

Ira and Betty Dyer Scholarship

A distinguished couple with a strong belief in the importance of education, philanthropy and helping others, Ira and Betty Dyer were happily married for sixty-eight years, prior to Ira's death in 2016. They met on a blind date when Ira was a student at MIT and Betty was a freshman at Clark University and after marrying two years later, they embarked on a fascinating life together, raising two children, traveling the world, sailing out of Marblehead for 45 years and supporting medical research, the arts, and Jewish and community causes through philanthropy.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Ira, the son of Russian immigrants, developed an interest in engineering/science at an early age, attending Brooklyn Tech on the vocational track. He served in the Army Air Corps during World War II and planned on becoming an airplane engine mechanic. After the war, his brother-in-law bought him a train ticket to Boston, insisting that he visit MIT. Ira was admitted to MIT on-the-spot, and went on to receive his bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in physics, with support from the GI Bill.

His career accomplishments were considerable. While working for the company now known as BBN Technologies, Ira designed, built and tested an ultrasonic brain scanner that paved the way for ultrasonic scanners currently used in cardiology and gynecology. He later led a research division of the company that investigated all aspects of sound and vibration in complex structures such as ships, submarines, aircraft and spacecraft and helped design the US Navy X-1 submarine. He also designed an engine mounting system that significantly quieted the vessel. The isolation concept enabled the US Navy to develop ultra-quiet submarines, which provided significant advantages for submarine operations during the Cold War.

In the 1970s, Ira led the MIT Department of Ocean Engineering and was named the Weber-Shaughness Professor of Ocean Engineering. He was a dynamic lecturer whose intellect and clarity inspired his students. As Director of MIT's Sea Grant Program, created by the federal government to stimulate research in the wise use of the oceans, he played a major role in advising, researching and designing anti-submarine warfare systems for the Navy.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Ira led his students on six Arctic field programs, where they tackled projects such as imaging the entire Arctic Basin with acoustics and developing a taxonomy of ice noise events in the region. In the 1990s, he resumed his research on structural acoustics that influenced contemporary submarine designs and he contributed to a high-level Navy technical advisory committee that led to the contemporary submarine sonar signal processing suite.

He was a fellow of the Acoustical Society of America and the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a visiting fellow of Emmanuel College at Cambridge University, UK. Over his long and eminent career, he received many awards and honors, including the 1996 Per Bruel Gold Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the Acoustical Society of America.

Betty Dyer, the granddaughter of Russian and Polish immigrants, grew up in Clinton, Massachusetts. Attending Clark University in Worcester, MA. where she studied history and psychology, hers was the second class to include women. As only the second class of co-ed's, there were no dorms for women, so she lived with her Worcester relatives, the Hoffman's, including a teenage Abbie Hoffman.

Throughout her life with Ira, in addition to raising their children Sam and Debora, Betty devoted her time, talents and considerable energy to volunteering.

While living in Newton, she shared her passion for reading with children in a Dorchester elementary school. Five days a week for approximately ten years, Betty was on site, working with students one-on-one, inspiring them to love reading as much as she did. She sought out books that would motivate and instill confidence in each child. The students and staff loved and cared for Betty, and she stayed connected with her students for many years.

She was active in local politics and supported issues that were important to her by serving on the board of the League of Women Voters in Newton. Betty was an inspiration to her young daughter Debora and would include her while she was out distributing flyers on reproduction, education and voting rights for women. Betty served on the board of the Newton chapter of Hadassah and was an active member and eventual chairperson of the MIT Women's League.

Ira and Betty were compelled to help people in need. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, they worked with an organization called Action for Soviet Jewry to place refugees in appropriate jobs. Betty's focus was on Soviet scientists and those with unusual skills. She used her resources at MIT and helped place about a dozen refugees at MIT, Boston University and Northeastern University, as well as colleges around the country. The Dyer's also sponsored a newly arrived Soviet family and they found great fulfillment in helping refugees start new lives.

Betty was a much-loved and in-demand holder of premature babies at Salem Hospital. Decades ago, the award-winning research that established the tremendous value of touch was conducted by her brother, Dr. Saul Schanberg and a few others at Duke University. This work revolutionized worldwide the care of preemies. She also participated in the Ready to Read Program at Salem Hospital, which provided books to children undergoing medical treatments and to their siblings. Always a voracious reader, after moving to the North Shore, she joined several book clubs and made many new friends. Betty also volunteered as a reading tutor for children at the Salem Witchcraft Heights Elementary School until the onset of COVID-19.

The Dyer's were avid sailors and drove from their home in Newton to Marblehead for many years, before moving to the sailing capital of the world in 1989. They were long-time members of the Marblehead Yacht Club and enjoyed hosting family, friends and sometimes Ira's students on their 50-foot boat, the Coriolis. They also were members of Temple Emanu-El.

"We've been very much interested in the education of young people in America," said Betty Dyer. The couple long ago established scholarships at their respective alma maters of MIT and Clark University. In establishing this scholarship through Marblehead Dollars for Scholars, Betty is honored to support local students as they pursue higher education, and she hopes they will be inspired by the couple's desire for everyone to continuously learn and acquire knowledge.