[173, 1235, 1967, 2014,1, 1, 7]

Emeritus Professor Alfred Jacobus (Alf) van der Poorten was born 16 May 1942. Poorten was born in Amsterdam in 1942 and spent the war years as ‘Fritsje’ since he need to hide from nazis. His real parents were few to survive the camps. Poorten was reunited with them in 1945. His family migrated to Sydney aboard the SS Himalaya in early 1951. Poorten attended Sydney Boys High School’. Poorten has one of the highest standardized tests in New South Wales. After a year in Israel, Poorten accepted into mathematics at the University of New South Wales in 1961. Poorten taught there for eighteen years. He first graduated in 1965 from a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in Pure Mathematics. He next completed his doctorate in 1968. He was President of the UNSW Students’ Union Council from 1964 to 1965 and President of the UNSW University Union from 1965 to 1967. Poorten was interested in all of mathematics but his research was in diverse aspects of number theory. His doctoral supervisor was Kurt Mahler, who was a Professorial Fellow in the Research School of Mathematical Sciences at the Australian National University. Poorten's thesis was entitled ‘Simultaneous algebraic approximations to functions’ and it was in this work that he made his first contributions to transcendence theory. It is no surprise that Poorten's second paper was a note on ‘Transcendental entire functions mapping every algebraic number field into itself’.. He served as Head of the School of Mathematics, Physics, Computing and Electronics from 1980 to 1987 and again from 1991 to 1996. Macquarie University was founded only in the 1960s. Poorten retired from Macquarie in 2002. An unusual aspect of Alf’s research output was the number of his joint authors. Of his publications, 178 have been reviewed by Maths Reviews, and this number will rise over the next couple of years. Once he moved to Macquarie University both Poorten scholarship and his research output rapidly increased with a constant stream of overseas visitors, mainly courtesy of the Australian Research Council. In addition, in 1988 he solved Pisot’s conjecture on the Hadamard quotient of two rational functions and he used these ideas to produce a new proof of the celebrated S-unit theorem. In 1992, jointly with Bernie Dwork, he studied the ‘Eisenstein constant’, providing sharp bounds on the Taylor coefficients of an algebraic power series. Work begun in the early 1980s with Bombieri led to the invariant Thue– Siegel method being applied to the explicit construction of curves with prescribed singularities. Finally, in 1999, Poorten and Kenneth Williams succeeded in breaking up the Chowla–Selberg formula, allowing evaluation of the Dedekind eta function for all discriminants in terms of singular values of the L-functions. Poorten always attempted to prove that ‘mathematics is beautiful, elegant and fun, a language as worthwhile learning as any other’, as he remarked to a reporter in 1979. At age of 68, Poorten died from lung Cancer.

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