

A PERSONAL RETROSPECTIVE  
ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF  
EVELYN M. NELSON  
1943 – 1987

Evelyn Merle Nelson, noted for her work in universal algebra, was born Evelyn Roden, of Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, in 1943 in Canada's steel-mill city of Hamilton, Ontario. She died on August 1, 1987 from complications following successful surgery for the cancer that she had managed for many years to keep hidden from friends and colleagues alike.

Evelyn attended Westdale High School in Hamilton and upon graduation at the age of thirteen entered the prestigious Mathematics–Physics–Chemistry Programme at the University of Toronto. In 1963 she transferred to the Honours Mathematics program at McMaster University in Hamilton, and soon married classmate Mort Nelson. She earned her B.Sc. in 1965, and was permitted while still an undergraduate to take graduate-level courses. Her graduate studies were completed in the mathematics department at McMaster. She earned her M.Sc. in 1966, writing a thesis under the supervision of algebraist Günter Bruns. The thesis, written in eight months, was published in 1967 in the *Canadian Journal of Mathematics* as “Finiteness of Semigroup Operators in Universal Algebra”. Evelyn's first daughter was born shortly thereafter. Just a few months before Evelyn earned her Ph.D. in early 1970, her second daughter was born.

The mathematics department at McMaster had no immediate vacancies on its faculty, so Evelyn spent the next three years at McMaster teaching and carrying out research as a postdoctoral fellow and research associate. She was finally appointed Associate Professor in 1978 and promoted to full Professor in 1983. She was the chairperson of the department's Computer Science Unit from 1982 to 1984 and was then offered its chairmanship when it finally became an independent department, but she declined the offer, already suffering from poor health. She also served on the editorial board of the journal *Algebra Universalis*, which included a stint as the journal's editor, and she was an active participant in the Faculty Algebra Seminar that met once a week in the evenings. I also recall hearing many mildly complaining reports that more than once Evelyn brought her two