

# Nell I. Mondy

*October 27, 1921 — August 25, 2005*

Nell I. Mondy, 83, Professor Emerita of Nutritional Sciences at Cornell University, died August 25, 2005 at Cayuga Medical Center, Ithaca. Mondy was on the Cornell faculty for more than 50 years. Her expertise in biochemistry led to a fruitful teaching and research career and took her to some four-dozen countries where she presented papers, worked as a consultant or conducted research. She was considered an international expert on the potato.

Mondy grew up in the small town of Pocahontas, Arkansas as the only child of a young widow. Getting her first degree at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, in 1943 during World War II, Mondy went on to receive her M.A. degree from the University of Texas at Austin (1945) and Ph.D. degree (1953) from Cornell. For many years, she was the only woman in chemistry wherever she went.

Her early research dealt with the vitamin B6, folic acid, vitamin B12 and enzymes in choline metabolism, but the majority of her time was spent studying various aspects of the potato, which she considered to be a “food for the world.” Mondy studied several biochemical aspects of the potato. Two of the more unique subjects were the nutrition and flavor of potatoes as these are affected by variety, production practices, marketing, and preparation for consumption. Flavor of potatoes is particularly difficult to define and she was unique in her attempt to attribute flavor to biochemical composition. The breadth of her interest in the crop led her to an active participation in the scientific association in North America that focuses on potato research and extension. She was elected a life member in this organization, The Potato Association of America, the organization’s highest honor.

Dr. Mondy was honored for her work by many organizations and in many ways. Her numerous awards include the first E.F. Steir Award from the Institute of Food Technologists, the outstanding alumni award from Cornell’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Centennial Achievement Award from Ouachita Baptist University. Mondy’s professional memberships, accomplishments and honors also include being an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Institute of Food Technologists, the Institute of Chemists and an honorary life member of Graduate Women in Science. She served as a consultant to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and food companies and agencies in the United States and abroad, including the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria.

In 2001, Mondy published her autobiography, *You Never Fail Until You Stop Trying: The Story of a Pioneer Woman Chemist* (Dorrance Publishing). In addition to chronicling her challenges as a woman in science, the book recounts

her efforts to improve food and nutrition worldwide, from India and Nigeria to Peru and Poland. She describes food processing behind the Iron Curtain in Warsaw in 1966; her work at the R.T. French Co. developing new products and improving the flavor of Sloppy Joes and Hamburger Helper; and visiting lepers and malnourished children and living through a military coup in Nigeria.

The author or co-author of more than 100 scientific publications, including the textbook *Experimental Food Chemistry*, Mondy is in the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, and is listed in more than two dozen reference books, such as *Who's Who in America*, *Foremost Women in the Twentieth Century*, and the *2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century*. She is the namesake of the Nell I. Mondy Laboratory of Human Performance in Martha Van Rensselaer Hall at Cornell and of the Nell I. Mondy Organic Chemistry Laboratory at Ouachita Baptist University, which also sponsors a lecture series in her name.

She maintained a deep and abiding respect for her mentors at Cornell, often recounting the lessons she learned at the side of distinguished Cornell faculty such as the late National Academy of Sciences member, Dr. Leonard Maynard. She shared these values with her many students. To them, she was caring and generous with her time. She emphasized the wider value of research and hard work in life. She was a kind-hearted woman, who kept in touch with her students and their families long after they graduated. Nell made her students feel that they were her family.

*Subhash Chandra, Lorraine Johnson, Susan Lang, Robert Plaisted, J. Thomas Brenna*