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Melanie Marquez
Gary Ross Mormino

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In Remembrance of History Professor David Carr

By Gary Mormino

A Renaissance man in age of specialists, a colleague who spent a lifetime poring over medieval ledgers but also enjoyed repairing vintage Volvos and mastering the intricacies of fly fishing, David Carr died Nov. 13 at age 67. He and his beloved wife Guna had made St. Petersburg home for almost forty years.

A professor's professor, David's childhood resembled more *Oliver Twist* than *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. His father, whom he never met, died in combat in World War II when his plane was shot down in the Pacific. Aunts and uncles raised young David, his life careening from Montana to Alaska, California to Colorado.

A generation earlier, David's destiny most likely was the copper mines of Butte, but imbued with a passion for learning, he became an accomplished student, a testament to the American Dream and its egalitarian possibilities. David was graduated from Colorado State University and then received his doctorate in European history from the University of Nebraska.

If far-away events at Midway and the Coral Sea shaped David's life, World War II also profoundly affected Guna Kordons. The daughter of an educated engineer, Guna and her family were swept into the maelstrom of geopolitics when Soviet forces conquered the Baltic. The Kordons barely escaped ahead of the Red Army, becoming D.P.s (displaced persons). Eventually the family resettled in Colorado, where Guna's father, the former engineer, obtained a job as a school janitor.

David and Guna met as undergraduates at Colorado State University. They married in 1965. In an age of dysfunctional and frayed relationships, their mutual affection and intertwined destinies was as touching as it was enduring.

In the late summer of 1971, the Carrs drove a U-Haul truck cross-country with a 1966 VW Bug attached to their rear. In Georgia, a police officer pulled the young couple over for speeding. David handed Guna $40, instructing her to return to Colorado should he be handcuffed. Instead, Guna began to weep. "There, there, little lady, please don't cry," the officer implored.

Poorer but free, the Carrs arrived in the sleepy town of St. Petersburg. He began teaching in the Fall of 1971. His salary may have been modest ($11,000 a year), but the view from his office was spectacular. In 1971, USF St. Petersburg consisted of WWII-era barracks and classrooms built originally for the Merchant Marine, overlooking Tampa Bay and Bayboro Harbor.

Buoyed by the expectations of a career specializing in Early European history, David soon realized the academic reality of life on a small campus. Over the next four decades, he taught a range of classes that will likely never be matched: British history to Western Civilization to the history of law, or as he liked to describe it, "From Mesopotamia to Megalopolis." A taskmaster, he is remembered by several generations of students as a demanding but compassionate professor.

Carr accepted the responsibilities of service and administration with less John Calvin's sense of calling and more St. Benedict's sense of work and duty. He coordinated the campus's first honors program, headed the faculty senate, and served as faculty assistant to President Betty Castor. He believed deeply in faculty governance and collegial responsibility.

No one spent more time in his office and archives than David. With monastic resolve, he managed to translate and publish *The First General Entry Book of the City of Salisbury, 1387-1452*. David was an old-school historian. He spent years of his life patiently copying and translating manuscripts. He also edited the national journal of Phi Alpha Theta,
The Historian. For over a decade, he had been working on a promising environmental study of English cities in the Middle Ages.

David Carr, as much as anyone, strove to make USF St. Petersburg a better place, an institution where young scholars could pursue dedicated teaching and high-caliber research. When he arrived, Tampa officials referred to USF St. Petersburg as a "branch campus." In countless committees and editorials, he argued for campus autonomy, cautioning that with independence comes accountability.

If David’s great passion was the hoary world of velum-bound books, his next great love was his adopted city of St. Petersburg. He served on too many committees to list or to remember, but his commitment to civic improvement was unerring and steady.

He was a wordsmith, a raconteur, and punster. On one occasion, he spotted a dowager wearing a risqué dress. "It seems we have gone," he quipped, "from Eldridge Cleaver to elder cleavage!"

He was always fastidious, be it on the tennis court, in a Rocky Mountain stream, or kayaking Coffeepot Bayou. He loved the pomp and ceremony of graduation ceremonies, patiently explaining to young (and old) colleagues how the academic hood should slip over the robe, how the mace should be carried, and the importance of traditions. His sock drawer was reputedly organized by color and pattern. To his double partners' torment, he enjoyed but never mastered tennis. Colleagues will dearly miss his manners, wit, and the lost art of civility.

Donations are being accepted for the David Carr Scholarship Fund. Please make checks payable to the USF Foundation, Inc. Mail to USF St. Petersburg, 140 Seventh Avenue South, SNL 100, St. Petersburg, FL 33701. A memorial service will be held in Colorado and at USF St. Petersburg. Dates to be announced.