



Gary Lease, 1941 - 2008

In Memoriam

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By Public Information Office, Staff Writer 459-2495

Gary Lease, a resident of Santa Cruz, CA

The following obituary was submitted to Currents by the family and friends of Gary Lease.

Professor Doctor Gary Lease (Doctor of Theology, University of Munich), former Chair and Professor of the Department of the History of Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz, died on January 4, after a long battle against cancer. During his travail, which he faced with a noble calm and Stoic resolve, Dr. Lease was nurtured and supported by his cherished wife of 19 years, Dorothea E. Ditchfield, formerly of Toronto, Canada.

Dr. Lease's scholarly competence spanned a remarkably wide spectrum of disciplines: History of Early Christianity, History of Germany, History of the Papacy and Ecclesiastical History, Near Eastern and Egyptian Archeology, theology, and History of National Socialism, to all of which he contributed important and original publications.

Dr. Lease came to UCSC in 1973 from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. During his thirty-five years of service at UCSC, Dr. Lease gained a reputation as an administrator as well as a highly esteemed, though sometimes controversial teacher, scholar, and critic. He served as the chairperson of a number of different departments, namely Religious Studies, Environmental Studies as well as the Language program, as Dean of Humanities, as Provost of Kresge College, as Associate Chancellor and as Director of University of California's Education Abroad Program in Göttingen, West Germany.

Gary also served as executive secretary of the North American Association for the Study of Religion and was the current treasurer of the International Association for the History of Religion. He performed these administrative tasks while maintaining a continuous record of full-time teaching and original research in archaeology, history, religious studies, and modern German history. He was as happy working in archaeological digs in Egypt and Syria as he was plowing through ancient documents in the archives and libraries of Rome, Berlin, or Israel. Before his death, Dr. Lease was working on what was to be a massive study of the debate over the origin of religion.

He was a brilliant writer, as anyone who was privileged to receive his poignant emails detailing the condition of his deteriorating health, will tell you.

Dr. Lease was also a world-class hunter and marksman. He hunted big game all over the world and trekked the hills and plains of Europe and America, as well as Namibia and South Africa in pursuit of the huntsman's most prized quarry. He was a lifetime member of the National Rifle Association, Member/Chair of the Santa Cruz Fish and Game Commission and served as well on the Board of the Watsonville Chapter of the California Waterfowl Association, and a number of other naturalist associations devoted to the rational and ecologically beneficial cultivation of the fauna and flora of the world.

Dr. Lease was also a superb chef, as those who have been privileged to participate in one of his grand game meals will enthusiastically attest. Finally, as a son of Rex Lease, a silent movie star and, later, a hero of many Westerns, Dr. Lease was the custodian of a rich record of information and lore about the early days of Hollywood cinema.

Dr. Lease is survived by his wife, Dorothea Ditchfield, his son, Dylan Scott Lease and his partner Natasha Kerr and grandson Bailey, his faithful hounds Sirius Sam and Barney Blue. A memorial event for Professor Lease is planned, the date, time, and location will be posted at the History of Consciousness web page: <http://humwww.ucsc.edu/HistCon/>. Those who wish to honor Professor Lease may do so by contributing to the Gary Lease Fellowship Fund, a scholarship to support graduate scholarship in History of Consciousness.

Ach, wie ist's möglich dann,
Dass ich dich lassen kann?