

Connie Eaves (1944–2024)

By Gerry Krystal & Xiaoyan Jiang

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Connie was born in Ottawa in May 1944 as one of four children to Israel and Mary Halperin. Her father was an internationally known professor of mathematics at Queen's University and later the University of Toronto, and her mother was an outstanding violinist and violin teacher. Connie attended the Kingston Collegiate and Vocational Institute during her high school years and then obtained her BSc and MSc from Queen's University. She subsequently travelled to England for her PhD in immunology with Laszlo Lajtha at the University of Manchester. Her first postdoctoral stint, from 1969 to 1970, was at the Christie Hospital & Holt Radium Institute in Manchester, again with Laszlo Lajtha. For her second postdoc she returned to Canada to study with James Till at the Ontario Cancer Institute. It was during this second postdoctoral period that she helped develop spleen colony assays and fell in love with hemopoiesis.

In the early 1970s Connie was recruited by Lloyd Skarsgard as one of the first scientists at the British Columbia Cancer Research Centre. Together with her husband, Allen Eaves, she founded the Terry Fox Laboratory (TFL) within the BC Cancer Research Centre in 1981 and the rest, as they say, is history. Connie remained at the TFL until her untimely death on 7 March 2024 at the age of 79. As generations of PhD students and postdoctoral fellows joined her lab, Connie proved to be a wonderful mentor, incredible scientist and kind person. She instilled in us the importance of using the right controls and being consistently rigorous in every experiment, training that we benefited from throughout our careers. We witnessed her tireless and passionate contributions to science, devotion to nurturing future generations of scientists, and advocacy for early-career female scientists from the start of her career until its very end.

Connie was a loving mother of 4 and grandmother of 11, and was naturally always running from one commitment to another. When Connie and Allen started the TFL in 1981, they had a vision of creating a community that worked together. This distinguished the TFL from other departments we had worked in previously, where competition, rather than cooperation, was the norm. Our little group



Image credit: Sara Terry.

of principal investigators collaborated extensively, helped each other with research grants and became lifelong friends. We believe that it is because of this community Connie and Allen built that the TFL became the longest continuously funded National Cancer Institute of Canada group in Canada. Our dearest hope is that we can continue Connie's legacy by growing this spirit of camaraderie in her memory.

Connie has won numerous awards for her breakthroughs in hemopoiesis, leukemogenesis and breast cancer, including the Till and McCulloch Lifetime Achievement Award (2022), the Order of Canada (2021) and the Gairdner Wightman Award (2019). She was also named one of Chatelaine's Women of the Year in 2019, elected into the Royal Society (London) (2021), inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame (2019) and recognized as a Status of Women Canada Pioneer by the Government of Canada (2016).


During her more than 5 decades in research, Connie trained, mentored and inspired over 100 University of British Columbia graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. She was

a mentor, a peer and long-term collaborator, and all the while, for many of us an inspiration and dear friend. She touched our lives with warmth and humor. Her loss will undoubtedly be felt throughout the research community in British Columbia, Canada and around the world. Our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and colleagues. We will all miss Connie dearly.

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