

Dr. Bertram H. Schaffner

Dr. Bertram H. Schaffner, 97, renowned as a psychiatrist and widely known as a collector of Indian art, died in his sleep on January 29, 2010.

The son of Milton and Gerta Schaffner and raised in Erie, PA, Bert began his university studies at Harvard at the very young age of 15, transferred to the Honors Program at Swarthmore College, graduating in 1932 and completed his medical education at Johns Hopkins in 1937. Following a residency at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital and further training at Bellevue Hospital and the New York State Psychiatric Hospital, Bert served with the U.S. Army, first evaluating the mental fitness of draftees and then with the 10th Armored Division as a neuropsychiatrist (seeing active combat during the Battle of the Bulge); at war's end, he was called to serve at the Nuremberg trials and then served on the denazification process for the American Military Government, service which led to the publication of his seminal work Father Land (1948) widely used in University courses and by those setting up anti-nazi democratic systems in Germany.

After the war, Bert took further training with the William Alanson White Institute in New York City, with which he was associated for most of his career as a psychiatrist, teaching, advising and leading. During these years he was active in promoting mental health initiatives in the Caribbean, serving on the Expert Committee for Mental Health of the United Nations, advising the British, French and Dutch island governments in the West Indies on their mental health programs, and assisting numerous other international organizations. Never abandoning his private psychiatric practice, he was a leader in the study of the problems of homosexual practitioners in the medical world; he was proud of being one of the very first doctors to treat AIDS patients, writing articles seeking more humane attitudes and treatment for them, and from the 1980's forward, he dedicated much of his professional efforts to helping HIV/AIDS patients and the health care providers who ministered to them, continuing to receive patients at his home office until shortly before his death.

Also well known as a collector of Indian art, an interest spurred by his participation in a Brooklyn Museum trip to India in 1966, Dr. Schaffner travelled often to the subcontinent and became a beloved member of the arts community in New York, serving on the Collections Committee of The Brooklyn Museum, to which he was both devoted and one of its major donors.

Author, prizewinner, compassionate psychiatrist and a model of what it means to be a friend, Bert is survived by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Morris Schaffner, three nieces, and many cousins in all parts of the country, as well as a host of professional colleagues and close friends from all walks of life.

A memorial service will be held at a time subsequently to be announced.