



Prof. Maryellen Ruvolo '70



Having graduated from Bay Shore High School in 1970, Maryellen Ruvolo went to Harvard University where she majored in mathematics. After completing her undergraduate work, she did graduate work in biological anthropology at Harvard and received her Ph.D. in 1983. Beyond that, she took an interest in molecular biology and became a post-doctoral fellow in biological chemistry at Harvard Medical School, eventually becoming a research fellow in population genetics in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard. In 1990, Ruvolo joined the Harvard Anthropology Department as a faculty member and has been there ever since.

Dr. Ruvolo was the first woman to receive tenure in biological anthropology at Harvard, largely because she helped to prove through the use of DNA evidence that humans are evolutionarily most closely related to chimpanzees. This finding inspired the national research effort to sequence the chimpanzee genome. She currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on human evolution, genetics and genomics, and molecular biology. Her laboratory is in the Peabody Museum at Harvard and her current research focuses on understanding the genetic changes that make humans different from chimpanzees.

In 1982, she married David Pilbeam, a paleontologist and Professor of Anthropology at Harvard and they have a daughter, Katie. Currently, she and her husband reside in Lexington, Massachusetts, but she has retained her roots in Bay Shore as her parents and sister still live here. A visitor whenever possible, she and her family often join her parents in Fair Harbor on Fire Island for summer vacations.