



IN MEMORIAM

Ruth Roemer
Professor of Health Services
UC Los Angeles
1916 – 2005

Ruth Roemer, an adjunct professor of public health, died August 1, 2005 in West Los Angeles after a brief illness. She was 89.

As a lawyer and an educator, Roemer had a profound effect on public health policies and was an effective advocate for health issues worldwide. She was instrumental in getting the World Health Organization (WHO) to launch the first international convention on tobacco control.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Roemer lost her father, a plant pathologist, at age nine and was raised by her mother in Milford, where she said she felt like a radical growing up in a conservative town.

She majored in English at Cornell University, but changed her plans to teach after touring Europe with the American Student Union in 1936. "I came back knowing I had to do something relevant to the social conditions of the United States and this terrible threat of fascism in the world," she said.

She enrolled in Cornell Law School where she competed for the position of editor of the Cornell Journal of Opinion with a fellow student, Milton Roemer, whom she married in 1939. At that time, Ruth Roemer was a labor lawyer, representing unions. But when she returned to Cornell to work with a professor there, she worked on a landmark study that transformed laws on the admission of patients to mental hospitals and found her niche in public health.

After joining UCLA's School of Public Health in 1962, she became an activist, taking up such controversial health issues as abortion law reform and the addition of fluoride to public drinking water. In 1993, she helped write a document that helped the WHO launch the first international convention on tobacco control. She also used her legal skills to fight against discrimination of those with HIV/ AIDS.

Roemer was an active faculty member for more than 40 years. When interviewed at 86, she had been teaching every quarter. At the time of her death, she was planning her classes for the fall quarter. Her husband, Milton, also taught at the public health school and was a renowned expert on and advocate for universal health insurance and health maintenance organizations. He worked at UCLA for 38 years, until his death in 2001.

UCLA Today, August 16, 2005

Approved by Jeanne Giovannoni, Vice Chair, UCLA UEPRRC