

Howard Bragman, 66, A Publicist Who Shone In Times of Crisis, Dies

By NEIL GENZLINGER

Howard Bragman, a publicist who, like many in his line of work, often helped the famous and the reluctantly famous navigate embarrassing or volatile spotlight moments, but who also had a specialty of advising clients who were coming out of the closet, died on Saturday in Los Angeles. He was 66.

The cause was leukemia, his family said in a statement.

Mr. Bragman was a familiar face in news coverage and on television shows like “Good Morning America,” whether talking about particular clients or about the art of public relations and damage control. Over his career he handled plenty of garden-variety public relations chores — promoting products, announcing engagements or deaths — but clients often made use of his services because they were in crisis mode.

In 2008, when Ed McMahon, Johnny Carson’s onetime sidekick on “The Tonight Show,” faced possible foreclosure on his multimillion-dollar home in Beverly Hills, Calif., Mr. Bragman was there to help handle the news media. In 2010, when a JetBlue flight attendant named Steven Slater had an onboard meltdown that went viral and landed him in court, Mr. Slater engaged Mr. Bragman to deal with the fallout. In 2017, after Anthony Scaramucci was dismissed as Donald J. Trump’s White House communications director just a few tumultuous days into the job, he hired Mr. Bragman to help orchestrate his political afterlife.

Often in those situations, Mr. Bragman’s answers to journalists’ questions were more deflective than informative — “Not in the habit of confirming my clients or their strategies” was his oft-quoted response when asked what specifically he was telling Mr. Scaramucci — although be-

His specialty was advising gay stars, athletes and others who were coming out.

hind the scenes he would advise clients on things like which interview requests to accept and what to say during those interviews.

But for another type of client, a gay man or woman going public, Mr. Bragman was more open and more of an activist. He was gay himself — “the gay guru,” he was sometimes called — and he was both a counselor and an admirer of actors, athletes and others who were coming out.

“These people are heroes, because coming out is the single most important act any gay person can do,” he told NPR’s “Morning Edition” in 2011. “Because every bit of research that’s ever been done says if you know more gay and lesbian people, you are going to support our rights.”

Among the celebrity clients he worked with in this capacity was Dick Sargent, who some two decades after he played the husband of Elizabeth Montgomery’s character on the classic sitcom “Bewitched” announced on National Coming Out Day in 1991 that he was gay.

In 2009, when Meredith Baxter, who as a star of “Family Ties” in the 1980s had been one of America’s best-known TV moms, started getting inquiries from the tabloid press after going on a lesbian cruise, her manager advised her to contact Mr. Bragman, who gave her blunt advice.

“We have to take control of the story or you will have no say in it at all,” she recalled him saying in her autobiography, “Untied: A Memoir of Family, Fame and



Howard Bragman at his office in Los Angeles in 2006.

Floundering” (2011). He booked her on NBC’s “Today,” where she told the world she was a lesbian. Mr. Bragman, she said, gave her the courage to go through with the interview.

“He said as soon as it’s done, you’ll be free,” Ms. Baxter told NPR. “And we walked out that door of NBC studios in December, and it was the most freeing thing I had ever experienced.”

Mr. Bragman performed a similar service for the country singer Chely Wright in 2010, when, though well into the gay liberation era, a gay performer in country music was still a rarity.

“Historically, country music would rather an artist be a drunk — they even encourage that one,” Ms. Wright told The Los Angeles

Times at the time. “They would rather you were a drug addict than be gay.”

Mr. Bragman also worked with the former N.B.A. player John Amaechi when, in 2007, he came out, and with Michael Sam, an N.F.L. prospect, when he announced in 2014 that he was gay. Mr. Sam would become, in a brief pro career, the first publicly gay player in the National Football League.

Howard Benjamin Bragman was born on Feb. 24, 1956, in Flint, Mich. His father, Leonard, had an insurance company and later a real estate business, and his mother, Myrna (Wolin) Bragman, was a homemaker who later worked with her husband in real estate.



PETER KRAMER/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES

Mr. Bragman’s clients included the actress Meredith Baxter, above left, who told the world that she was a lesbian during an appearance on the “Today” show in 2009; and the former N.B.A. player John Amaechi, above right, who came out as gay in 2007.



CHRIS GOODNEY/BLOOMBERG NEWS

“I was fat and Jewish and gay in Flint, Michigan,” Mr. Bragman told NPR. “And that makes you a bit of a Martian, because there’s not a lot of peers, there’s not a lot of role models, to really look to.”

He earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and psychology from the University of Michigan in 1978 and soon landed a job at a small public relations concern in Chicago whose clients included Anheuser-Busch, the maker of Budweiser and other beers.

Mr. Bragman was soon turning up in newspaper articles. When Stevie Wonder and Kai Millard Morris had a child, Mandla, in 1979, it was Mr. Bragman who announced that the newborn weighed 7 pounds, 8 ounces. When Tom Earhart, a snowmobile racer sponsored by Budweiser, set a new speed record of 148.6 miles per hour in 1982, Mr. Bragman told the world.

He was a founder, in 1989, of Bragman Nyman Cafarelli, which quickly became a major public relations player. One of his first acts there was to offer pro bono help to Joseph Steffan, who had been kicked out of the United States Naval Academy in 1987 after acknowledging that he was gay and who in late 1988 sued for reinstatement. (The suit was ultimately unsuccessful.)

“Sometimes causes need publicists, too,” Mr. Bragman told The

Los Angeles Times in 1990. “I felt it was important that he have all the help he can in fighting his battle.”

Mr. Bragman, who lived in Los Angeles, is survived by his husband, Mike Maimone, whom he married this year, and a brother, Alan.

Bragman Nyman Cafarelli was sold in 2001 to Interpublic Group. Mr. Bragman, after teaching public relations for five years at the University of Southern California, founded a new firm, Fifteen Minutes PR, in 2005, and another, La Brea Media, in 2019.

In 2008, he put his public relations knowledge into a book, “Where’s My Fifteen Minutes: Get Your Company, Your Cause or Yourself the Recognition You Deserve” (written with Michael Levin). In the book, he cited the biblical story of Moses, who was reluctant to deliver the messages God wanted delivered, and so God told him to bring along Aaron, his brother, who was more eloquent and could do the talking.

“So a lot of us in public relations believe that Aaron is actually the first practitioner of our craft,” Mr. Bragman wrote, “thus making public relations the third oldest profession, slightly behind spy-craft and prostitution.”

And, he added, “we get accused of both of those as well.”

Hans Modrow, 95, Who Was One of East Germany’s Last Communist Leaders

By CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE

BERLIN — Hans Modrow, a Communist reformer who was one of the last political leaders of East Germany, died on Saturday in a hospital in Berlin. He was 95.

His party, the far-left Die Linke, confirmed his death, from a stroke.

Within East Germany’s rigid Communist Party, Mr. Modrow was widely seen as a reformer in the mold of the Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev — he was often called the German Gorbachev, in

Communist cabinet under the leadership of Egon Krenz, East Germany’s last party general secretary.

As prime minister, Mr. Modrow invited opposition members — including environmentalists, feminists, free socialists and social democrats — to join the government, believing he could keep East Germany from dissolving and uniting with West Germany if it adopted reforms, like free elections and state transparency.

But when he realized that the country was destined to merge with the West, he helped usher in the transition during the Communists’ final five months in power. He proposed that a unified Germany remain neutral militarily, a plan that West German leaders rejected.

“When it was essential to secure the peaceful transition from the G.D.R. dictatorship to a free country, he took on the task,” Christine Lieberknecht, a former conservative state governor from the East, wrote in the German tabloid Bild. “This is his lasting political achievement,” she added.

Before he was named prime minister, Mr. Modrow had spent more than a decade as Communist Party leader in Dresden, away from the political life of the capital, East Berlin.

While he was credited with setting up a formal dialogue with a group of dissidents in the city, he was also responsible for the harsh police response to a mass demonstration in October 1989 at the Dresden railroad station, where antigovernment protesters gathered to meet trains bearing East German refugees on their way to West Germany. About 1,320 peo-



Hans Modrow in 1993. In East Germany’s Communist Party, he was compared to the Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

ple were arrested.

Mr. Modrow lost his post as prime minister in May 1990 in the first, and last, free elections of the Volkskammer. The body was dissolved with the unification of the country that October. Afterward, he was among the first former East German politicians to join the reunited Parliament, serving until 1994. He also served in the

European Union Parliament in Brussels from 1999 to 2004.

“It was important to him to push for the interests of East Germans,” said his son-in-law Torsten Hochmuth.

After reunification, Mr. Modrow was tried on charges of falsifying election records in Dresden and giving false testimony concerning the police response to the train



MARKUS SCHREIBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mr. Modrow in 2019.

station protests. Convicted on both counts, he was given a suspended sentence of 10 months.

Hans Modrow was born on Jan. 27, 1928, in Jasenitz, then a German village in Pomerania and now part of the town Police in Poland. He was the third of four children of Franz and Agnes (Krause) Modrow. His father was a baker who lost his business when Hans was young and was an early member of Hitler’s Nazi party.

As a youth, Hans apprenticed as a machinist and joined a volunteer fire brigade in the final years of World War II, he told his daughter Irina Modrow. In the war’s final months, Hans, at 17, was ordered to join the Volksturm, a last-ditch defensive effort comprising very young and very old recruits.

After Germany’s defeat, as a prisoner of war, he was taken to the Soviet Union, where he embraced Communism after attending a training institute for future

Communist cadres. On his return to Germany, he became active in Communist Party politics, starting with its youth wing and working his way up the party’s ranks until he was sent to Dresden in 1973.

Unlike other Communist leaders, Mr. Modrow lived what he preached. For decades his home was a modest apartment in a prefabricated Communist-era building in Dresden.

“He was part of the regular house community — from the outside nobody could really tell that he was the comrade Modrow,” Mr. Hochmuth said. “He was really just a working class boy.”

Mr. Modrow was married to Annemarie Straubing for 53 years. She died in 2003. His daughter Irina Modrow died in 2017. He is survived by his partner, Gabriele Lindner; another daughter, Tamara Singer; three grandsons; and a number of great-grandchildren.

In retirement Mr. Modrow was active in the party that succeeded the Communists, now called Die Linke. After Russia invaded Ukraine last year, he described the war there as an “internal civil war” involving “fascist elements in western Ukraine” — and was widely criticized for it.

Besides his political legacy, he was instrumental in founding the soccer team 1. FC Union Berlin in 1966; it now ranks as one of the best in Germany.

Mr. Modrow, who talked of his political career in interviews over the years, was once asked about life in East Germany.

“It was neither paradise nor hell,” he said.

A prime minister who helped secure a peaceful transition to a free country.

fact — who eschewed the big houses, fancy cars and other perks that many party leaders took for granted.

Though he was a member of the party’s central committee for more than two decades and a member of the East German Parliament, the Volkskammer, for more than three, Mr. Modrow did not reach the top echelons of power until just before the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

On Nov. 8 of that year — just a day before the wall began coming down — Mr. Modrow was made a member of the Politburo, the highest political body in the German Democratic Republic, as East Germany was known. He was appointed prime minister on Nov. 18, and in that role oversaw the last

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Deaths

Klingenstein, Patricia

KLINGENSTEIN—Patricia Davis.



Patricia Davis Klingenstein died peacefully on February 11 from cancer. She was 93. Born and raised in Portland, Maine, the only child of Dr. Harry and Sadie Davis. She went to Weymouth school in Portland and then to Smith College from which she graduated in 1951. Her first love was her family. She was the glue that held it together. She

loved dearly her husband, John, to whom she was married for 66 years. They met in college and never looked back. Her four children, Tom, Nancy, Andy and Sally, daughter-in-law, Julie, ten grandchildren and six great-grandchildren loved her as much as she did them. She was always supportive of her family’s activities. She never missed a graduation, birthday or other major life event. She was an extraordinary host who labored over seating arrangements so that every guest left feeling well cared for. She was always kind and considerate, even to those she did not like, of which there were few. She listened more than she talked. Her recollections were invariably about her children or grandchildren, not her. She had a much better memory of the events of her children’s past than did her children themselves. She did the New York Times crossword puzzle in a felt pen and had it finished

Deaths

before her second cup of coffee. She planned to live forever, not because she entertained any idea of immortality, but rather because she was such an optimist. Her dress was always elegant. Neither her dress nor anything else about her was casual. Nothing was ever out of place. She had very high standards — from etiquette and grammar to decency and integrity. She loved books, great literature being her favorite. In book clubs into her nineties, she had a deep appreciation for the humanities and made sure she passed this along to her children. Her love of reading and her understanding of the importance of books was reflected in her philanthropy. Among her many gifts to libraries was one to a small school in the Maryland countryside where an accompanying plaque reads: “In honor of Pat Klingenstein, a lover of books and small libraries.” She sat on many non-profit boards, among them The Klingenstein Philanthropies, the New York Public Library and the New-York Historical Society (N-YHS), always attentive and taking her responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. She is the longest running trustee of the N-YHS, in honor of her financial and volunteer support, the N-YHS’s library was named af-

Deaths

ter her. Of this she was particularly proud. She was a believer in independent school education. She joined her husband in helping to establish and then generously support the Klingenstein Center at Columbia Teachers College which has trained teachers and administrators for 40 years. Though she spent most of her life outside of the state, she was at heart a Maine girl. Recently, she and her family honored her father, formerly chief of pediatrics at Mercy hospital, with an anchor gift supporting the hospital’s expansion. She took particular joy in supporting small nonprofits benefiting children’s health through a grants program established by the Sadie and Harry Davis Foundation. She was a generous benefactor of Smith, devoted to the college, advisor to several presidents and she was the co-chair of a successful capital campaign in the 1970s. She received a number of awards for her philanthropy. She accepted, as she accepted everything, graciously. Nothing ever went to her head. Her loving and glowing presence will never be forgotten. A memorial service honoring Patricia Klingenstein will be held at the New-York Historical Society on March 27th at 4pm. In lieu of flowers, the family encourages gifts to the N-YHS or Mercy Hospital in Portland, Maine.

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