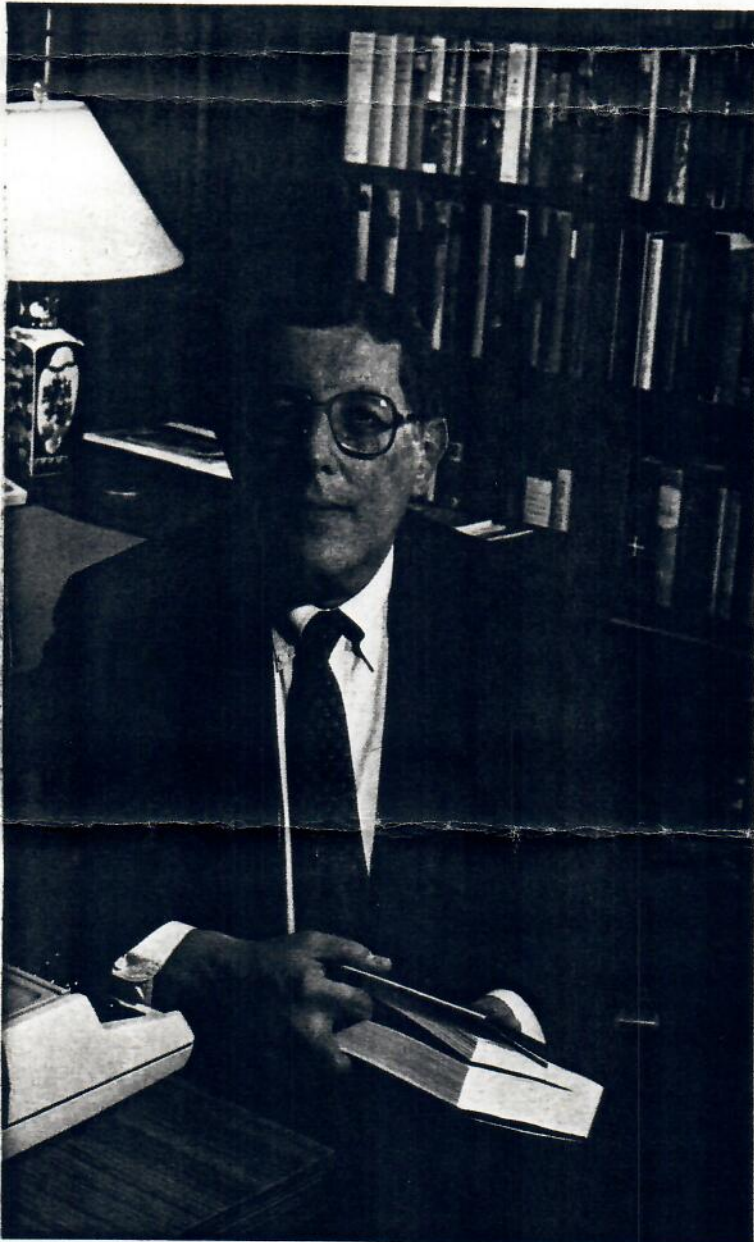
Opinions vary. "He's dragging this college into the real world," says one student. "When the *Dartmouth Review*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *National Review* finish with him, he'll be finished," declares a dedicated conservative. "Change brings conflict, but Jim's calm demeanor and exquisitely rational approach will elicit reason and common sense," comments a trustee of the college. Says a leader of the faculty: "You're looking at the next president of Harvard."

This is a time of testing for Freedman. In his first year and a half he fearlessly stirred up hornets' nests. He called for Dartmouth to "upgrade its intellectual distinction" and "downgrade the 'Animal House' image." He urged the faculty to consider expanding graduate programs. He initiated the Presidential Scholars program, flying in top students and giving them VIP treatment previously reserved for athletes. And, most disruptive of all, he publicly denounced the rabidly conservative, off-campus but student-run *Dartmouth Review* following the harassment of a black professor in his classroom by some of the publication's staff members.

Dartmouth's Committee on Standards suspended the implicated *Review* students, who denied any wrongdoing. Two of the students sued and after a preliminary hearing were reinstated by a New Hampshire judge, pending further proceedings. The judge found that the college as a whole had been fair and had not violated the rights of free speech, as the *Review* claimed it had, but that one faculty member on the committee showed bias against the publication. The *Review*, which is supported by such prominent conservatives as William F. Buckley Jr., Patrick Buchanan, William Rusher, Wil-



by NARDI REEDER CAMPION



*James O. Freedman, whose foes accuse him of something close to sin in Hanover—trying to “Harvardize” Dartmouth.*

liam Simon, the Coors family, and the Olin Foundation, still has two undecided suits against the college.

After the suspension of the *Review* students, the slick-paper weekly triggered an uproar by likening Freedman to Hitler in a piece titled “Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Freedmann.” Attempting satire, the *Review* accused him of plotting a “Final Solution of the Conservative Problem.” Denunciations from the Board of Trustees as well as from the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith ensued, decrying the trivialization of the murder of millions by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

Freedman’s speech deploring the *Review*’s tactics strengthened his ties with the faculty. Declaring that a president has a responsibility to protect his college’s “moral endowment no less than its intellectual and financial endowment,” he said that the college could not “stand by silently when a newspaper recklessly sets out to create a climate of intolerance and intimidation that destroys our mutual sense of community. . . .”

By being unafraid to show his mettle, Freedman has consolidated the opposition, who accuse him of courting the faculty, of downgrading fraternities, and of attacking ultra-conservatives. His most vocal critics accuse him of something close to sin in Hanover—attempting to “Harvardize” Dartmouth. In his inaugural speech Freedman stated, “We must strengthen our attraction for those singular students whose greatest pleasures may not come from the camaraderie of classmates but from the lonely acts of writing poetry, or mastering the cello, or solving mathematical riddles, or translating Catullus. We must make Dartmouth a hospitable environment for students who march to a different drummer. . . .” As Edward B. Fiske put it in the *New York Times*, Freedman is trying to change the life of the party into the life of the mind.

**F**reedman is Dartmouth’s first president since 1822 with no prior connection to the college. He is a 1957 Harvard College graduate and a Harvard Law School dropout. His son Jared is in the Harvard class of 1991. “I was accepted at Dartmouth and Yale,” President Freedman recalls, “but my mother made up her mind I should go to Harvard. She valued education and Harvard was the symbol. The Harvard of the final clubs wasn’t mine. My Harvard was a kind of nonstop conversation with friends at Lowell House. We educated each other. I didn’t shine at college, but I learned that if one has to live by one’s wits, the competition is keen and life is tough.

“I went straight from college to Harvard Law School. Today we encourage students to take time off; then it was lockstep. In the middle of the first year I quit. I was burned out. I went home to Manchester, New Hampshire, and spent the next

JON GILBERT FOX

**"Jim Freedman is a leader who has the self-confidence to recruit the very top people. His rarest quality is his ability to listen."**

Vartan Gregorian,  
*president of Brown*

**"Freedman's Orwellian doublespeak, his judicial double standard, and his selective enforcement of the First Amendment should embarrass any principled liberal who cares about the fairness and the free exchange of ideas."**

William Simon,  
*former secretary of the treasury*

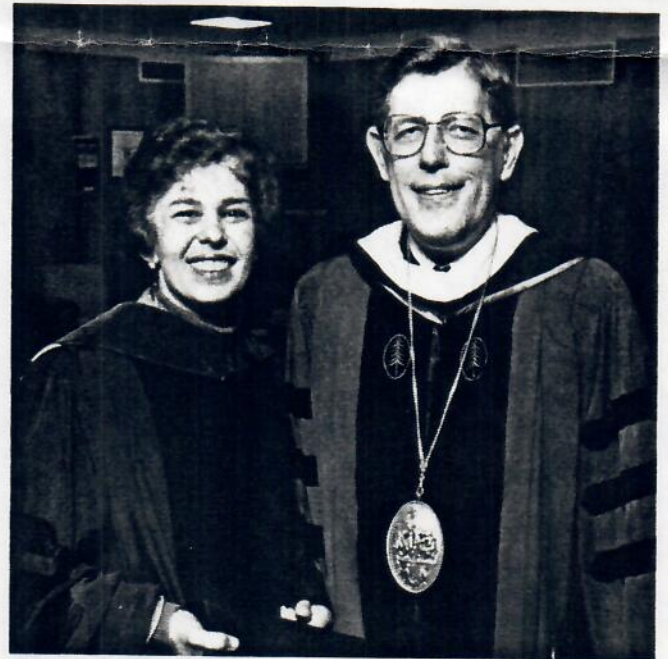
two years as a reporter on the *Union Leader*. Then I decided to try law school again. I identified Harvard with failure, so I went to Yale and loved it. When the three years were up, I didn't want to leave."

After he acquired his law degree, Freedman's career rolled along on ball bearings—first law clerk to Judge Thurgood Marshall, then a year at the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. His first day in New York was memorable, and he relives it in the telling: "I'm scared to death. I don't even understand the subways. On the platform I run into a law school friend. I ask how you get started dating in this city. He gives me three names and says, 'Call this one first. She'd be best for you.' Her name was Bathsheba Finkelstein and she was, indeed, best for me. She had dark hair and luminous eyes and a gentle voice. We spent our first date talking and walking around Greenwich Village, where she lived with her parents. A year later we were married."

It's been an ideal academic match. Sheba Freedman, who has a B.A. from Brandeis, an M.A. from Columbia, and a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr, is a senior lecturer in psychology at Dartmouth. They have two children. Deborah, a graduate of the University of Michigan who has just been accepted at Yale Law School, is 24, and Harvard sophomore Jared is nineteen. Freedman's longtime mentor, Federal Judge Louis H. Pollak of Philadelphia, his teacher at Yale Law School and colleague at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, believes that "to understand Jim you must recognize his respect for Sheba's intellectual seriousness. He is intuitive but he depends on her acute perceptions. They are a team."

Freedman made the leap from corporate law to academia in 1964 when he became assistant professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania. In his eighteen years there he was, successively, professor of law, professor of political science, university ombudsman, associate provost, and dean of the law school. He also taught law as a visiting professor at Michigan, North Carolina, Cambridge, and Georgetown, and at the Salzburg Seminar; served two years on the Philadelphia Board of Ethics; and published *Crisis and Legitimacy: The Administrative Process and American Government* (Cambridge, 1978).

In 1982 the Iowa Board of Regents asked Freedman to become president of the University of Iowa and he accepted. He devoted much of his five-year stint to promoting internationalism, making three trips to China to expand Iowa's programs there. He established a Center for Asian and Pacific Studies and started the Iowa Critical Languages program, which prepares undergraduates to be high-school teachers in



President Freedman and his wife, Bathsheba, a senior lecturer in psychology at Dartmouth, before his installation in September 1987. "He depends on her acute perceptions," says a friend. "They are a team."



Sitting for his portrait, by Jerome Witkin, for the University of Iowa.

**"I wonder if Jim Freedman really understands that the president of Dartmouth must be an active participant in weaving the web of intellectual and social fellowship that has always knit together the Dartmouth faculty, students, and alumni."**

Edward M. Bradley,  
*professor of classics, Dartmouth*

**"This is my fourth Dartmouth president. I've liked them all, but it's lovely to have one whose every public utterance makes me proud of my college."**

Noel Perrin,  
*professor of English, Dartmouth*



Freedman waxes eloquent at Dartmouth's traditional tree trunk lectern.

Chinese, Japanese, or Russian. He worked out 42 exchange agreements with universities abroad. As one Iowa senior remarked, "You've got to admire a guy who can get 1,800 foreign students to come to this cow college."

While at Iowa Freedman also established the university's largest-ever fundraising campaign (the \$100 million targeted early in his tenure continued upward to \$150 million before he left), revitalized the honors program, reallocated funds to "centers of excellence," and initiated an Undergraduate Scholar Assistant program, which allows outstanding students to receive a stipend for assisting professors with research. He strengthened the Iowa Writers' Workshop and inaugurated the Center for the Book, a program that combines instruction in bookbinding, book conservation, papermaking, type design, and history of the book.

Freedman agrees with Prospero that a library is "dukedom large enough." He's a voracious reader and serious collector; his library, carefully indexed and climate-controlled, numbers 4,500 volumes. "Every one there for a purpose—no paperbacks," he says. "I was a late bloomer. My father, a high school English teacher, was always pushing books. He was born in London. His mother died in childbirth and, at the age of seven, my father came all alone to America to join a father he'd never met. In 1916 Harvard's quota for Jews was full, so father went to Bates. Prejudice against Jews was strong. He was the first Jewish teacher in Laconia and Manchester, New Hampshire. Many of his students say he was the best teacher they ever had. He took the teaching of English seriously; it was urgent that his pupils come to terms with *Macbeth* and *The House of the Seven Gables*."

"I didn't buy my first book until I was fifteen—*Arrowsmith*, Modern Library edition, ninety-five cents. From reading Sinclair Lewis I went on to Somerset Maugham, and I've never stopped. Like most people I reread Dickens and Shakespeare. My current favorites are Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Bellow, Tom Stoppard, and Hannah Arendt. She's not easy."

Freedman's idea of a good time is browsing. The older the bookshop, the better. Jim Harris, owner of the Prairie Lights Bookstore in Iowa City, testifies: "You want to know if this guy reads? Let me tell you; this guy *reads*. He's the ideal customer—comes at least twice a week, buys only hardbacks, pays cash. When he left I almost had to refinance. He's also very pleasant."

I asked people in Iowa about Freedman's faults. Answers were vague, ranging from "he's too formal" to "Jim craves stuffed cabbage, like his mother used to make" to "President

**"He has a brown-bag lunch each week with one of the college's thirty departments. He just asks where the discipline is going and sits back and listens. I've never seen the like of it."**

Fred Berthold,  
Kelsey professor  
of religion, Dartmouth

**"My father doesn't know how to take it easy. He's always busy. But from the time I was six until I was ten, he found time to play two games of chess with me every night."**

Jared Freedman,  
Harvard '91

Freedman was seen in a bookstore the day of the Big Game." Freedman himself is more explicit about his shortcomings: "I'm stubborn. I'm no good at sports. I can't identify trees. And I place a higher value on brainpower than is appropriate."

He did, however, relish Big Ten sports and with Sheba attended all home football and basketball games. During his presidency, the Iowa football team played in six consecutive bowl games and won two Big Ten championships, with the First Fan and the First Fan's Lady cheering them on.

People in Iowa City couldn't understand why Freedman would leave. One professor said, "Give up a Big Ten university of 30,000 students and 1,600 faculty to go to *Dartmouth*? I don't get it." But a dean told me, "Jim has his priorities straight. He wants to have an impact on American education. The *Boston Globe* has more clout than the *Des Moines Register*." As a farewell gift, the faculty created the Freedman professorship in letters at the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

When Freedman's friend Harold T. Shapiro decided to leave the University of Michigan for Princeton, Dartmouth President-elect Freedman, whose appointment had been announced one week earlier, wired President-elect Shapiro: "WELCOME TO THE IVY LEAGUE." These two high-powered Big Ten presidents, both witty Jewish intellectuals, now preside over two of America's most prestigious—some say elitist—private colleges.

**A**t Harvard Freedman concentrated in English and was deeply affected by Walter Jackson Bate. "Professor Bate taught me Keats and Johnson. He was my model of what I wanted to be. He was so searching, modest, open—but I never met him. Douglas Bush taught us *Paradise Lost*, line by line. The lights went out in one class and he started reciting passages from Milton on darkness. When T.S. Eliot spoke in Sanders Theatre in the spring of 1955—dressed in a cutaway and satin cravat—he began by apologizing to Professor Bush for writing an essay that denigrated Milton. 'I was wrong, sir, and you were right,' said Eliot. 'Milton is a great poet.'

"John V. Kelleher, a Dartmouth man, was my tutor. A world-renowned expert on Joyce, he taught me one-on-one. We did *The Faerie Queene* in the fall and John Donne in the spring. He permanently deepened my love for great literature. His copy of *Finnegan's Wake* had notations between every single line. What a valuable book!"

National attention on Freedman—an interview with Morley Safer on "60 Minutes," numerous articles in the *New York*



Freedman receives instruction in the use of his new computer.



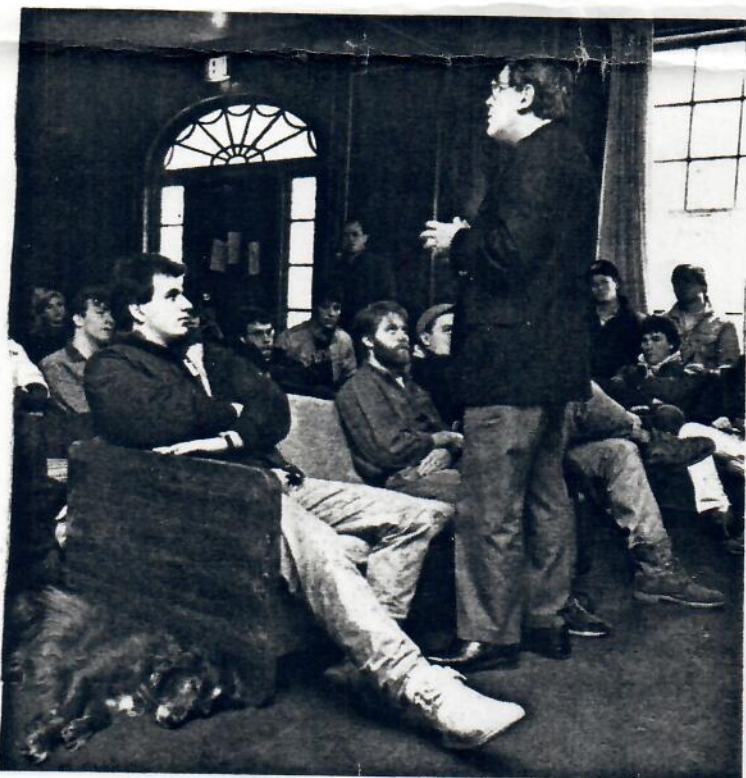
Discussing majors and tenure decisions at breakfast.

**"President Freedman is slowly but surely accomplishing his objective: the sterilization of Dartmouth. He wants to change this vital, idiosyncratic, and profoundly traditional college into a bland . . . academic factory like his alma mater, Harvard."**

Harmeet K. Dhillon,  
editor in chief, Dartmouth Review

**"Jim Freedman is a man of the most subtle intellect who nourishes the arts as much as he cherishes the sciences. He has proven himself one of the nation's truly strong and independent leaders in higher education."**

A. Bartlett Giamatti,  
commissioner of baseball



Reasoning with students at Alpha Delta fraternity.



A stroll with son Jared (Harvard '91) and Sheba.

*Times*, attacks in the *Wall Street Journal*—has increased interest in Dartmouth, but Freedman's scorn for the *Dartmouth Review's* tactics continues to cause trouble with some alumni. Dartmouth has the largest percentage in the country of graduates who donate to their alma mater, but a few alumni who say that their Dartmouth no longer exists have stopped contributing. "I don't think there is any intention to change the basic character of Dartmouth," says George Munroe, chairman of the trustees. On the other hand, Oscar Ruebhausen, Dartmouth '34, insists, "You're making Dartmouth the kind of place I wish I'd attended."

Freedman's patient, detached nature, plus his impressive ability to listen, should stand him in good stead in this time of testing. Even his critics admit the man has the courage of his convictions. As his close friend professor James Alan McPherson of the Iowa Writers' Workshop put it, "That prominent chin shows his backbone."

President Freedman may eventually achieve his stated goal of "enhancing intellectual distinction at Dartmouth College." There is a measurable increase in the number of Dartmouth students applying for honors programs and for scholarships such as the Marshall and Rhodes, and interest in Ph.D.'s is clearly up. "Jim Freedman's greatest strength," says Dartmouth professor of history Charles T. Wood '55, "is that he genuinely understands the importance of scholarship to the life of the mind and of the life of the mind to the whole human being." Harvard's David Riesman, peering into his crystal ball, offers this assessment: "It's going to take longer than I originally hoped, but I believe the Freedman scenario will be: Local boy makes good. Makes Dartmouth better. Becomes national leader in education. Raises intellectual standard of nation."

Some critics who have heard President Freedman speak have been turned around. When he addressed a packed auditorium of alumni last June, an old grad wearing a Dartmouth Indian necktie asked hotly, "Will Dartmouth have a symbol ten years from now, and what will it be?" Freedman's dark eyes twinkled. "Well," he said, "how about a hockey stick?" Laughter and applause. At the end of the program he got a standing ovation. ♡

*Nardi Reeder Champion is a freelance writer living in Hanover, New Hampshire. A graduate of Wellesley, she says she got her education at Harvard. Her husband, Thomas B. Champion, is Harvard '38, M.S. '40. One son, Dr. Toby Champion, is Harvard '70. Last year she spoke at the Harvard Fiftieth Reunion on "Fifty Years of Sex."*