

Ursula Franklin

1926 - 2016

It is difficult to encapsulate Ursula Martius Franklin's life in just 400 words. A renowned feminist, human rights activist, author, educator, and pioneering scientist, Franklin's multi-faceted achievements made her one of Canada's most accomplished professors.

Ursula was born in Munich, in 1926, to a Jewish mother and a Lutheran father. While she was pursuing her studies in chemistry and physics at Berlin University, she was expelled by the Nazis and sent to a forced labour camp for 18 months (whereas her parents were sent to a concentration camp). Fortunately, all three survived, and Ursula resumed her studies, earning her Bachelor's degree in 1946 and her Ph.D. in experimental physics in 1948. She once stated in an interview that she chose to study science because its subjects couldn't be state censored. In 1949, she immigrated to Canada to pursue the Lady Davis postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto. There, she married engineer Fred Franklin, a German immigrant. Together, they had a son and a daughter, and joined the Society of Friends (Quakers) in 1964.

She began her distinguished career in 1952 as a research fellow for the Ontario Research Foundation. She was promoted to senior research scientist and occupied this post until 1967. In the early 60s, she studied the levels of strontium-90 radiation in children's teeth, which played a pivotal role in the cessation of atmospheric weapons testing in 135 countries. In 1967, she became a researcher and associate professor at the University of Toronto's Department of Metallurgy and Materials Science. There, she became a pioneer in the field of archaeometry by discovering how to date bronze, copper, ceramic, and glass artifacts. In 1984, she became the first female to be given the designation of University Professor, the



University's highest title. From 1987 to 1989, she served as director of the University's Museum

Studies Program. Following her retirement, she and a handful of coworkers sued the University of Toronto for the gender wage gap. In 2002, 60 retired faculty women received compensation as a result. In 1989, she delivered the Massey Lectures, where she spoke about the social impact of technology. Throughout her career, she unequivocally advocated for peace and justice in all dimensions of life.

Franklin's honours and awards are too numerous to list here. Most notably, a Toronto high school and street were named after her, and she held 40 honorary doctorates. She was also named Companion of the Order of Canada in 1992, was appointed to the Order of Ontario in 1990, and was awarded the Pearson Peace Medal in January 2002. Latterly, she was inducted into the Canadian Science and Engineering Hall of Fame in 2012. She died in July 2016 at the age of 94.