

Robin Redfern Bellinder, of Ithaca, a professor of horticulture at Cornell University for 31 years and an international expert in weed control in vegetable crops, died unexpectedly on Nov. 13, 2015. She was 70 years old.

Robin died of a pulmonary embolism after a brief hospitalization and stay in a physical rehabilitation clinic for an unrelated spinal injury.

Robin was born in Astoria, Ore., on Aug. 7, 1945, the first child of Capt. Richard “Dick” Dunning Redfern and Dorothy A. Warren. The family was on the West Coast for her father’s deployment with the U.S. Coastal Artillery during World War II. They returned to Michigan after the war and settled in the northern village of Bellaire, where she and her younger brother Tod spent much of their youth. The family moved to Traverse City, Mich., and then Lansing, where she graduated from Lansing Eastern High School in 1963.

Robin took a serpentine path to her Cornell professorship. She began studying at the University of Michigan in 1963. When she expressed interest in a degree in the sciences, her advisor told her that, based on her math and science test scores, she should instead get a degree in English. She left school shortly after to explore the world, hitchhiking through much of the U.S. and Europe and ending up in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1966. She returned to her studies in 1968 but took another break in 1969 to travel for a year overland from Sweden to India, Singapore and back. She had her daughter, Jessica, in 1971, and as a single parent resumed her studies and earned a degree in English from Uppsala University in 1972. She returned to the U.S. in 1974 and, after several years working in the hospitality industry in northern Michigan, she returned to college and completed her bachelor’s degree in science at Michigan State University in 1979. She went on to get her master’s and, in 1984, doctoral degrees from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va. In the same year, before her graduation ceremony, she began working as an assistant professor of horticulture at Cornell.

Robin balanced her obligations as a graduate student and professor with her role as a single parent in an era and professional arena where this was uncommon. Although money was tight when she was a student, she maintained an unwavering commitment to nurturing her daughter. During the relocation from East Lansing to Blacksburg in December 1979, she loaded a Michigan Christmas tree on top of everything in the U-Haul to make sure the family would have a real Christmas celebration when they arrived.

At Cornell, Robin’s research program focused on weed management for vegetable crops. One of few women in her field at that time, she became a national and international leader. She published research results widely in peer reviewed publications, as well as publications that advised growers about her work’s practical applications. She served as president of the Northeastern Weed Science Society and, in 2005, was named the recipient of Cornell’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences award for outstanding accomplishments in applied research. She will be remembered as a weed scientist who ardently and tirelessly supported New York vegetable growers.

Robin had a deep concern for people, whether farmers in South Asia, for whom she championed the introduction of more efficient weed control practices, or hungry families in New York’s southern tier. She initiated Cornell’s efforts to provide fresh fruits and vegetables from the Homer C. Thompson Research Farm to the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. She realized that

rather than composting the farm's edible produce, they could feed hungry area families. Since 2004, as a result of her initiative, Cornell has donated more than 1 million pounds of produce from the Thompson farm.

Robin will be remembered as an intense, thoughtful, loyal, generous, creative and loving person who tenaciously advocated for the things she believed were important. She will be greatly missed.

She is survived by her daughter, Jessica Bellinder, son-in-law, Brian Arthur, and granddaughter, Fiona Claire Bellinder, of New York; her brother, Tod Willis-Redfern, of Eaton Rapids, Mich. her half-sister, Susan Fujii, of Mountain View, Calif. and her nieces, Alexis Willis-Redfern and Keilani and Malia Fujii. A memorial in her honor will be held at Herson Wagner Funeral at 110 Geneva St. in Ithaca at 3 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 21. Visiting hours with the family will begin at 2 p.m., and afterward the family will host an open house at Robin's home. She will be buried next summer at a family plot in Lakeview Cemetery in Bellaire, Mich. A memorial for family and friends will be held in Bellaire at that time. As an alternative to flowers, the family suggests that donations be made in Robin's honor to the Food Bank of the Southern Tier at 388 Upper Oakwood Ave., Elmira, NY 14903 (fbst@feedingamerica.org).