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## Headline News

### Prof publishes long-awaited biography of astrophysicist mother

It has taken many years of toiling, but York Professor Emeritus Paul Herzberg has now completed a biography of his mother Luise Herzberg, the wife of Nobel Prize-winning physicist Gerhard Herzberg (Hon DSc. '69) and an astrophysicist in her own right. *Luise Herzberg, Astrophysicist: A Memoir* is more than just a tribute to his mother, it is a chance for Luise to step out of the shadow of her world-famous husband and have her own accomplishments recognized.

Paul's mother was born Luise Hedwig Oettinger in 1906 and educated in Germany where she received her PhD in physics in 1933. Her husband lost his academic post because Luise was a Jew. In 1935, they arrived as refugees in Canada. (See *YFile*, [Nov. 15, 2007](#).)

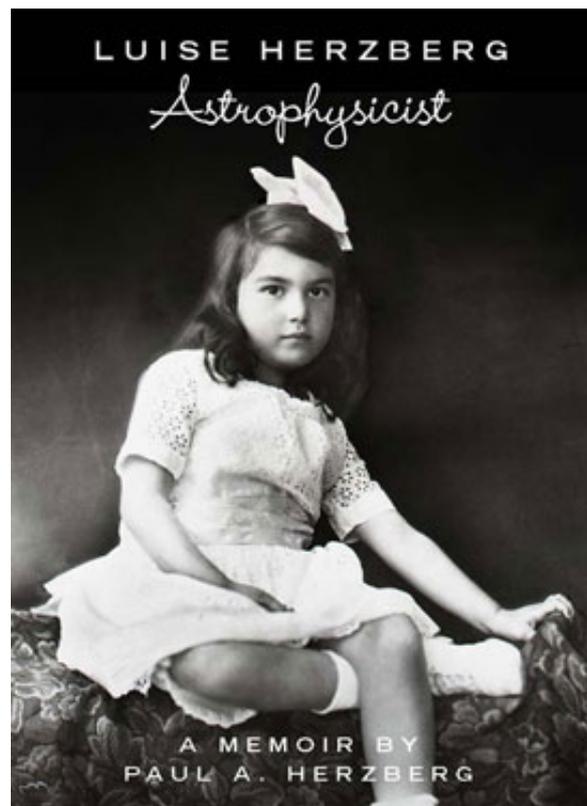
In *Luise Herzberg, Astrophysicist* (York University Bookstore, 2010), Paul describes how Luise met the challenge of combining family and career. When she returned to research in physics and astronomy after the war, she faced nepotism rules and worked largely unnoticed. In the last decade of her life, however, she gained considerable recognition as an astrophysicist. Some of her work is still referred to today, although some is mistakenly attributed to her husband.

On Luise's death, a friend wrote: "She remained totally female, despite high intelligence, active work in science and constant contact in the learned circles of the world. It was not her nature to want to shine, but nevertheless she was completely aware of everything that was happening."

Luise died in 1971, just months before Gerhard won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, a success which he could not have achieved without her devotion and support.

Constructing the details of Luise's extraordinary life was not an easy task. Paul, who was a professor in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health, completed a two-year stint learning German just so he could read the cache of family letters, which would provide further insight into his mother's life, and interviewed his elderly father several times before his death at the age of 94.

Paul started down the same path as his parents, but after earning a master's degree in physics switched fields to specialize in quantitative psychology. He taught at York from 1966 to 2002 where he developed a unique introductory statistics course featuring learning-to-mastery, self-pacing and tutoring by undergraduate student peers.



In 1996, he received the University-Wide Teaching Award. It had always been in the back of his mind, however, to write about his mother. A biography of his father by Boris Stoicheff, *Gerhard Herzberg: An Illustrious Life in Science*, was published in 2002.

Paul's book may be purchased online or directly at the [York University Bookstore](#). For more information, contact Paul Herzberg at [herzberg@yorku.ca](mailto:herzberg@yorku.ca).

