Memorial Resolution on Behalf of Anna Whitehouse Berkovitz, Emerita Professor of Biological Sciences

It is with great sadness that the Department of Biological Sciences announces the passing of Anna Whitehouse Berkovitz, Professor Emerita in Biology who passed away peacefully on November 27, 2018, at age 88, after a series of medical setbacks.

Anna was born in Mukacevo (Munkács), at the time in Czechoslovakia, in 1930. This region, also known as Ruthenia or Transcarpathia, was annexed by Hungary in 1939, occupied by the Soviet army in October 1944, and now is part of the Ukraine.

In May 1944, Anna and her parents, Elizabeth and Eugene Weiszhausz, as well as her grandparents and their extended family were ordered to the Mateszalka ghetto, and soon afterwards deported to the Auschwitz death camp. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, her grandparents, as well as several aunts, uncles and cousins were immediately separated and led to the gas chambers. Only Anna, Elizabeth, and her aunt Irene survived the Holocaust.

In November 1944, Anna and Elizabeth were transferred to various other camps, including a slave labor camp near Magdeburg, Germany, where they were put to work in an underground ammunition factory. Ten days prior to the end of World War II, they were liberated by the Swedish Red Cross and taken to Sweden, where they spent three months in a sanatorium recovering from malnutrition and physical and emotional traumas.

In April 1946, Anna and Elizabeth immigrated to the United States. They settled in Los Angeles, California, where a great-aunt had located a number of years earlier. Anna graduated from high school in only two years, and then completed four years of college, graduating from U.C.L.A. in January 1952 with a B.S. degree in bacteriology and with Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude honors. While working as a laboratory technician, Anna met Leonard Berkovitz, who was then a post-doctoral fellow at Caltech. They were married in June 1953, and their sons Dan and Kenneth were born in 1956 and 1960, respectively. During this period, Anna worked part time in various cancer research laboratories.

In 1962, Leonard accepted a position at Purdue University, and the family moved to West Lafayette, Indiana. Anna then decided to continue her formal education and entered the Purdue University biology department as a graduate student, from which she received a Master’s degree in Molecular Biology in 1968. In 1967, she was asked to take a temporary teaching position to fill an unexpected vacancy in the department. This temporary position turned into a lifetime career of teaching. She was awarded tenure in 1975, eventually retiring in 2003 as Professor Emerita in Biology.

Anna’s efforts as a teacher and her dedication to her students were amply recognized by her students, colleagues and the administration. She was selected by the students as one of the Top Ten Outstanding Teachers in the School of Science 14 times, she received the Murphy Award, the top recognition of teaching excellence by the University, and was given the Chiscon Award for outstanding teaching performance by the Biology department. Anna was elected to the Teaching Academy at Purdue and her name is in the Purdue Book of Great Teachers.

In retirement and after Leonard passed away in 2009, Anna remained active in teaching genetics at Purdue, traveling, discussing current events, and spending time with her children and five grandchildren.