



I-House Alumni Spotlight:

Irving Tragen (IH 1943-47)

U.S. diplomat and Latin American foreign affairs expert

I-House Alumnus of the Year 2018:
Global Ambassador of Peace and Public Service



Years at I-House: 1943-47

Country of Origin: United States



Irving Tragen and his wife, “Ele,” in 1947.
The pair met at I-House and spent 57 years together, conquering life and service as one.

About Irving Tragen

Irving Tragen has dedicated 55 years to foreign affairs service in Latin America and has played a pivotal role in U.S.-Latin American diplomacy. Tragen was born in San Francisco in 1922. Having lost the majority of his hearing ability when he was a teenager, he pursued his education by reading lips, and obtained his bachelor’s and law degrees from UC Berkeley. While at Berkeley, he met his wife Eleanor, or “Ele,” at International House and the pair married in 1947. The Tragens immediately embarked on the first leg of what would become a lifelong journey of service in Mexico, El Salvador, Chile, Venezuela, Bolivia, Panama, Guatemala, and the Caribbean. Tragen was an integral part of President John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress initiative, as well as the Organization of American States Economic Development Program efforts to tackle debt and foreign trade crises, secure border area infrastructure projects, and combat international drug trafficking.

Reflections and Writings

In the years since his retirement, Tragen has published an autobiography, *Two Lifetimes As One: Ele and Me and the Foreign Service*, a heartfelt and insightful account of his life, career, and partnership with his wife Ele.



Irving Tragen and I-House Executive Director
Shaun Carver in February 2025.

Lasting Impact

Tragen’s sharp insights and wealth of experience continue to inspire. Shaun Carver, who met with Tragen at Edmonds’ Cafe, reflected on their visit: “Conversations like this remind me why I-House matters. Our alumni continue to make a profound impact on the world, carrying forward the values of diplomacy, service, and connection that were nurtured within our walls.” Tragen’s legacy serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring impact of the International House community.

Hear Tragen’s Story in His Words

Berkeley Law *Borderlines* Podcast:
“Irving Tragen, 100 Years of Development”

