



Leslie Reese Bell

December 16, 1954 - November 29, 2023

Leslie Reese Bell, a molecular and developmental biologist, died in Corvallis on November 29th. She was 68 years old and had suffered from dementia.

Leslie was born in Lafayette, Indiana in 1954. Her parents, J Richard Bell and Sally Bell, had met when students at Purdue University. Sally's father, Richard Papenguth, was a swimming coach at Purdue and the Lafayette Swimming Club. He was a source of pride in the family for his contributions to the modern form of the butterfly stroke and for having coached the U.S. women's team at the Olympics in Finland 1952.

Leslie's family moved to Corvallis in 1962, her father having accepted a faculty position in Civil Engineering at Oregon State. A highlight of their arrival in the Pacific Northwest was attending Seattle's World Fair.

After graduating from Corvallis High School in 1972, Leslie obtained a B.A. in Biology from the University of Oregon. While an undergraduate, she was honored to spend a summer working in the laboratory of Ed Lewis at Caltech in Pasadena. A future Nobel laureate, he was famous for his pioneering studies of *Drosophila* development. Leslie pursued graduate work in what was then the Department of Genetics at the University of Washington in Seattle, where she met her future husband, John Yochem. In the course of her degree, she was able to demonstrate at the DNA level an hypothesized form of

recombination intermediate. Although this structure had been previously demonstrated in a prokaryote, an organism such as bacteria lacking a nucleus, she was the first to show its existence in a eukaryote, a nucleated organism such as ourselves. A fellowship led to postdoctoral studies at Princeton University.

Leslie was a coauthor of papers in the top journals of her field. A skilled molecular biologist, she had a knack for the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique. Younger researchers would seek her for advice. A PCR coincidence occurred when she was an assistant professor at the University of Southern California: she cotaught a course with Norman Arnheim who was the final author of the first PCR paper. (One of their graduate-student teaching assistants for the class was Bryan "Dexter" Holland.)

Leslie liked art and made sketches and watercolors when she was young. She had a green thumb for house plants and flower gardens. She enjoyed plays, dance, and the opera.

She was preceded in death by her mother. She is survived by her father; her husband; a sister, Cecily Brown of Scio; and nephews and nieces.

Tribute Wall



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