

MEMORIES OF EDDIE NUSSBAUM

By

Guido Weiss and Edward Wilson

A. Edward (Eddie) Nussbaum died of congestive heart failure on October 31, 2009 at the age of 84. He was a faculty member in the Department of Mathematics at Washington University in St. Louis for 37 years.

Eddie Nussbaum was born in 1925 in the region Moenchen-Gladbach-Rheydt (three adjacent towns), Germany, where his parents operated a department store. His elder brother was arrested on Kristalnacht in 1938. Soon thereafter, Eddie and his sister were sent by the Kinder Transport train to live in Belgium. However, conditions in Belgium were not safe and Eddie and his sister were soon separated. Eddie fled to southern France and, when conditions there also became unsafe, he crossed into Switzerland with the help of two local women and their woodsman father. When he was quickly put in jail by the Swiss authorities, he invented a story which led to his release and he lived for several years with a spinster and her nephew in Switzerland while studying mathematics at the University of Zurich. Although Eddie's sister also survived the Holocaust, sadly both his parents and his elder brother died in the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.

In 1947, Eddie arrived penniless in New York and began taking courses at Brooklyn College while supporting himself by rolling clay tennis courts. Soon thereafter he was admitted to Columbia University for graduate studies in mathematics and received his M.A. from Columbia in 1950. The high regard in which he was held by the Columbia Mathematics Department is attested to by his appointment as a Lecturer for the academic year 1951-52. For 1952-53, he was a staff member of the electronic computer project headed by John von Neumann at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. After serving as an Instructor at the University of Connecticut (1953-55) and an Instructor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (1955-57), he received his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1957 with a dissertation entitled "The Hausdorff-Bernstein-Widder Theorem for Semi-Groups in Locally Compact Abelian Groups". Following a year of service as an Assistant Professor at RPI, he was appointed as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Washington University in 1958 and was quickly promoted to Associate Professor in 1961 and to Full Professor in 1965.

In 1955, Eddie was a co-author with Allen Devinatz and John von Neumann of a paper published by the Annals of Mathematics and entitled "On the permutability of self-adjoint operators". This led to a distinguished career in functional analysis with numerous important papers on unbounded operators on Hilbert spaces and a

variety of related topics. His lectures were regarded by students and faculty as a model of mathematical clarity and precision. Both within the Mathematics Department and among his circle of friends and relatives, he was considered to be a kind, gentle, and compassionate man. Although he suffered a serious heart attack in 1979, he made a remarkable recovery aided by an intensive rehabilitation/exercise program that led to his becoming an avid runner; indeed, he won a medal in a 1983 race. He retired from Washington University in 1995.

In 1989, Eddie and his wife Anne visited his hometown of Rheydt in the Moenchen-Gladbach-Rheydt region and were very well received there; remarkably, he said he harbored no bitterness over his family's experiences. He is survived by Anne, his wife of 52 years, and their children Karl and Franziska. Karl teaches film studies at Montclair State University and has produced a number of films. Franziska works with photographers and serves as a stylist for advertising agencies in the St. Louis area.