



In Memoriam

Josef Purkart

**Professor of Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages
UC Riverside
1940 – 2016**

Josef Purkart, emeritus Associate Professor of German and Medieval Latin at UC Riverside, died after an illness on March 5, 2016, at the age of 76. He served the campus for 18 years, from 1970 to 1993, during which time the campus more than tripled in size and the German Department, along with the other world literature programs, merged as the Department of Literatures and Languages, now the Department of Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages, making him a founding member.

Professor Purkart was born in Wels, Austria, in 1940. He studied at Freiburg University in Germany, then emigrated to the U.S. in 1965, having perfected his English in part through his encounters with American students to whom he taught German. He received his Ph.D. in German from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1971, a year after his appointment as an assistant professor at UC Riverside. His dissertation was on the role and song of the messenger in Middle High German love letters, and he continued to pursue his interest in the topic of love in that period in his later work, his signature contributions centering on the *Rota Veneris* of the 13th century Italian professor of rhetoric Boncompagno da Signa, on whom Professor Purkart was regarded as the world's leading expert. His *Rota Veneris*, a facsimile reproduction of the Strassburg Incunabulum of Boncampagno's text, appeared in 1975, with an introduction, translation, and notes, and is still the only published translation and commentary on the text. He later published essays on how sexual metaphors arising from the Christian rhetoric of love in the *Rota Veneris* make for biblical parody and on the use in it of scriptural and exegetical imagery for the comic defense of carnal love. In 1988, he decided to retire early and pursue his other passion, opening a second-hand and antiquarian bookstore in downtown Riverside, Josef's Books.

Professor Purkart was a dedicated instructor of German at all levels, and one of his fellow Germanists at UC Riverside, Georg Gugelberger, sent his own daughter to learn the language from him. The two colleagues met often to assist each other with home repairs and improvements and for conversation in their native language. Professor

Purkart was known on campus both for his direct manner and his sense of humor, which no doubt drew him to Boncompagno, who is famous in literary history for his love of unusual practical jokes. For instance, when asked about the challenges of teaching second-language learners, Professor Purkart responded dryly that an undergraduate once translated “The student wanted the professor to offer advice” as “The student wanted the rat to bite the professor.”

He is survived by his ex-wife Susan, who taught at Riverside Community College for many years, and his five children, to whom he was deeply devoted: Deborah Carpenter of San Diego, Josef Eduard (“Peppi”) Purkart of Riverside, Karina Purkart of Santa Cruz, and Renata Purkart and Johannes Purkart of Los Angeles.

This memorial was prepared by Carole-Anne Tyler, Associate Professor of English, with information from UCR colleagues in Comparative Literature and other departments and *The Press-Enterprise*.