

# Arno H. A. Heyn

Written and compiled by Janice Meisenhelder-Heyn for the presentation of the 2012 Arno Heyn Memorial Book Prize



Arno Heyn in 1995

Arno Heyn was born Oct. 6, 1918 in Breslau, Germany, now Wroclaw, Poland, in the middle of a flu epidemic at the end of a World War. He was the son of an American father, a pharmaceutical chemist, and a German mother, an artist and pianist, who raised Arno in Germany. His mother would practice the piano for hours each day, and Arno recalls playing with blocks under the grand piano. Although he never perfected his own piano skills, his love for classical music was engraved in his heart from those early childhood experiences. Arno's last year of high school was accelerated by a decree from Hitler designed to produce more young men ready for the military. Arno's father was already living in the US, when he graduated from high school in 1937.

Through his father's US birth Arno also had US citizenship and could leave Germany in 1937 to join his father in Detroit, where he enrolled in the University of Michigan, obtaining a B.S. in Chemistry in 1940 and a Ph.D. (analytical chemistry) in 1944 under the direction of Hobart Willard. Arno returned to Germany to visit family in the summer of 1939, and was about to leave Rotterdam when his passenger ship was confiscated by the government. Hundreds of Americans were desperate to leave Europe, with long lines in front of the American Express office.

Arno checked the phone book to see that the main office of the Holland- American lines was in the industrial harbor district, and sought passage with a Freighter, instead of the obvious luxury liner. Only one other fellow had the same idea, and Arno secured passage to the US. He left Rotterdam on August 31, the day before France declared war. Although his freighter encountered a German U-boat and feared being torpedoed, he made it safely home. His advice was always: "Don't follow the crowd."

In his later years, Arno enjoyed frequent trips back to Europe and visits to his native homeland.

At the University of Michigan, Arno joined the University Choral Union, singing with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy each May. Although he never thought highly



Arno Heyn, University of Michigan, 1940

of his piano talent, he was proficient enough to pass the necessary requirement for choir membership. Over his lifetime Arno acquired an extensive collection of recordings, sharing his love of classical music with his family.

During his doctoral work, he became friends with Vivian Kann, a student also doing work with Hobart Willard. Arno writes:

“Vivian was engaged to Wilbur Walworth in spring of 1941. As she was picking up the printed wedding announcements in town one day, I bumped into her, with a tall skinny girl, Helen Pielemeier, who had graduated that spring and was now running the small library in the School of Public Health. I didn’t pay too much attention to this girl who was about 4” taller than I.

That fall, since Helen and Vivian lived on the same side of town, Helen would come over to the chemistry lab after work, and I would give them both a ride home. I would let off Helen first, and then took Vivian home, and often Vivian and I would stand outside and talk for many minutes before I finally drove back to my home. After a while, however, I’d take Vivian home first, and Helen second, and we would sit in the car and talk. As things went along, we started dating.”

In December, they were engaged and on March 14, 1942 married in Bethel Church, Ann Arbor.

“In the early forties, all young men were subject to the draft for military service. Being a graduate student in an “essential” line of study (chemistry), I had been deferred, pending completion of my graduate work. But in late September 1944, I received an induction notice. At the New York ACS Meeting in August 1944, I had been interviewed by people from Sun Oil, whose work had enough priority so they were pretty sure to be able to get me deferred. So, right after I got the induction notice, I wired Sun Oil, and they wired back early on Oct. 4 that they could arrange to get me deferred if I could be in Philadelphia the next morning.

I quickly packed a bag and got onto the Red Arrow train which ran from Chicago through Ann Arbor to Philadelphia and got space in the Pullman sleeper, and was in Philadelphia the next morning.”

“By 1946, after the war had ended, I no longer needed to be in industry since I was no longer subject to be drafted, and I was looking around for a teaching job. Dr. Willard had heard of an opening at Boston University. I had never heard of Boston University. I did know that Boston College, a Catholic college, was well known for its football team, but who in the Midwest had ever heard of Boston University?”

Sure, we knew that Harvard and MIT were in Cambridge, across the river, but other than having heard about Mayor Curley, we knew nothing of Boston. I recall my father saying that once, while in Boston, he had taken a cab and found the streets so complicated and intertwined that he couldn't see how the cabby could find his way.”

“I took the train to Boston to be interviewed and apparently satisfied the faculty members I had talked with and in due time was offered a job as Instructor with the royal annual salary of \$3,000 plus pay for the summer.”

Helen found a house in Newton for \$16,000, where they both spent the rest of their lives and raised their three children: Evan born in 1947, Margaret born in 1949 & Robert born in 1954.



Arno and Helen with Evan, Margaret and Robert in 1959

At B.U. Arno advanced from Instructor to Assistant Professor, and later, to Associate Professor with tenure, and again a few years later to Full Professor. He taught analytical chemistry and environmental chemistry at BU. He was more interested in teaching than in research, but did have a few doctoral students, most notably Martha Bergin and Phyllis Brauner. He spent three sabbatical leaves in Europe, the first in 1965 at the Eidgen. Hochschule, Zürich, the second in 1973 split between the Waterchemistry Lab at the Kernforschungszentrum Karlsruhe

(Germany) and a Water quality state lab in Vienna, the third in 1980 again in Karlsruhe. He returned for three summer stays to the lab in Karlsruhe in following years, and thereafter returned to Europe every 2-3 years for visits with his two German cousins and to renew his acquaintance with former schoolmates at the Fletcher Schule.

Morton Hoffman recalls lunch-times in Arno's office:

“Lunchtime featured Arno's cookie box, which was always filled with goodies that I could not resist, and his Constant Comment loose tea, which he steeped from a spoon-like device into a cup with boiling water. How he would carefully measure out the tea: too little and the tea would be insipid, too much and it would be acerbic.”

“Arno was, after all, a card-carrying analytical chemist; he was part of that tradition where the proper application of quantitative volumetric and gravimetric techniques was the difference between being a chemist and something else. He prided himself on the time he spent with students in the quantitative analysis and instrumental analysis laboratories, answering the questions and showing them the proper use of the pipette, burette, and rubber policeman. He relished the quest for the perfect measurement while knowing full well the limits to precision. Precision of speech, writing, and attitude characterized Arno's professional and personal life.”

“Within the Chemistry Department, Arno was the institutional memory. He not only took the minutes at faculty meetings, he remembered for years (or, perhaps, decades) this or that action of the past and all the debating points, and would not hesitate to let the historical strength or weakness of one's position be known. It was not possible to beat Arno in the memory game.”

In his childhood, Arno spent summers at his grandmother's country guest house, nestled in the mountains of Germany. His love for nature and hiking the great outdoors was a life-long passion, which he taught his children, along with his knowledge of wildlife and camping.

In 1951, Arno discovered the Sub Sig Outing Club, joining them on hiking and ski trips, first with their unique bus which could sleep 22 people and had a small kitchen. Later a sister group bought a closed village school in Moretown, VT which was converted to a simple ski dorm, and in 1966 Sub Sig acquired land in Harts Location north of Bartlett, NH and built a cabin for 20 people.

Arno was a key helper in these enterprises, doing all of the electric wiring, all the propane gas plumbing and contributing to the carpentry and masonry construction of the entire cabin and out-house. In 1999, when the original cabin was destroyed by lightning, Arno gladly and generously duplicated all of his labors again to rebuild a new cabin. In 1985, Sub Sig conferred the title of Life Member to Arno, “in grateful appreciation for loyal commitment, significant leadership and outstanding contributions.”

His hiking friends remember him best for his careful planning and exceptionally positive attitude. Vivian Walworth tells of one hike in the early years characterized by an unusual series of unfortunate events which left their group of lost campers forced to sleep in the forest without any appropriate gear. Arno was the only member who remained cheerful and positive, pointing out how much they had all learned in just one weekend!

It was just such unrelenting and genuine cheerfulness combined with respectful, considerate and generous actions that endeared Arno to all who knew him.

Arno always enjoyed working with his hands, and often did mechanical and household repairs with his sons. Looking ahead to retirement, Arno earned a diploma in 1969 from the Locksmithing Institute of Little Falls, N.J. Upon retiring, Arno launched a successful business, marketing to new home owners in the Western Suburbs of Boston.

His small stature and smiling disposition accurately portrayed his sterling integrity to his customers. Although he continued to enjoy traveling, photography, music, cooking, as well as his locksmithing work, his first priority in retirement was always *The Nucleus*. His family knew all else would stop, until the next edition was complete. It was his tireless dedication and enthusiasm for the Northeastern Section that led the chapter to establish this award in his honor.

Sources:

Arno Heyn's Memoir

*The Nucleus*, February 2005, pg6-8.