



IN MEMORIAM

Roslyn B. Alfin- Slater
Professor of Community Health Sciences, Public Health
and Biological Chemistry, Emerita
Los Angeles
1916– 2002

Roslyn B. Alfin- Slater, Ph.D., an authority on nutrition, died August 9, 2002, in Los Angeles following a stroke. Professor Alfin- Slater was known for her common- sense approach to diet and nutrition. She co-founded the newsletter “Nutrition and the MD,” written for doctors and nutritionists, and with Derrick Jelliffe, wrote the Los Angeles Times’ column on “Science, Food, and Health” from 1972 to 1982. In response, often to questions submitted by readers, Professors Alfin- Slater and Jelliffe became the “Dear Abby” of the nutritional world with “state of the art,” “reader- friendly” information on the relationship between diet and health.

Dr. Alfin- Slater was one of the first scientists to examine how diet affected health status. She studied the relationship between cholesterol and essential fatty acid metabolism, evaluated the role of saturated and unsaturated fats and trans- fatty acids, and was among the first to question the effects of dietary intake of cholesterol on cholesterol levels in the blood.

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1916, Dr. Alfin- Slater, known affectionately as Roz by friends and colleagues, graduated from Brooklyn College in 1936 with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry. She obtained her master’s degree in chemistry (1942) and her Ph.D. in biochemistry (1946) from Columbia University. After appointments as a research fellow at the Sloan- Kettering Institute for Cancer Research and in the Department of Biochemistry and Nutrition at the University of Southern California, Dr. Alfin- Slater joined the faculty of UCLA’s School of Public Health in 1959 and helped to found its program in Public Health Nutrition. At UCLA, she served as head of the Division of Environmental and Nutritional Sciences (1969-1977), vice chair of the Graduate Council (1970-71), and president of the Faculty Association (1979-80). For several years, she taught a popular UCLA extension class called Nutrition for Now, which emphasized practical guidelines on vegetarianism, additives in food, fad diets, and other topics.

Dr. Alfin- Slater wrote more than 200 scientific papers, co- edited the four- volume series Human Nutrition, A Comprehensive Treatise and the book, Nutrition for Today. The recipient of numerous awards, including the prestigious Osborne- Mendel Award for “excellence in basic research” in 1970 and the Borden Award for “distinctive research on the nutritional significance of any food or food component” in 1981 - both from the American Institute of Nutrition, Roz was particularly proud of being named the Distinguished Alumnus by Brooklyn College in 1972. She was amused to be named the “Food Man of the Year” by the Southern California Section of Institute of Food Technology in recognition of her “distinguished contribution to the Advancement of the Food Industry through Science and Technology,” but felt gender equity had been served when she was awarded the Woman of Science Award by the Medical Auxiliary of UCLA.

But Dr. Alfin- Slater was probably most proud of her role as teacher — both in the classroom and to the public at large. She was a gifted lecturer and teacher. She laced her lectures with wit and humor, recognizing that ideas are better remembered when they are infused with humor. But her mission was serious: “I don’t think there is any place in science or in the world for untruths or forged data” adding that in her particular field of nutrition “many untruths are being proposed in books by self- styled experts, some of which end up

on the bestseller lists.” In the 1970s, she publicly challenged Linus Pauling on his assertion that massive doses of vitamin C would prevent and cure colds, but she wasn’t above telling snuffling junior faculty to stop at the health food store on the way home “just in case....”

Professor Alfin- Slater formally retired in 1987. But this did not stop her involvement in nutrition and the UCLA community. She served as Dean of Students in the School of Public Health from 1983 to 1987 and as president of the Emeriti Association (1989-90). At the time of her death, she continued to supervise one doctoral student.

Although clearly a role model for women in science, Dr. Alfin- Slater credited both her father, who believed in higher education and careers for women at a time when that was not a popular idea, and her husband, Grant Slater, a research biological chemist at the UCLA School of Public Health, for their contributions to her success. Grant Slater, Ph.D., her husband of 54 years, survives her.

Linda Bourque
Larry Ash
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