

Kenneth Thomas Leffek

A brilliant and inquiring mind and generous spirit has been stilled. Ken Leffek died early on April 30, 2024, after an unanticipated, brief but difficult illness, at home under the close care of his family, with the excellent support of the palliative response team of Island Health Community Home Care.

Ken was born in Nottingham England and learned perseverance at a young age as his recently widowed mother went out to work and nurtured her two young sons. He was evacuated, on his own at first, early in WWII, to northern England, but soon joined his elder brother John, and after a considerable period, reunited south to his mother. He applied himself with diligence to his studies and won scholarships, eventually earning his BSc in 1956, and going on to receive his Doctor of Philosophy in physical chemistry from University College London shortly before his 25th birthday in 1959.

Ken met the love of his life Janet Wallace at a college dance in 1957: they married in 1958 and emigrated to her home country Canada in 1959 where Ken took-up a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Research Council in Ottawa. Their daughter Katharine was born in Ottawa in 1961. Once having completed the fellowship Ken won appointment to the faculty of Dalhousie University, and the family moved to Halifax.

Their son Geoffrey was born in 1965 in Halifax and the family of four established themselves among a wide network of good friends and colleagues in academe and music education as well as contributing to the political life of the community in part by close involvement with the Nova Scotia NDP. Lively conversations and joyful gatherings were frequent in their home.

At Dalhousie, Ken taught in the chemistry department; conducted his own research, and mentored many graduate

students (notably from Eastern Europe, as well as North America) in theirs, for the next thirty-three years. For eighteen of those years, he was elected as Dean of Graduate Studies, re-vitalizing the research endeavours of the Graduate School, and stabilizing its budget.

The family travelled throughout the UK and Europe when Ken was on periodic sabbaticals. Among his achievements were: listing as a noteworthy chemist, educator by Marquis Who's Who; Fellow Chemical Institute Canada; Fellow Royal Society of Arts London, Chair Atlantic Canada chapter (1987-1991); Member Royal Society of Chemistry, Chemical Institute Canada (National Director technical and science affairs 1980-1983, National Vice President 1985-1986, President 1986-1987).

In retirement Ken and Janet moved to Victoria, BC, in 1995 and quickly established a close network of friends and re-connected with extended family. They travelled widely visiting their son Geoff (Clare) and their four children in England, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the UAE, and Scotland. They also returned to the Maritimes about once a year to visit their daughter Katharine (David) and their nine children in New Brunswick, and to visit dear friends in Nova Scotia. A highlight of their travels was the 50th wedding anniversary round-the-world tour that Ken organized that took them to the USA, Australia, Singapore, Arabia, Europe and the UK, before crossing Canada yet again with stops in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and in Alberta to visit Janet's brother Kent (Lois) Wallace, and other extended family and friends. There followed holiday trips to Russia, Eastern Europe, China, and Western Europe and the UK to visit Ken's brother John (Kath). Some of these travels were eased by Ken's learning of conversational German in his retirement (and establishing a regular German conversation group to exchange views on news or literature in German).

In addition to generous contributions to performing arts

foundations, Janet and Ken established scholarships through the Nova Scotia Registered Music Teachers' Association. Over the forty years of that career in academe Ken published many research papers in the field of physical-organic chemistry, and in retirement published an historical memoir and biography of his mentor, "Sir Christopher Ingold: A Major Prophet of Organic Chemistry".

Janet died in January 2023 bringing a quiet end to a solid 64+ years of marriage. Ken is survived by his elder brother John (Kath) Leffek, of Holland-on-Sea, England; his daughter Katharine (David) Duchesne of Victoria; and his son Geoffrey (Clare) Leffek of Edinburgh. He is also survived by thirteen grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, all of whom are determined to carry forward his legacy of intellectual curiosity and generosity of spirit.

Honouring his wishes there will be no service. Ken's ashes will be privately buried in the UK such that his nitrogen may be returned to the soil and nourish a tree to be planted there.

*"In three words, I can sum up everything I've learned about
life. It goes on."*

Robert Frost

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

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