

Mary Rosalind Morris

1920 - 2022



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May 8, 1920 - March 26, 2022

Mary Rosalind Morris, daughter of Celia (Evans) and Aneurin Morris, was born in her maternal grandparent's home, Ruthin, Wales, May 8, 1920. Her brother, William Penri, was born in 1922. Their father had a severe case of flu at the end of serving in World War I and was advised by his doctor to change his career from teaching to one involving an outdoor life. In 1925 the family moved to Canada and by 1930 were settled on a fruit farm near the town of Forest in western Ontario.

After attending a rural elementary school and Forest High School, Rosalind spent four years at the Ontario Agricultural College (now University of Guelph) where she earned a B.S. in Agriculture. She accepted a graduate assistantship in the Plant Breeding Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Her thesis research involved genetic studies on buckwheat, an important cover crop in the region. Her financial support was a teaching assistantship under Professor Robert Cushing, who had gone to Cornell from the University of Nebraska.

During her time at Cornell, her family suffered the loss of her brother Pemi, who had joined the Royal Canadian Air Force after high school and in 1942 transferred to the Royal Air Force in England. He was a navigator on a Lancaster bomber that was hit on a bombing mission to munitions factories, Magdeburg, Germany in 1944. Pemi and all except one of the crew died, and their bodies were transferred to a British military cemetery in Holland through efforts of the Red Cross. Rosalind visited the site in 1970.

After receiving a Ph.D. at Cornell University in 1946, Rosalind started a career of 43 years in the University of Nebraska Agronomy Department under the leadership of Dr. Elvin Frolik. She taught two courses and part of a third course to graduate students. Due to concern about harmful effects of radiation on crop plants, her first research tested the effects of different types of radiation on com genes and chromosomes. In order to advance her knowledge in this area, she spent the year 1949-1950 on a University of Nebraska fellowship at the California Institute of Technology under the guidance of Professor Albert Longley. Rosalind also spent several months in 1956-1957 in Sweden and England on a Guggenheim fellowship to enhance her research and teaching experiences.

Upon her return to Nebraska in 1957 she joined the wheat research team led by V. Johnson, J. Schmidt, and P. Mattern. The rest of her career was devoted to developing and testing chromosome-substitution lines in bread-wheat varieties. This involved meticulous microscope observations by Rosalind and her assistants. Many of these lines were shared with wheat scientists in different countries.

Rosalind was a trailblazer for women in agronomy when it was unusual to see women in such roles. In 1978 she was the first woman to receive the honorary title of Fellow from the American Society of Agronomy. She belonged to a number of scientific societies and presented results of her research at meetings in the U.S., Canada, Egypt, England, India, and Japan. After retirement Rosalind and Dr. Mary Lou Pritchard took a number of trips within the U.S. and to several countries to attend Elderhostel programs, Welsh Society annual meetings, and cultural gatherings as well as sightseeing trips.

During their trips to England and Wales, Rosalind visited relatives in their homes. Locally, Rosalind and her dog Cym regularly visited several Lincoln parks to pick up litter. She received two awards for these efforts with Cym's name on one plaque. She was a member of local and Nebraska state-wide bird-study organizations and went on numerous bird-watching trips to different areas of Nebraska. Rosalind was a long-time member of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, the local branch of the American Association of University Women, and the St. David's Welsh Society of Nebraska.

Per Rosalind's request, there will be no memorial service. Her body will be cremated, and the ashes deposited in the family grave at Forest, Ontario, Canada. Suggested memorials in lieu of flowers may be given to the M. Rosalind Morris Fund at the University of Nebraska Foundation or The Welsh Heritage Project, Wymore, Nebraska.