



Ira Cohen

August 12, 1938 - April 29, 2020

Ira Cohen was, indeed, a Bronx boy. His earliest memories were of playing outside their Bronx apartment building, in a snow fort when he was four years old. The fort was probably an appropriate symbol as well as a playspace given that the year was 1942. Blissfully unaware of the many ethnic and racial divides of his neighborhood, when asked by a group of older boys, “Who are you?” Ira replied, “I’m an air raid warden.” Nonplused, the boys went away. Throughout his life, Ira used humor to (mostly) turn away wrath.

Ira Cohen was a proud graduate of Bronx High School of Science (1954) and The City College of New York (1960). He received his Ph.D. from New York University. After he finished CCNY, he married Felissa Lashley with whom he had three children of whom he was very justly proud. Peter, the oldest, is a defense attorney in St. Louis, Missouri. Along with his wife Julie, he has raised three children, Benjamin, Hannah Claire, and Lydia. Ira’s daughter, Heather, lives in Denver, Colorado, and owns Heather J. Cohen and Associates, a firm that does private investigations and draws on Heather’s graduate degree in criminal justice. Neal Cohen, an executive with Charles Schwab, lives in Cedar Park, Texas, with his wife Anne and children Jacob and Grace. Ira’s stepson, Andy Elder lives in Austin with his wife Rachel and their three children, Anwen, Madoc, and Bevan. Andy is a partner in Illuminas, a firm that serves clients in computer applications and analysis. All of the children and grandchildren filled many spaces in Ira’s life with joy and laughter, as a few of

the photos on the website will demonstrate.

Ira married Ann Hopkins Elder in 1989 where they were both Professors at Illinois State University – Ira in History and Ann in Political Science. Their paths often crossed since they were Americanists interested in elections which they viewed from both historical and behavioral lenses. Their teaching collaborations led to a life-long interest in the many factors shaping voting decisions and subsequent policies. As Director of Honors for 17 years, Ira developed the program into a pipeline for students, often from downstate Illinois with little wider world experience to grow into their dreams. Many years after graduation, students were still writing to Dr. Cohen to share their memories and to say “thank you” for opening many doors for them. As a two-time President of the National Collegiate Honors Society, Ira supported its growth in membership and influence in the area of both traditional and experiential teaching, in collaboration with many such as Bernice Braid who are well known for their innovative teaching and interest in student learning.

When early retirement provided an opportunity to move to New York, both Ira and Ann jumped at the chance to live close to Ira’s family and to live in a place both have loved. Ira taught for well over a decade as an Adjunct Professor of History at Hunter College of The City University. After a year’s uneasy residence on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Ira and Ann were happy to find a place on the Upper West Side, where they lived for over twenty years. They were always happiest when their grandchildren would visit and where his oldest grandson, Benjamin could happily browse “Gramps” history library. Ann was always happy when Ben would relieve Ira of some of his history books, creating empty spaces on the shelves that were soon filled again!

Those of us who have known Ira through the years will perhaps remember him through different lenses, and we hope they will continue to share their memories in that most happy way of keeping our loved ones in our lives.

Tribute Wall



“ *Ira Cohen*

October 14, 2022 at 12:02 PM

MK

I just found out about Ira's passing. I was truly fond of him. He was in attendance at the graduation ceremonies in which I received my Ed.D. at ISU, after which he offered me a position in his honors program. I was honored and elated, but then he asked me what salary I was making at the school district in which I was working. I told him. Then, he retracted the invitation saying "Stay there! I can only offer you half of that!" A kind and caring man with a great sense of humor. May his memory be a blessing! Margie Tomassi Kang, November 15, 2024

Margaret Kang - November 15, 2024 at 07:26 AM



“ *Only today learned of your becoming a blessed memory. Thank you, landsman, for telling me I could have succeeded anywhere. Thank you for lending me The Great Comic Book Heroes. Thank you for your wit, your kindness, your New York accent. Mawddy remembers, boychick!*

Mort Castle - September 13, 2021 at 09:58 PM

AC

“ *Ira influenced my education and personal growth immeasurably. This is a very profound loss for anyone who knew him. I knew both Ira and Ann when I was at ISU. My 6 children have been greatly influenced by their guiding hands in my life. I'm very grateful to have known him. My sincerest condolences.*

Amy Hays Craane - June 23, 2021 at 01:16 AM



Jennifer
Booker-
Smith

“ Dr. Cohen was the one who told me I won the Robert G Bone Scholar award at ISU in 1993. I remember jumping up and down saying "are you serious!?" And he said "of course I am!" I remember him always smiling and being friendly. So sad to see he is no longer with us.

Jennifer Booker-Smith - July 16, 2020 at 11:49 AM



“ Ira and I were friends and colleagues at Illinois State for more years than I can count. He was one who made me feel welcome at the U almost immediately. Both being NY boys and having graduated from “competing” High Schools helped cement the relationship. His inside knowledge of all that was going on along with his quick wit made me want to drop in to his office whenever possible. Too many times we suffered, not silently of course, on committees and in Senate meetings. In sum I liked him a ton and truly enjoyed our friendship. Ann, I know words are not enough to assuage your grief, but know, that despite being separated in time and space you have both remained part of my life. Michele and I send our sincerest sympathy to all who mourn.

Mel Goldstein - May 08, 2020 at 04:59 PM

ML

“ Ira was a bright, entertaining, influential and unique figure for more than three decades at Illinois State University. His influence in and out of the classroom was memorable. I was glad to know him.

Marc Lebovitz - May 04, 2020 at 06:18 PM

DK

“ I am so sorry Ann to read in today's paper about the passing of Ira. You two were like two halves of an arch meeting and giving each other immense strength. I recall so often seeing IRA and talking with him along with your and my involvement with the Research Office as reps of our respective departments traveling and supporting research and grants. My thoughts and prayers are sent your way. Stay strong...keep his memory very alive.

Donald Kachur - May 04, 2020 at 04:04 PM

AL

“ Anita L. purchased a sympathy card for the family of Ira Cohen.



Anita L. - May 02, 2020 at 08:50 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Ira's Funeral Livestream recording



Austin Natural Funerals - April 30, 2020 at 07:56 PM

SP

A wonderful man and professor. With an equally wonderful spouse. I knew both as a student at Illinois State. His life was a blessing. So thankful that this service was shared.

Sandra k Parker - May 04, 2020 at 09:26 AM

JR

Ah, Ira you brought grace and humanity to all around you. Miss you. Ann, my deepest condolences. Jo Rayfield

Jo A Rayfield - May 15, 2020 at 06:14 PM

CR

I am one of the many innumerable ISU students touched by Professor Cohen. His teaching of American History and Urban American History was motivational to me. I was also his Graduate Assistant at ISU. He definitely made a difference in my years as a student at ISU. I am glad his personal and academic professional life were so fulfilling and rewarding. I will never forget Professor Cohen.

Claire Ricewasser

Claire Ricewasser - November 29, 2020 at 05:50 PM



“ 6 files added to the album Memories Album



Austin Natural Funerals - April 29, 2020 at 06:08 PM