

Tributes and remembrances from colleagues and friends

(Compiled by Vic Schoenbach 7/6/2022)

We have all been touched by Gerardo's brilliance and creativity, as well as by his thoughtfulness and kindness.

As you know, I spent about 34 years in the department and the school. Over the course of this long time, one remembers selective happenings that occurred to friends and colleagues. What I remember most about Gerardo is when he and Jo announced their marriage. We all thought then what a lovely thing, to have two of the nicest people we had ever known or met get married and share their lives together — what a wonderful couple they were!

My condolences go out to Gerardo's family and especially to his wife, Jo.

Michel

Michel Ibrahim, 6/24/2022

What a great man Gerardo was. I really owe him so much for his mentoring and kindness.

Manfred Green PhD 1982, Israel, supervised by Gerardo, 6/21/2022

Dear Jo,

Meg kindly forwarded Vic's emails with the sad news about Gerardo's passing. I echo the outpouring. He was my dissertation advisor in the 1980's, he rescued me from circumstances (one advisor, Michel, became dean and was unable to continue as my advisor), and was so kind to me, even though I was working outside his specialty of cardiovascular epidemiology. I worked in maternal and child health, which I love, but I always regret that I didn't work in the cardiovascular field to gain even more from Gerardo's mentoring. He was so polite and kind and considerate, always so scholarly and ethical, a true example of excellence as a scientist and human being. I feel so lucky to have had him as an advisor, and still cite his advice in the middle of meetings, dilemmas, and all kinds of situations where I will pop up with, "Well, my dissertation advisor always told me to do..."! I haven't received better advice than the advice he gave, and every word is still relevant and a source of wisdom and direction.

I am so sorry for your loss which can only be compensated by knowing how widely he was loved and appreciated.

Thinking of you,

Tammi

Tamar Lasky, 6/20/2022

Gerardo was my PhD advisor, a neighbor and someone I greatly liked and respected. His passing is greatly felt and a great loss to all of us.

Ross Simpson, 6/20/2022

It's hard to add to the heartfelt, insightful praise of Gerardo from so many of his colleagues, students, and friends. In a department with a long history and a series of exceptional contributors, Gerardo stands in the very top tier. He was such a gentle and modest yet commanding presence. As Chair there, I can attest to his exceptional selflessness and good citizenship. No matter how busy he was with so many other responsibilities, when duty to the program called, he never failed to respond and did so without complaint. Even having been away for 17 years (!), I can clearly remember his presence and the honor of being his colleague.

David

David Savitz, 6/20/2022

I was his doctoral student from 1993-96 and we kept in touch over the years. He has always been my role model as a mentor, once I started my academic path at UofSC. The world is a better place because of him and all of us that knew him were so fortunate to have had him in our lives. When I heard of his passing I was simply shocked, speechless. It is taking me some time to process. He will be so missed.

Angela Liese, 6/18/2022

Gerardo will always be on my mind and I remember Jeremy Kark (Jerusalem) once saying about Gerardo: "I couldn't believe that a man can be that good".

Ulrich Keil, 6/18/2022

We had a toast to Gerardo at SER... I miss him dearly.

David Shoham, 6/18/2022

I was so sad to learn about Gerardo Heiss passing. Gerardo was a rare person, and I will always remember him.

Joyce Clark Allen, 6/17/2022

<http://www.joyceallenwords.com/>

There have been many wonderful messages noting the gifts that so many have received from this extraordinary teacher, researcher and mentor. But this addition may be unique. Gerardo assigned an analysis of a dataset of juvenile blood pressure to me and Louise H Flick who was in the Doctoral program. Now my wife of 40 years, we and our 2 sons continue to be grateful to Gerardo for our wonderful life together.

Bill True and Louise Flick, 6/16/2022

I write with great sorrow to express my sympathies to his family and colleagues in the Department of Epidemiology on the untimely passing of Gerardo Heiss. Over the years I had the privilege to know Gerardo, mainly as a friend. A person of great humility - well respected within the academic community and gracious in manner.

Our encounters were always brief -- whether in the hallways of the school of public health or waiting for the bus in front of the Health Sciences Library. His reputation extended well beyond the school and was well known within the larger global healthcare community who had worked with Gerardo on one of his many WHO collaborative projects. My work focused on some aspect of health policy /management, which brought me in contact with key in-country epidemiologists who would often ask whether I knew Gerardo -- fortunately I was always able to say yes, giving me credibility.

Gerardo as a person -- friend or colleague -- provided a global perspective on life as he lived it, of which we all are the beneficiaries. We will miss him dearly.

Arnold D. Kaluzny, MHA,Ph.D

Emeritus Professor
Health Policy & Management
6/16/2022

I got to know Gerardo when we both served on the Graduate Studies Committee for several years and always found a common ground for making practical recommendations that benefited our students. But my favorite memories were always his welcoming attitude and friendly way that he always greeted me when we would meet randomly in the halls or at other meetings.

Bill Sollecito, Professor Emeritus, 6/16/2022

I am saddened to hear of Gerardo's death. I will remember him fondly both as one of my professors long ago and one of my colleagues. We were on at least one school-wide faculty committee together in which he modeled a willingness to bring calm wisdom in tackling complex issues with a gentle style of communication that reflected appreciation for his colleagues and their views.

Carol Runyan, Professor Emeritus, 6/16/2022

Sandy Martin sent me your announcement of Gerardo's passing. Terribly sad, I was honored to know him and have him as my dissertation advisor.

Alice White, 6/16/2022

Gerardo was a fantastic mentor, I will forever be grateful for his gentle guidance, patience, thoughtfulness, and countless hours of intellectually stimulating deep diving into the meaning of things. RIP, Gerardo, you will continue to inspire me.

Georgeta Vaidean, 6/15/2022

June 15, 2022

Dear Friends of Gerardo –

The School has now posted an article about Gerardo's passing and legacy:

Gillings School community honors the legacy of Dr. Gerardo Heiss*

<https://sph.unc.edu/sph-news/gillings-school-community-honors-the-legacy-of-dr-gerardo-heiss/>

The article notes that “At a future date, in conjunction with Dr. Heiss’ wife, the Gillings School community will host a celebration of his life and monumental contributions to science, including his training of public health leaders who now span the globe and carry on the work to which he dedicated his life.”

Thanks to all of you who have emailed me your thanks and memories of Gerardo. Several of you also sent them to the list address, so I will release these for general distribution, one at a time, starting today. I am also planning to combine the individual emails into a single document to distribute in an email or post in the In Memoriam folder at <https://go.unc.edu/GerardoHeiss>. If for any reason you do not want me to disseminate your comments (I would omit your email address), please let me know – or send me a version that you prefer for dissemination purposes.

Several of you have asked for Jo Heiss’ contact information. I do not yet know her email address. I will try to send her postal address within a day or two.

In sympathy,
Vic

<https://go.unc.edu/vjs>

<https://go.unc.edu/EPIDhistory>

<https://go.unc.edu/UNCSPH>

The subject of this message came as a shock to me. Perhaps I imagined that this dear friend and mentor would live forever. My most deep sentiments go to Jo and his family. I wish them the strength to go through this physical separation. We can rest assured that our good memories of Gerardo will never go away and will remain solid in our hearts.

I met Gerardo in 1979 when I first expressed my desire to learn how epidemiology could help me improve diabetes care. He was open to listening to my initial and naïve ideas and encouraged me to pursue this endeavor. He became my master's and Ph.D. adviser, my mentor then and forever.

Maria Inês Schmidt, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 6/14/2022

I remember Gerardo fondly from my time in the department. Condolences to his family and friends.

Vani Vannappagari, 6/14/2022

Sad business. I did not know Gerardo well, but he was unfailingly friendly and approachable whenever we met.

Jonathan Kotch, 6/14/2022

Please add me to your email list when details of the Memorial Service are announced. I have been friends with Jo and Gerardo for 40+ years so I want to be there among his friends and colleagues.

Sue Harvin, 6/14/2022

I'm so sorry to hear about Gerardo - I have wonderful memories of him from my time in Chapel Hill.

David Freedman, 6/14/2022

I do remember Gerardo, though I didn't actually know him. His passing from Covid makes us realize how vulnerable we all are still. I am saddened by news of his passing.

Pat Fischer, 6/14/2022

He was a great colleague and researcher.

Karin Yeatts, 6/14/2022

Colleagues – One of our finest Kenan Professors passed away this weekend. Dr. Gerardo Heiss was a scholar, a fabulous teacher and mentor and a fine person. He will be missed.

Ron Strauss, 6/14/2022 email to Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Chris Clemens, Executive Vice Provost Amy Hertel

My deepest sympathies go out to the Epidemiology Family at UNC. I hope you are faring well through this tough time

Daniel Caños, 6/14/2022

Sad. I knew and remember him.

Karl Bauman, 6/14/2022

Thanks so much for sending this very sad news. As with many others, I remember Gerardo fondly and with great respect.

If and when there is a public service, please do let me know. Also, if you have it, please send me contact info for Jo. I knew her only a bit. She and Gerardo had seats at the NC Symphony next to ours, so we visited many times in the pre-Covid days.

Ernie Schoenfeld, 6/14/2022

I knew Gerardo from the early days when John Cassel moved heaven and earth to get him out of Pinochet's Chile and into our Epid PhD program - almost overnight! Gerardo was an incredibly kind friend to whom I will always be indebted.

Joanna Smith, 6/14/2022

Thank you for informing me about this, Victor. I remember Gerardo from all those years ago.

Raj Bhopal, Emeritus Professor of Public Health, University of Edinburgh, 6/14/2022

I am deeply shocked when hearing that my friend and colleague Gerardo Heiss passed away last Saturday in Chapel Hill.

Gerardo has done so much for me and my family over the decades I have known him. I would like to thank him by writing to his beloved wife Jo and expressing my deep sympathy to her and also tell her about the many, many good and helpful things Gerardo did for me and my family.

Ulrich Keil, University of Muenster, 6/14/2022

Thank you for sharing this news and your own thoughts. Gerardo was a pillar of the department from the day I arrived: upright, dignified, clear of thought, supportive of others. I will miss him. My condolences to you, his family, and the rest of the department.

David Richardson, 6/14/2022

Sad news.

Thank you for share. My sympathies to Jo and family

Shimon Weitzman, Israel, 6/14/2022

I was truly blessed by Dr. Heiss!

Ahinee Amamoo, 6/14/2022

I'm so sorry to hear about Gerardo. I really appreciate your message and will keep you and his family in my prayers.

Carol J. Rowland Hogue, 6/13/2022

My heart is broken! Gerardo meant so much to me.

Kapuaola Gellert, 6/13/2022

Thank you for sharing this information regarding the passing of Gerardo Heiss. I never worked directly with him but I do have fond memories of having several stimulating conversations with him. He represents another great loss for our Epidemiology Department.

Jerome Wilson, 6/13/2022

It's the passing of a gentle giant, for sure.

Anna Schenk, 6/13/2022

Gerardo and I were doctoral students together. He with Al Tyroler and I with John Cassel, Ed Wagner and Sherman James. He was a soft spoken giant of epidemiology. He was highly articulate, extraordinarily well versed in evidence based science and always let the other person talk first. I had the opportunity to spend some time while I visited UNC in 2018 to catch up with him. He loved teaching and mentoring. He had high standards and was always setting the bar higher in research and in teaching. I kept up with him ever since my visit.

Gerardo will be missed. Good bye dear friend.
What a sad day for epidemiology and for the world.

Michele Forman, 6/13/2022

I too remember Gerardo fondly. He was not just an amazingly prolific researcher, but he was such a kind man. He will be missed.

Sandy Martin, 6/13/2022

I have known Gerardo for 40 years. We would often see each other on weekends when we worked, shared many students, and spoke about chile and many other things. I too met him via Gerardo when the 3 of us worked on a project.

It is hard to see him pass away.

Barry Popkin, 6/13/2022

I'm so very sad to learn about Gerardo's passing. He was a seriously good person as well as an outstanding epidemiologist. He came to our department very shortly after I began my position with the student program, and I have very good memories of him as a friend there.

Joyce Allen, 6/13/2022

I held Gerardo's life's work as a scientist, academic, teacher and mentor to students in great high regard. But it is his character as a human being, which I knew from the stories, that I admire most.

Judith Winkler, 6/13/2022

Thanks for sharing, Vic. I did not know him well. However, he always spoke to me whenever I would see him in the halls of the school.

Dot Browne, 6/13/2022

Vic, thanks for sharing. So sorry to hear this,

Dan Blazer, 6/13/2022

This news really hurt me. I really liked talking to Gerardo. I loved his accent also. I will miss him.

Lisa Bradley, 6/13/2022

Vic, sorry to hear this. I remember working with Gerardo on the Evans County Study with Dave Kleinbaum and Al Tyroler.

Larry Kupper, 6/13/2022

Thanks for letting me know, I will miss him too.
Ilene Siegler, 6/13/2022

Thanks, Vic. Very sad for us all.
Bill Miller, 6/13/2022

Sad news indeed. Gerardo was a fantastic epidemiologist and (more importantly) a wonderful person. My condolences to Jo and his family.
Kathy Magruder, 6/13/2022

June 13, 2022

Dear UNC Epidemiology Colleagues, Alumni, and Friends –

Til Sturmer and Audrey Pettifor, respectively chair and associate chair of the Department of Epidemiology, sent the following email this morning to all Epidemiology faculty:

From: Stürmer, Til <sturmer@unc.edu>
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2022 9:19 AM
To: LSRV_epidfaculty.con <epidfaculty@listserv.unc.edu>
Subject: [epidfaculty] [epidall] Gerardo Heiss passing

Dear all,

Our beloved friend, mentor, teacher, and researcher, Gerardo Heiss, passed away peacefully on Saturday. His wife Jo, the family, and his sister from Germany were able to say goodbye. We will all terribly miss Gerardo! His active participation in meetings, his teaching the 1st year PhD seminar until a few weeks ago, his mentoring students (including from the hospital bed), and his humbleness despite being one of the legends of epidemiology.

Gerardo got his MD from the University of Chile at Santiago in 1968, his MSc in Social Medicine from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1973, and his PhD in Epidemiology from UNC in 1976. His first 1st authored publication was in 1977 together with Al Tyroler. He was too modest to count his papers on his CV, but PubMed lists close to 600. He was instrumental for large cohort studies, including the

Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study (ARIC), that provided the evidence needed to reduce cardiovascular morbidity and mortality worldwide.

I do remember meeting Gerardo for the first time at the Epidemiology Summer School in Ulm, Germany, in 1996. I had just started as a faculty member in a very small epidemiology department and it was more than encouraging that a legend like Gerardo would not only come to Ulm but actually talk to me about my research.

In conjunction with his wife, Jo, the Gillings School of SPH, the Department of Epidemiology, and others, we will host a celebration of his life and monumental contributions to science and training public health leaders that now span the globe carrying on the work he was so dedicated to, soon. Details to follow.

Best – Til & Audrey

Gerardo was a wonderful colleague and friend, whom I have known for nearly 45 years. He excelled as a teacher, mentor, researcher, committee chair, and in so many other roles – with an exceptional degree of integrity and courteousness in all his actions and interactions.

I assume that more information about the circumstances will be shared in the coming days. At this time I know only what I've seen on Nancy Colvin's and Christy Avery's Facebook pages, which report that Gerardo had been hospitalized with pneumonia brought on by Covid-19.

My collection on Gerardo (<https://go.unc.edu/GerardoHeiss>) currently includes a recording of a seminar he gave on the history of the Evans County Study and his remarks at the Dedication of the John Cassel Conference Room. I hope to add more in the coming days and weeks.

I send my heartfelt sympathy to Jo Heiss, family and friends, and all of you who knew, learned from, and worked with this wonderful man with whom I hoped to have many more interactions.

Be well,
Vic

<https://go.unc.edu/vjs>

<https://go.unc.edu/GerardoHeiss>

<https://go.unc.edu/UNCSPH>

P.S. I constructed the email list by building on one that I used to write about Bert Kaplan's passing, hence the name of this list (friendsofbert). I may try to revise the name in the future. Of course, please let me know if you'd like me to remove, modify, or add an email address.
