

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

David B. Feinberg

Papers, 1976-1994

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Summary

Title	David B Feinberg Papers, 1976-1994
Size	Ten linear feet
Source	Gift of the Estate of David B. Feinberg, 1995.
Abstract	David B. Feinberg (1956-1994) was a writer and AIDS activist in New York City. The collection contains correspondence, writings, other personal papers, and photographs of David Feinberg, mostly pertaining to his life in New York, as a writer and a gay man in the age of AIDS.
Copyright	The donor retains copyright and literary rights to published writings.
Restrictions	One letter, not by or directly pertaining to Feinberg, is restricted until 2050; otherwise, no restrictions.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

David Barish Feinberg was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, on November 25, 1956, the second of two children. He grew up in Syracuse, New York, and graduated in 1977 from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he majored in mathematics and studied creative writing with the novelist John Hersey.

After graduation, Feinberg moved to Southern California. He found work there as a computer programmer, and gradually came to terms with his gay identity, coming out to his family after attending a gay pride parade. He also continued writing fiction, completing a novel, Calculus, in 1979. (Calculus remains unpublished; Feinberg later characterized it as "godawful," telling one interviewer that it was a novel that "only an MIT math major could have written.")

Feinberg returned east in 1979 to attend New York University, completing an M.A. degree in linguistics in 1981. Soon after that, he accepted a job in the computer center of the Modern Language Association in New York City, where he continued to work until shortly before his death in 1994.

In the early 1980s, Feinberg joined a gay men's writing group, through which he eventually found his narrative voice, in the form of his character, B. J. Rosenthal. Rosenthal, like Feinberg, was a young, gay, Jewish man, originally from upstate New York, who worked as a programmer and lived in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan. (From 1981 to 1993, Feinberg's home was a studio apartment on Ninth Avenue near West 52nd Street.) In 1986, Feinberg submitted a story about B. J. to Mandate Magazine. The editor liked it, and Feinberg began doing a monthly column for Mandate called "Tales From Hell's Kitchenette," comic vignettes about gay life in New York, which ran from July 1986 to May 1987.

Feinberg met Ed Iwanicki, an editor at Viking Press, at a party in 1986. Iwanicki was an enthusiastic reader of Feinberg's column and encouraged him to submit to Viking the manuscript of any novel he might write; Feinberg complied in August 1987 with Eighty-Sixed. The heavily autobiographical work deals humorously and poignantly with gay men's lives before and after the onset of the AIDS crisis and with the illness and death of one of the narrator's friends. When it was published in 1989, it found a wide audience, and won that year's Lambda Literary Award for Gay Men's Fiction and the American Library Association's Gay/Lesbian Book Award for Fiction.

It was also in August 1987 that Feinberg took the HIV antibody test and learned that he was HIV-positive. That fall, he joined the activist organization AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP), and was a committed member for the next seven years, regularly attending weekly meetings and participating in demonstrations at St. Patrick's Cathedral, the headquarters of the Food and Drug Administration in Washington, and the laboratories of Hoffmann-La Roche Pharmaceutical Company.

In 1991, Feinberg published his second book, Spontaneous Combustion, a collection of short stories about B. J. Rosenthal, that, like Eighty-Sixed, were chiefly based on his own life. Feinberg used sarcastic humor as a way of coping with his fears about AIDS, and most of the pieces in Spontaneous Combustion are light in tone, though several are somber accounts of the deaths of friends.

For the next few years, Feinberg continued to balance writing and political activism with working full-time. In July 1994, however, failing health caused him to take medical disability leave from his job. That fall, he entered St. Vincent's Hospital, where he died early in November, three weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday.

Despite increasing weakness and exhaustion, Feinberg continued to write as long as he could, even while hospitalized. In his last months, he was working on a memoir about his family; a novel with the provisional titles of Behavior and Twelve-Inch Remix; and a play, The Pathological Flirt. On October 18, 1994, New York Newsday published a version of the speech he had given at an ACT UP meeting on October 3, in which, having become disillusioned with ACT UP demonstrations as a force for change, he took the organization to task for failing to focus on what he saw as the essential issues of AIDS treatment and education.

David Feinberg's last book, a collection of essays called Queer and Loathing: Rants and Raves of a Raging AIDS Clone, appeared in print before his death; most of the reviews, however, were posthumous.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The ten linear feet of David Feinberg's papers consist of correspondence, mostly incoming; writings, published and unpublished; clippings; such miscellany as desk calendars and monthly bank statements; photographs, and audio tapes.

Materials date from the mid-1970s to 1994. For more detailed information, see the series descriptions that begin on the following page.

PROVENANCE NOTE

The David B. Feinberg Papers came to the New York Public Library through Wayne Kawadler, the executor of Feinberg's estate, in April 1995.

RELATED MATERIALS

In 1995, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division of the New York Public Library received the records of ACT UP, in which Feinberg was active from 1987 to 1994. Researchers should check with the Manuscripts Section staff concerning access to them.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

SERIES 1. CORRESPONDENCE. BOXES 1-6.

Correspondence dates from 1976 to 1994, and is arranged chronologically. It consists almost entirely of incoming letters; there are very few copies of letters from Feinberg. The correspondence is mostly personal, from friends and relatives. There are also some fan letters from readers.

Notable correspondents include John Hersey, Feinberg's creative writing teacher at M.I.T. (one letter, November 22, 1977); Larry Kramer (one letter, ca. August 15, 1991); and Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich, who became friends of Feinberg after writing him to praise Eighty-Sixed (about two dozen letters, February 1989 through January 1992).

SERIES 2. WRITINGS. BOXES 7-15.

Series 2 contains novels, stories, and articles by Feinberg (and one box of writings by others), including many drafts and sketches for uncompleted works. Among these papers are his first, unpublished novel, Calculus (Box 7); drafts of early short stories, possibly from his college writing class (Box 8); Behavior, an unfinished novel (Box 9); The Pathological Flirt, the play on which he was working at the time of his death; and the beginnings of a memoir about his family,

My Secret History, which he evidently started writing during his final hospital stay in 1994 (Box 11).

Also in Series 2 are published copies of Eighty-Sixed, including a German paperback edition, and Spontaneous Combustion (Box 12), and copies of Mandate Magazine from 1986-1987, featuring Feinberg's column, "Tales From Hell's Kitchenette" (Box 14).

Feinberg's papers do not include the typescripts of his three published books, although passages from them, often fragmented or in different form, are scattered within this series.

SERIES 3. OTHER MATERIALS. BOXES 16-18.

These items include five folders of clippings and newsletters about AIDS and two folders of material about ACT UP (Box 16); Feinberg's desk calendars for 1981 through 1993 (Box 17); and an assortment of personal files, from financial records and N.Y.U. transcripts to copies of his invitations to parties (Box 18).

SERIES 4. PHOTOGRAPHS. BOXES 19-21.

Series 4 consists of photo albums, framed pictures, loose snapshots, and slides. None of the people, places, or dates of these pictures is identified, though there are several broad categories of topics: gay rights demonstrations, including those of ACT UP; parties; vacations; and family gatherings.

SERIES 5. AUDIO TAPES. BOX 22.

This series contains six miniature cassettes, partly or wholly unidentified; and five cassettes, labeled "Spontaneous Combustion." Researchers should check with the Manuscripts and Archives staff about access to these items.

CONTAINER LIST

Box	Contents
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Series 1: Correspondence

1	1976-1985
2	1986-1989
3	1990-1991
4	1992
5	1993-1994
6	Undated

Series 2: Writings

7	<u>Calculus: A Novel</u> (1979)
8	Drafts and notes for stories, ca. mid-1970s-early 1980s
9	Drafts and notes for novels and stories, ca. mid-1980s-early 1990s <u>Behavior</u> (novel, never completed)
10	Copies of published articles and notes for stories, ca. 1985-1991
11	Last writings, 1994: Drafts of memoir, <u>My Secret History</u> Drafts of play, <u>The Pathological Flirt</u> Notes for stories, articles Speech given at ACT UP meeting, October 3, 1994 Notes on hospital stay, summer-fall 1994
12	Books: published copies of <u>Eighty-Sixed</u> and <u>Spontaneous Combustion</u>
13	Reviews of and publicity for DBF's books; Articles mentioning DBF
14	<u>Mandate</u> Magazine, 1986-1987

BOX **CONTENTS**

- 15 Writings by others:
 John Weir
 Kay J. Divant
 Dennis Klein

Series 3: Other Materials

- 16 AIDS/ACT UP items: clippings, newsletters, etc., 1987-1994
- 17 DBF's desk calendars, 1981-1993
- 18 Various files, including:
 Notes from therapy, ca. mid-1980s
 "To do" lists
 Party invitations
 Personal ads

Series 4: Photographs

- 19 Photo albums
- 20 Photo albums and framed pictures
- 21 Loose snapshots and slides

Series 5: Tapes

- 22