

# GERTRUDE B. ELION

## Pioneered the way researchers develop drugs



**“In my day I was told women didn’t go into chemistry. I saw no reason why we couldn’t.”**

**Elion persisted despite facing setbacks:**

With a scholarship, Elion graduated with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry, but did not have the money to go to graduate school. Many labs refused to hire her because she was a woman.

Despite this, she persisted and took jobs as a secretary, a chemistry teacher, and an unpaid worker in a lab. By saving up money, she was able to attend NYU for her Master’s in chemistry. Because of her hard work, she finally gained a position in a pharmaceutical firm developing drugs.

**Elion valued saving lives above all:**

Throughout her career, she invented drugs for leukemia, immunosuppressants (used for patients with organ transplants), allopurinol, and a multitude of antiviral drugs. Most importantly, she invented a new way of scientific drug development which was more efficient than the old trial and error method. Because of her achievements, she was awarded a Nobel Prize in Medicine and many honorary doctorates. However, she says her biggest achievement was helping others.

**“The satisfaction of [getting people well] is much greater than any prize you can get.”**

