



## Cecil Clyde Rousseau Jr.

January 13, 1938 - April 10, 2020

Cecil Clyde Rousseau, Jr. was born January 13, 1938 in Philadelphia, PA and died in Memphis, TN on April 10, 2020 at the age of 82, after a 12-year battle with Parkinson's Disease. The only child of Cecil Sr. and Christine Rousseau, he spent his formative years in Port Arthur, TX.

Cecil met his wife Jane while they were both in graduate school at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and they married in 1965. He received his Ph.D. in Physics in 1968 from Texas A&M University. Although he was trained as a physicist, he went on to a decades-long career as a mathematician who specialized in graph theory and combinatorics. He was on the faculty at The University of Memphis for thirty-seven years and frequently collaborated with world-renowned mathematician Paul Erdős. He was involved with the U.S. Mathematical Olympiad Team from its start in 1974, serving in a variety of roles. As one of the leaders, he traveled to International Mathematical Olympiad competitions around the world, including Warsaw in 1986, when the team tied the Soviet Union for first place. As a result of his passion for mathematics competitions, he was awarded the Paul Erdős Award from the World Federation of National Mathematics Competitions in 2012. Even after his retirement in 2008, Cecil continued to share his passion for math by tutoring and mentoring students. To his students and colleagues, he was known as C<sup>2</sup>R.

Math was a great love and the search for an “elegant solution” was always on his mind, but he loved music with a similar passion. Classical, jazz, blues, and the occasional country album would fill the house. He was not only an avid listener, he also loved to sing. He was known as a quiet man, until his deep bass voice would resonate from the choir or the occasional solo, when he could be coaxed into one.

Cecil was a lifelong Christian, singing in church choirs and reflecting thoughtfully on the messages of his faith. His profound faith in God animated his scientific curiosity. Science and faith were never in competition in his mind. His faith also informed his commitment to social justice in the world.

He was preceded in death by his parents Cecil Rousseau, Sr. and Christine Rousseau Pearce. He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Jane, of Memphis; two daughters: Celia (Anthony Anderson), of Memphis, TN and Dana (Brad Neuhauser), of Minneapolis, MN; five grandchildren: Elizabeth, Joshua, and Sarah Neuhauser, and Keiji and Kanaan Anderson; and three bonus grandchildren: Jenesis Anderson, Jade (Sirgregory Thornton), and Noah Anderson.

A memorial service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research ([michaeljfox.org](http://michaeljfox.org)) or the University of Memphis Foundation (Dept. 238; The UofM Foundation; PO Box 1000; Memphis, TN; 38148-0001 or online). Donations to the UofM in his memory will be used to support scholarships for students in the Department of Mathematical Sciences.

# Comments

---



“ I didn't know Dr. Rousseau, but I know his daughters. We can't always count on children reflecting the parents, but in his case, it's not hard to see how wonderful he must've been because both Celia and Dana are as good as they come. My sincere condolences to Mrs. Rousseau, Celia, Dana, the sons in law, and all the grand children. -Adrienne Dixson

**Adrienne Dixson** - April 16, 2020 at 08:05 PM

---



“ I was a PhD student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville when Jamie received her job offer to work for FedEx in Memphis. I did not want to live hundreds of miles apart so I began looking at PhD programs in the area. Memphis’ math department did not rank well at the time, but my favorite UT prof, Carl Wagner, said “They must be doing something right; Erdos used to hang out there all the time” (Erdos was a famous mathematician that did not have a home and would go stay with other mathematicians and write papers... a wonderful character, very prolific, and a brilliant mind.)

It turned out that Memphis was a hidden gem of a program - world class department tucked away in the land of the Delta Blues (as my teacher James T. Campbell would tell the undergrads that weren’t aware: “the department’s reputation is exponentially proportional to how far you are away from Memphis... the further you go, the greater it is). One of the mathematicians at the department whose work attracted Paul Erdos was Cecil Clyde Rousseau (5th most papers with Erdos).

Dr Rousseau passed on Friday from complications due to the coronavirus.

I don’t know if I have enough space to write all my tributes to the man. If his office door was open, that meant he wanted to talk math with anyone... any math, but especially number theory (maybe his severe enthusiasm wove through of all mathematics but I only caught the number theory goodies). He was like a kid in a candy store when it came to the subject. He never judged, but welcomed any interest (though he many times told me... after I asked him the same question four or five times: “Jeff, you need to go and pray and mediate on this”).

I had a graduate Complex Analysis class my first semester at Memphis and it did not prepare me for Rousseau’s undergrad Complex Analysis class I took the following spring. No knock on the fall class; it’s just that Rousseau’s classes were so deep (as another prof said of Rousseau’s classes: “If you get an A in a Rousseau class, the University should award you a plaque”). On our midterm in this undergraduate class, Dr Rousseau had as part b of a problem a question off a PhD qualifying exam from Princeton. He did not do this because he wanted to show us how smart he was nor did he do it to try and destroy us... he did it because he thought it was beautiful and he wanted to share it with his friends.

More than this the man took the time to send me an encouraging email when I started at Pitt. It still hangs on my wall and I smile every time I read it.

As I said in my acknowledgments in my dissertation (CCR was one of my committee members), “Doing Mathematics with Dr Rousseau is like watching a sunset with a friend”. He loved math because he loved the beauty of it and he enjoyed nothing more than sharing the beauty with anyone that would listen.

Thank you for sharing the beauty with me Dr Rousseau and for impacting my life and the life of so many others. The math community is now not as bright as it was and is missing one of its greatest treasures... blessings to your family and your wonderful wife Jane, and don’t wear the Almighty out with all your mathematical chatter. Rest In

Peace kind soul...

(I posted this on Facebook and numerous others are offering their condolences and sharing their memories there)

**Jeffrey Wheeler** - April 13, 2020 at 12:04 PM