

University of California: In Memoriam, 2000

Gerhard K. Kalisch, Mathematics: Irvine

1914-2000

Professor Emeritus

After a long illness, a dear friend and colleague, Gerhard Karl Kalisch, died on August 29, 2000 in Irvine. He was born on December 21, 1914 in Breslau, which, at different periods of recent history, belonged to both Germany and, as Wroclaw to Poland. The multilingual character of the city left its mark on him: he was an avid student of languages, which he acquired with striking ease.

His Muttersprache was German: at the Gymnasium he studied Latin and Greek. At age nineteen, he left his birthplace for France. There he acquired so profound a command of the country's language that subsequently he could not readily decide which among German, English, and French was "his" language. He was less formidably but to some degree comfortable in Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, Mandarin, Yiddish, and Sanskrit languages that he collected during the intellectual and geographic wanderings of his later years.

With a socio-political prescience that characterized most of his thinking, soon after the rise of Hitler, Gerhard fled the Nazis. He failed to persuade his mother and his only sibling, a younger sister, to follow his counsel and leave Germany. They were ultimately consumed in the Holocaust. His father, living apart from the family, died when his quarters in Berlin were destroyed in a bombing raid.

As a refugee in France, Gerhard bartered lessons in German for lessons in French and "within a month" acquired a working knowledge of his next language. Four years later, having labored on various French farms, he gained entry to the United States.

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His English was competent before he disembarked in America. In two years he earned both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree at the University of Iowa. He then enrolled in the graduate program at the University of Chicago, and again, within two years, he was awarded a doctorate in mathematics.

He set out on a long journey through the academic world where he left indelible marks of distinction. Among his way-stations were the University of Kansas, Cornell University, the Institute for Advanced Study (two visits), the University of Minnesota, and finally, the University of California. Irvine, from which he retired in the late eighties.

His 22 scholarly publications were wide-ranging, internationally published, and significant in the fields that interested him. They appeared over the 45-year period 1946-1990. He began in algebra, went on to topological algebra and functional analysis, then to game theory. Finally, he spent his last period of research in the depths of what many term hard analysis. His accomplishments were recognized and admired not only in the United States but also around the world in many lands where, on several occasions, he was an invited speaker. Several mathematicians, the undersigned among them, had the honor and pleasure of co-authoring some of the papers bearing his name.

His doctoral students were:

J. B. Roberts, University of Minnesota, 1953

G. K. Preston, University of Minnesota, 1956

H. Radjavi, University of Minnesota, 1964
S. Kantorowitz, University of Minnesota, 1965
B. N. Harvey, University of California, Irvine, 1969
G. Itzkowitz, University of California, Irvine, 1972
H. Seid, University of California, Irvine, 1972
R. Waterman, University of California, Irvine, 1972
M. Stickney, University of California, Irvine, 1974
F. Smith, University of California, Irvine, 1979
R. Murufas, University of California, Irvine, 1981

Some anecdotal data bearing on his linguistic skill are the following:

- In France during a sabbatical leave from the University of Minnesota, he aroused the suspicion of the concierge in the build

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ing where he lived. Gerhard's spoken French was so idiomatic, unaccented, and fluent, she reported him to the local police. She believed only sinister forces lay behind someone identifying himself as a visiting citizen of the United States and yet speaking her beloved French like a native.

- His familiarity with the vocabulary and high style of written and spoken English was so profound that many of his American friends and colleagues learned from him the Fowlerian refinements of their mother tongue.
- To facilitate written communication between his wife, Lenore, and her uncle, Gerhard wrote her letters in Hebrew script, with which Lenore was not familiar, as she dictated them in Yiddish.
- While traveling in Italy during the seventies, he invoked his knowledge of Latin and French. Later, he proudly announced that while in Italy he “spoke only Italian.”

Without diminishing his scientific accomplishments or his remarkable record as a polymath in linguistics, physics, chemistry, biology, and astronomy, one must stress his grace and sweetness toward those in his ambit--family, friends, students, colleagues, casual acquaintances, sales clerks, and staff. He was loyal to a fault, gentle and instructive as a father to his children, John Martin and Margaret June (Peggy), gifted in conversation, blessed with a lusty and yet subtle sense of humor, and exceptionally kind in dealing with those whose lives he touched.

Recognizing the good fortune that was his early escape from disaster, he devoted enormous effort toward securing the release of members of his family from the clutches of the Nazi horror.

Frustrated in these endeavors by the inertia and indifference of public and private channels, he suffered greatly and irremediably from the trauma. He was so profoundly affected, his friends and his family felt it necessary to screen him from the more realistic contents of various media presentations, books, magazine articles, television programs--in his words, accounts that “might be upsetting.” Any situation likely to trigger unfortunate memories was carefully excluded from his consciousness.

On the proactive side, he became a significant supporter of the postwar efforts to assist the survivors of the Holocaust in re-establishing their lives in the United States, Israel, and other safe harbors where fate carried them.

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The loss that his death brought to his family is incalculable. As his close friend and admiring colleague for more than 52 years, I miss him more than words can tell.

Bernard R. Gelbaum

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