

THIS CONCERT IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ELIZABETH R. SIMONS 1929 – 2019

For most of the existence of the BAE our Newton, then Brookline audiences were greeted by Liz Simons. Her presence, intelligence, commitment, and dedication were integral to our growth and success. We miss her very much.

Elizabeth Reiman Simons was born in Vienna in 1930. Her mother was a pianist, her stepfather edited an anti-fascist newspaper. They lived a comfortable life until March 1938, when Adolf Hitler annexed Austria to Germany. The family fled Vienna that June and made its way to Paris, where she became fluent in French, doing all the shopping and cooking for her family. The German conquest of Paris in June 1940 meant that Liz and her family were once again in danger. By circuitous routes, and constantly threatened with being sent back, they reached Portugal, from which they sailed to the US in June of 1941. They settled in Elmhurst, NY where Liz, who had managed to keep up her schooling throughout these turbulent years, showed exceptional proficiency in science and was accepted at Cooper Union in 1946 to study chemical engineering, the only woman in her class of 13.

Liz went on to earn her PhD in Physical Chemistry at Yale in 1953 where she met her beloved husband Harold Simons (deceased 1999). She spent 3 years on the Wellesley College faculty, 15 years at Harvard Medical School, where her research centered on polypeptide and protein structure. Being female, she was considered ineligible for a “real” title (Lecturer but not Assistant Professor) at Harvard so she moved to Boston University in 1972 as Associate Professor of Biochemistry.

At BU, Liz decided not to pursue her previous research but rather to apply biophysical approaches to study how blood cells function. Liz noted *“Even though I had never had a course in biology or in biochemistry, I can read and think, and my training put me in the right time, so the approach worked! I got my first NIH grant in 1973, remained funded until 2010”*.

Liz was an inspiration to her many colleagues and trainees over her long career. She is especially admired for her passion for science, her determination, and her dedication to mentoring, enjoying students, post-docs and technicians.

In her words: *“If I had to summarize my professional experience it would be: If you can read and think and have great co-workers you can do anything.”*

Liz was a resident of Newton, MA since 1953, raising her children Lee and Bob in the same house that she lived in until the fall of 2018 when she moved to Lasell Village. After retiring from BU in 2012 Liz took and taught courses at the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement, volunteered for Newton At Home, was devoted to her dogs, attended countless concerts, and did yeoman’s work for the BAE. Her curiosity and interest in life never waned.

Liz recorded two amazing episodes about her life that are available at archive.storycorps.org — search for Elizabeth Reiman Simons