

## Slice of MIT Podcast | Tales from Bronze Beavers

---

[SLICE OF MIT THEME MUSIC]

**ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to the Slice of MIT Podcast, a production of the MIT Alumni Association.

**BOB FERRARA:** Back in those days, you just got the train, you showed up. I thought Cambridge was out in the sticks. So I had come from a big city, Chicago. And so I was thrilled to find out it was urban setting.

**HOST:** Bob Ferrara came to MIT not knowing much about it. But in the many years he's been involved with MIT since, he's learned a thing or two.

As Senior Director in MIT's Division of Student Life, Bob is currently involved with a number of MIT student programs and clubs. And that's something he's been doing since his days as an undergrad.

**FERRARA:** The intramurals, then as now were phenomenal. And our house was kind of a middle of the road. And then we got-- one of my fraternity brothers, Dave Krauss, was our athletic chairman one year. And he insisted that we do everything. So we all had to learn paintball. Anything that moved when we entered it.

**HOST:** Aside from being in the fraternity Theta Chi, Bob was also a member of MIT's basketball team. He began volunteering for MIT as a student, launching a precursor to the Public Service Center.

**FERRARA:** One of my deepest experiences was tutoring academics for all kinds of service project. And because I was a city kid, it was really easy for me to relate to a lot of the kids around here. I know a couple of those kids. I know that one of their mothers said, he went to college 'cause of you. I told him to go.

And they, that's all they need. They need somebody to say, you guys smart. You can do this too.

**HOST:** Bob Ferrara is a recipient of this year's Bronze Beaver Award. The award recognizes alumni for their role in volunteering for the Institute. The highest honor the MIT Alumni Association can bestow on any alumni volunteer.

On this episode of the slice of MIT podcast, we'll hear from this year's award recipients. They'll

share stories of their memories of MIT. Listen for stories of rock stars, inspiration, and the laws of thermodynamics.

The alumni will also talk a little bit about why and how they stay connected to the Institute today.

In his years after graduating from MIT, Bob has been sure to inject a lot of fun into his volunteering activities. He launched the Science Trivia Challenge, and the Tech Challenge Games. But what Bob says some his most rewarding volunteer work has been, is in his role as a mentor with the Community Catalyst Leadership Program, a leadership program for students that matches them with alumni mentors.

**FERRARA:** It's just so interesting to interact, and be even a small part of a student's life. You never know exactly how you help.

**HOST:** Bob and his class, the class of 1967, also get to work with current students in another unique way. A partnership between the classes of 1967, and 2017. Something they call Class Connections.

**FERRARA:** There was no model for it. So we sat down with the 2017's, who were also very enthusiastic. And one of those nice little bits of serendipity, the class president of the 2017's is Liana Ilutzi, who happens to be a basketball player. So she and I we talked a lot of basketball.

And so she was all going out to do things. And we've planned about three events together. Three or four events. And then we had this idea of the 10,000 hour challenge.

So we came up with a kind of a simple idea. That we, collectively, our classes over the four years, that the 2017's, every year, at the Institute, would do at least 10,000 hours of service. Well it turns out, thanks a lot to this 2017's, but also our people have been contributing quite a few hours.

We're on a good path, we're going to make it. And the question is how much over are we going to shoot it?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN:** Oh, people loved it. I loved it. If nothing else, I loved it. But I'm glad everybody else loved it.

**HOST:** One of Jonathan-- Jono-- Goldstein's favorite volunteering moments involves a rock-star at the 150th anniversary of MIT's start.

**GOLDSTEIN:** We actually had 150th, which was just a few years back. And I knew we had always done Tech Night at the Pops. And I knew that Tom Schultz of Boston was an MIT alum.

And I was once at an alumni association event. And we're just going through names of Alumni. Folks said it actually showed up as Donald T. Schultz. And I said, is that Tom Schultz? And people are like, Tom Schultz? I said, Boston Tom Schultz?

**HOST:** That's "More Than a Feeling" Boston Tom Schultz.

**GOLDSTEIN:** And just then, I had this, I just said, wait, we out to ask Tom if he would play the 150th Tech Night at the Pops.

**HOST:** After finding the hidden MIT alumnus, a chance encounter helped to seal the deal.

**GOLDSTEIN:** Literally stroke of luck, I'm traveling to India a few weeks later, and I'm connecting out of New York. and who's on my flight, literally aisles across from me but Keith Lockheart of the Boston Pops.

So I said, Keith, MIT's 150th anniversary's coming up, and we have to Tech Night at the Pops, which we always do. Wouldn't it be cool if Tom Schultz was the special guest? He goes, I love that!

So I thought, just planting the seeds on both sides of that, to get it done, was probably my proudest moment.

**HOST:** Jono has had other exciting moments. As an undergrad, he made it into MIT's very first undergrad class on cloning eukaryotic cells. This was in 1979.

**GOLDSTEIN:** I was particularly lucky because I was in the very first class that was ever taught to undergraduates for cloning eukaryotic cells, which are animals. And this was kind of thing-- it's probably done in junior high school now-- but back then, nobody had ever really done this, except graduate students, and PhD students.

I was proud of having so many things pass in front of me. And be able to take advantage of so many of them.

**HOST:** His experience as a volunteer has kept him coming back in roles with the Annual Fund Board and later on the Board of Directors. As well as working with his Reunion Committees.

**GOLDSTEIN:** We had a few areas of MIT that were about to make a significant gift. But, well, basically the idea is, we cut a gift up into five chunks. And we just went to each of these different folks and said, hey, you've been here a long time, you know what's really needed at MIT. So we want to give you some money to do that.

And frankly, the whole process of talking to these folks about what they wanted to do, was one of the greatest things, in terms of getting involved with MIT, this is kind of like giving really knowledgeable, thoughtful people, some money to go to something useful. So we were just happy to be doing it.

**HOST:** Jono continues to represent MIT in many ways. He recently returned from a trip to Rwanda, where he continued a relationship with the new Rwanda Climate Observatory that collects data on climate change.

**GOLDSTEIN:** The thing is, it doesn't have to end when your undergrad ends. And there's just plenty of great involvement in the MIT community. [MUSIC PLAYING]

**HOST:** Terry Stone took a decidedly nontraditional path to MIT. At the time of her acceptance into Sloan's Masters of Management Program, Terry was working in academia in French literature.

**TERRY STONE:** Well, I had always been intrigued, as I think most people are, by what MIT represents. It just seems like a beacon of unusual thinking, and conceptual thinking.

**HOST:** Terry and her husband Rick both completed their master's degrees in 1976.

**STONE:** I say it converted me into an affordable human being. It really made such a difference in terms of transitioning my life to the kind of career that I had.

We just feel very, very grateful to MIT for having opened their doors to us.

**HOST:** Terry found herself at MIT at an exciting time for economics and finance, fields that became her passion and focus at MIT. Terry's classes sometimes challenged her in ways that only MIT courses could.

**STONE:** So at Sloan, in those days, we took classes with the PhD students. So it wasn't like an MBA program, which is really geared toward preparing people for management jobs. It was really

more of a academically oriented program.

And so I remember sitting in Robert Murton's class on portfolio management. And the master's students were all at the back, and the PhD students were all at the front. And he was talking about how portfolio theory was like the second law of thermodynamics. And everybody in the front row, the PhDs, were all saying, well that's such a great idea, that's such a great concept. And we were all in the back saying, what's the second of thermodynamics. It was one of those things, like, oh my gosh, how are we going to do this?

But we were able to grasp all this. And it seemed well beyond a grasp. And I find it extremely interesting. And, ultimately, it became very relevant in the world of finance.

**HOST:** As a volunteer, Terry first got involved with the Club of New York at the encouragement of other MIT grads. Since then, Terry has volunteered in many roles. Her background in humanities has come in handy for her work with the Humanities Visiting Committee as a corporation member.

**STONE:** And I think because of my background in French literature, and comparative literature, and music, which were my great love, and my undergraduate focuses, I was assigned to visiting committees that were relevant to the topics.

And so I began to understand how incredibly strong MIT is in those areas, as well as in management, and in science, and technology. And have always been associated with those. And it's a special passion for me. It's my background. They're things that I everybody loves.

And see how great MIT is in those areas. And to be able to try to make it understood by people who, sometimes, don't realize that MIT has strengths has been very important to me.

**HOST:** After years of volunteer service, former MIT president Susan Hockfield asked Terry to serve as the Institute's executive vice president and treasurer, a role Terry truly enjoyed.

**STONE:** It's a passion. I always say, if I was having a particularly difficult day, when I was working, I would just go-- my office was between the two domes on second floor-- and I would just go down to the end of the corridor, and look at the door opening on to Nas Ave, and just watch that energy walk through the door. And I said, OK, this place is worth it. Let's go back to work.

**HOST:** After a number of years inside the Institute, and out, the specialness of MIT is not lost on Terry.

**STONE:** It really is MIT's moment. It's probably always MIT's moment. But there's a moment now where the world thinks that MIT can solve the world's problems. That's science, technology, entrepreneurship, which we are the brand name for those things, right now throughout the United States and throughout the world.

And people really think that those things, science, technology, and entrepreneurship, really can unlock wonderful things for the future of the world.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**BOB GURNITZ:** I knew it was good. But you really realize how wonderful it is when you leave.

**HOST:** After spending a decade of his life at MIT, earning his undergrad, master's, and PhD, Bob Gurnitz returned. Not to Cambridge, but to a rented suite in Pittsburgh.

**GURNITZ:** I used to run the annual telethons. And that was a lot of fun. I had the luxury of being able to use a suite at one of the very nice clubs in Pittsburgh.

**HOST:** Pittsburgh is where Bob first got involved with volunteering. But as he moved around the country, he stayed in touch with MIT. He made friends with alumni at the clubs in Florida, Pittsburgh, and occasionally Cape Cod.

For the past 14 years, Bob has returned to MIT to help first year students solve real world problems, like feeding the world, carbon sequestration, and life on Mars. He has served as a mentor through a course known as Solving Complex Problems.

Bob gets to engage with MIT in a way he's most familiar with, a meeting of the minds.

**GURNITZ:** To me, learning is absolutely life-long. There's nothing like being up in Cambridge, and the halls of MIT.

**HOST:** Solving Complex Problems has 40 to 80 students on a given year. Students are tasked with a problem that is hard to solve, and mentors like Bob work with students to help find solutions. Giving mentor, and student, a chance to learn from each other.

**GURNITZ:** A lot of this is problems are just amenable to textbook solutions. But they are bigger and broader than that. And it's real life.

Most students at MIT, or at any school, really, don't have an opportunity like this.

**HOST:** Bob also supports MIT'S Science and Engineering Program for Teachers. Always giving back, Bob sees it as his duty as an alumnus.

**GURNITZ:** I gained such a wonderful background, and such a wonderful experience. The more I can do to help other people have such an experience, the more I want to do it. It is really, really a unique place.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HOST:** That's it for this episode of The Slice of MIT Podcast. But the story doesn't have to stop there. Why do you volunteer with MIT? What are some of your favorite memories? Tweet us with your stories on Twitter @MIT\_Alumni. That's MIT underscore alumni.

Special thanks to Bob Ferrara, Jono Goldstein, Terry Stone, and Bob Gurnitz for sharing their stories with us this episode.

If you want to hear more surprising, insightful, and quirky stories from the MIT community, subscribe to the Slice of MIT Podcast on iTunes. Let us know what you think. Please rate the podcast and leave us a review. We'll be back next month with another episode of the Slice of MIT Podcasts. In the meantime, check us out on our website at [slice.mit.edu](http://slice.mit.edu). Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SLICE OF MIT THEME MUSIC]