



Mary Drake Iversen

November 18, 1920 - August 9, 2025

Mary Drake Iversen died peacefully in her sleep, at the monumental age of 104. As she'd been heard on occasion to say, "The first 100 years are easy, the second 100 are a little bit tougher." While her longevity was certainly awe-inspiring, it was the quality of her life and the ways in which she had an impact on so many people — from her family to her friends to her community — that were truly inspirational.

Born Mary Patricia Drake in Hibbing, Minnesota in the same year women won the right to vote in the United States, the future Mrs. Iversen was raised in Minneapolis and was the embodiment of a good citizen; she was fiercely smart, highly curious, and ever-invested in making the world a better place. She met her husband, the late Dr. Robert W. Iversen while they were students at the University of Minnesota; they married in 1943, and had two children, Nicholas and Frederick.

In 1963, the family settled in Syracuse, NY, where Dr. Iversen was a professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University for over 20 years. Mrs. Iversen also worked at the university, as the Director, University College Humanistic Studies Center and Women's Center for Continuing Education. In 1980, she was awarded the Chancellor's Citation for Excellence which was given for outstanding contributions in scholarship, research, teaching and creative work. She was a lover of art (even if her family did make fun of her efforts

during rowdy games of Pictionary), and volunteered for decades at the Everson Museum of Art, whose renowned ceramics collection was of particular interest to her, as she was passionate about sculpture and ceramics in particular. She was an avid volunteer for literacy causes within Syracuse as well as a volunteer at the city's historic Oakwood Cemetery, where her husband and eldest son are laid to rest.

A voracious reader, Mrs. Iversen was similarly devoted to theater and film, but nothing sparked her passion quite like sports. She bled Syracuse Orange, and rooted on all SU teams, but also never missed a Yankee game and kept a seasonal list of all the Pinstripe players. For her 90th birthday, she sat rink side at Madison Square Garden, watching the NY Rangers beat the Calgary Flames and cheering more loudly than anyone else. She passed her love for tennis down to her family, and delighted in hearing about her granddaughter's trip to the French Open; she kept a souvenir jar of red clay from Roland Garros on her bookshelf. Her competitive spirit could come out in a backyard game of wiffleball with her great-grandchildren or a tabletop round of Parcheesi or dominoes. She never let anyone win, but that was never what mattered anyway.

She traveled far and wide around the world, from Costa Rica to Kenya; she visited her sons at their homes in New York City and Alaska. She accompanied her husband on a trip to Normandy, France, where they visited the strip of land where he'd come ashore on June 6, 1944. In a desk drawer in her home, she still had a letter he'd written to her from that day, telling her how much he loved her, in case he never saw her again.

Upon his return from combat, the Iversens maintained a commitment to creating the kind of world in which they would want to live and raise a family. They were members of the NAACP, and believed in progressive causes, social justice, and racial equality. Mrs. Iversen was named a "Woman of the

Week” in May 1949 by the Cedar Rapids Gazette for her work in the Iowa Voters League; she was later sent to the United Nations as a representative for the League where she attended a conference and sat in on a UN security council meeting. Her lifelong devotion to charitable causes too numerous to list were clearly visible in her home, where most walls were filled with calendars sent by the many organizations she supported.

It's fair to say there will never be anyone else quite like Mary Iversen, and yet it's important to acknowledge that we all have within us the ability to be the kind of person she was: compassionate and candid, interested in all her surroundings, open to whatever the world had to offer. She could be a creature of habit — breakfast was always half a grapefruit and a bowl of cereal, and the beds were made before you could blink the sleep out of your eyes — but also one of surprises and delights: Her early morning tai chi practice was captivating to watch. And while she wasn't necessarily known for her prowess in the kitchen, her family is grateful she passed down her famous cheesecake recipe, so that we can make it and think of her, even if nobody has ever made it as well as she did, and nobody ever will. She shoveled the snow from her driveway until her 100th year, and at the age of 89 she went scrambling over boulders in the coastal islands of Maine with her great-grandchildren. She will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

Mrs. Iversen was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Robert Iversen, and son, Nicholas Iversen (Anne Fretz). She is survived by her son, Frederick (Fritz) Iversen (Amy Holm); granddaughter Kristin Iversen; grandson Patrick Iversen (Vanessa); and four great-grandchildren. The family is deeply appreciative of all the care-givers who helped her with so much love in the last years of her life.

Calling hours will be held at the Giminski-Wysocki Funeral Home; 1320 West

Genesee Street in Syracuse, on Friday, August 22, from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. Burial will be held at Oakwood Cemetery in a private ceremony. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the Everson Museum of Art.

Previous Events

Calling Hours

AUG **22**. 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

Giminski-Wysocki Funeral Home
1320 W Genesee St
Syracuse, NY 13204
(315) 422-5087
<https://giminskiwysocki.com/>

Tribute Wall

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“ *I was sorry to hear of Mary Iversen’s passing. And smiled at her wry comment about the second century of one’s life. She and her husband, Dr. Bob Iversen, epitomized SU professional staff to me, and I treasured my time as Mary’s colleague at University College.*

Lois C. Gridley - August 19, 2025 at 04:34 PM