

ELI ROBINSKY (1925–2018)

Based in part on an obituary published in the *Globe and Mail*, August 14, 2018,
and edited by his geotechnical engineering colleagues



1975



2013

Dr. Eli Ivan Robinsky, Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto and Consulting Geotechnical Engineer, passed away on August 2, 2018. He was born in 1925 in Damascus, Syria, of Russian parents who were World War I refugees. He attended the American Community School and American University of Beirut, Lebanon, graduating with a BA and a BSc in Civil Engineering. After working on oil pipeline projects in the Middle East, he studied at Harvard University under Dr. Arthur Casagrande, obtaining his MSc in 1951. He subsequently worked for two years as a Geotechnical Engineer for the construction of air bases in Morocco, before immigrating to Canada.

Eli's desire to become a teacher was fulfilled after completing a doctorate in Civil Engineering at the University of Toronto in 1963, when he was invited to join that department. He remained at the UofT until his retirement in 1992. During his 29-year tenure, he enjoyed lecturing and discussing his many consulting projects with his students. He was honoured twice by his civil engineering students as "Professor of the Year".

In 1972, Eli established the consulting engineering firm, E.I. Robinsky Associates Ltd., specializing in geotechnical engineering. He operated primarily as sole practitioner, completing over 600 projects in Canada and abroad. These projects included feasibility studies for expanding several Inuit towns in permafrost terrain in the Arctic, including the provision of water supply, docking facilities, and air strips; a feasibility study for a lead/zinc mine in permafrost terrain on Baffin Island; developing a novel environmental protection scheme for preventing oil spills from tank farms; and developing special equipment and organizing local field crews to test foundation soils for high tension transmission towers in East Pakistan.

Eli published articles on pile foundations, lightweight insulating materials and tailings disposal, including a textbook dealing with the disposal of thickened tailings. He also held patents on sixteen inventions. In 1975, with Keith E. Bespflug, he received the Arthur M. Wellington prize from the American Society of Civil Engineers for publishing their widely quoted paper titled "Design of Insulated Foundations" (*ASCE Journal of the Soil Mechanics and Foundation Division*, 1973).

In the Canadian geotechnical community, Eli Robinsky is perhaps best known for his involvement with design and construction of the foundations for Toronto's CN Tower in the early 1970s. As documented by Michael Bozozuk on the CGS website¹, to provide the required geotechnical data for designing the foundation, four 762 mm diameter inspection holes were drilled to a depth of 37 m. After they were scrubbed clean and dewatered, Eli was lowered down each hole in a cable-cage, outfitted with a waterproof suit and an oxygen tank to closely examine and photograph the rock strata and install instrumentation to permit future studies of the response of the tower to wind action.

Eli Robinsky was a member of the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario, Consulting Engineers of Ontario, Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, and the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Eli is survived by his wife Marisha, daughters Lisa and Susie and a large extended family. He will be missed by his many friends and colleagues in Canada and abroad.

¹ <http://www.cgs.ca/pdf/heritage/History%20of%20Geotechnique%20-%20Bozozuk%20Article.pdf>, page 38
(accessed August 2018)