

THOSE WE'VE LOST

## *Annie Feron, Teacher and Host Mother to Foreign Students, Dies at 83*

She left her home in Belgium and spent time in London as a young woman, then went on to foster a chain of foreign exchange student relationships that spanned generations. She died of Covid-19.



Annie Feron in 2016. She was a dedicated “mom” to foreign exchange students in her home. Her principal commandment: “Host other people.” Credit...via Feron family  
**By Alex Traub**

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*This obituary is part of a series about people who have died in the coronavirus pandemic. Read about others [here](#).*

Eating at Annie Feron's? No invitation necessary. All you had to do was show up.

Ms. Feron's four children, their friends, young people she unofficially adopted, her husband, a rotating cast of long-term guests: On any given night, any or all of them might appear at her dinner table in Liège, Belgium. Ten diners was average.

The dishes Ms. Feron prepared were as traditionally Belgian as could be: leek soup, endive gratin and apple sauce, which was made from apples grown on trees in Ms. Feron's garden. But the diners could be from all over the world. The guests staying in her home came from Vietnam, Russia and Peru, among other places.

Ms. Feron died on Oct. 27 at a hospital in Liège. She was 83. Her daughter, Cathy Feron, said the cause was Covid-19.

Just before her death, Ms. Feron left her children several commandments, meant to serve as reminders of the family's values, Ms. Feron said. A principal tenet: "Host other people."

Nothing exemplified Ms. Feron's commitment to hosting like her support of foreign-exchange students.

As a young woman, Ms. Feron had been a foreign exchange student in London, where she struggled with homesickness but also learned the potential power of living abroad. It helped her become fluent in English.

As an adult, she hosted roughly a dozen long-term foreign visitors, several of them exchange students. One student was Nicole Allen, who at 16 moved from Washington, Pa., to Liège in 1991 through a foreign exchange program organized by Rotary International. Ms. Feron was her host mother.

Her jolly dinner parties, her firm but gentle critiques of Nicole's French, and her comradeship during the challenging early months of Nicole's time in Belgium — before she made friends her own age — had made an enduring impact.

Ms. Allen chose to attend college at McGill University in Montreal and continue living in the city afterward, sharpening her French. She married a French-speaking man. She became "a lifelong lover of French culture, thanks in part to Annie," she said.

Annie Eugénie Uselding was born on Aug. 27, 1937, in the Belgian village of Nobressart. She grew up in a nearby village, Heinstert, where her father, Joseph Uselding, was the mayor. He also ran a small farm, where Annie's mother, Marie Uselding Feller, helped out.

Annie received a certification to teach Germanic languages in the early 1960s from l'Institut de L'Enfant Jésus à Nivelles, near Brussels. She met Joseph Feron, a friend of her brother's from military service, and they married in 1966.

The couple moved to Liège for better work opportunities. Mr. Feron sold insulation and building supplies. In 1967, Ms. Feron became a teacher of German and Flemish at Saint-Lambert Collège, in a town near Liège. She stayed until the early 2000s.

Ms. Feron's husband died in 2013. In addition to her daughter, she is survived by a brother, Luc Uselding; three sons, Jean-Christophe, Bernard and Pierre Feron; and 10 grandchildren.

After Ms. Allen returned home from Belgium, she and Ms. Feron kept in touch through letters for 30 years. The valence of hosting shifted. Mr. and Ms. Feron visited New York and stayed with Ms. Allen. Ms. Feron pushed the tradition into another generation, asking Ms. Allen to host her 16-year-old granddaughter, Camille Feron.

Like her antecedents, Camille was shaped by the experience, said Cathy Feron, her aunt: "It helped her open up out of her shell."

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