



## Dr. William Watson Purkey

August 22, 1929 - April 7, 2024

Dr. William Watson Purkey, age 94, died on April 7, 2024 in Tallahassee, Florida. He is survived by his wife, Imogene Hedrick Purkey; their two children, Dr. William Watson Purkey, Jr., M.D. (Elizabeth) and Cynthia Purkey Norton (Jim); six grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. William and Imogene were happily married for 73 years.

William was born on August 22, 1929 to Elizabeth Reynolds Shenk and Lacurgus Watson Shenk of Luray, Virginia. Later, William was adopted by his stepfather, Richard Purkey. William grew up in Shenandoah, Virginia and Washington D.C. where he served as a United States Senate Page Boy.

After graduation from Jefferson Senior High School in Roanoke, Virginia, William joined the United States Air Force. During the Korean War he served as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Specialist. He received an Honorable Discharge in January 1955. After his military discharge, William continued his education at the University of Virginia where he received his undergraduate degree in education and his M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Educational Psychology.

Upon receiving his doctorate, William accepted a faculty position at the University of Florida. There he moved from assistant, to associate, to full professor with tenure. In 1976, William accepted the position of full professor, with tenure, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

During his 28 years of teaching at UNCG, William received the highest award for teaching given by the University of North Carolina System, The UNC Board of Governor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. In 2005 William received the 2005 Excellence in Education Award, presented by the Royal Conservatory of Music for his work in encouraging learning through the arts.

William was the author or co-author of ten professional books and over 100 articles on human motivation and self-concept theory. His most scholarly contribution was to create a theory of practice called "Invitational Education." The theory is designed to create, maintain, and enhance truly welcoming schools and allied institutions. The International Alliance for Invitational Education, a non-profit organization consisting of over 500 members in 16 counties, is founded on invitational theory.

There will be no formal visitation, a private memorial will be held at a later date. Rather than sending flowers, William requested that contributions be made to the non-profit International Alliance for Invitational Education at [www.invitationaleducation.org](http://www.invitationaleducation.org).

Breanna Green of Bevis Funeral Home (850-385-2193 or [www.bevisfh.com](http://www.bevisfh.com)) is assisting the family with their arrangements.

# Tribute Wall

SD

“ *Dr. Purkey was a joy to have for a professor. His invitational theory was real because he lived it! His was the class I looked forward to, and he encouraged me to get my M.Ed. He was a sweet, kind man and I miss him.* 💖

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**Sharon Helms Dulin** - February 26, 2025 at 05:33 PM

TR

“ Dear Imogene and Family,

*Thinking of you at this difficult time. It was always a joy to see you and meet many of you at our conferences over the years.*



*William was a Light in our profession whose work will continue on through the Alliance, books and many students. He made such a difference in the way we approach our profession and interact with every person. He was a precious friend, colleague and researcher who I will miss. My prayer is that his Light and vision will continue on like the Olympic Torch because his work and truth is timeless and necessary.*

*Since we met in 1986 at a PDK event, William and I shared many conversations and experiences. I loved hearing him speak and share his many stories and examples. I still quote him often, reference his many works, use the ITS when possible and reference IE frequently. I am proud I am a “long marcher” and shared the journey when possible. His impact on me and my work is significant. I am grateful.*

*You remain in my thoughts and prayers.*

*With deepest Sympathy.*

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**Tommie Radd** - April 21, 2024 at 02:35 PM

ST

“ Sending my sincere condolences to the family of Dr. Purkey and all that loved him. I first saw Dr. Purkey at a speech at Ohio University given to Martha Holden Jennings Scholars probably 45+ years ago and then several times again after that. He was an outstanding speaker and I still have his books. I only found his obit today by accident while looking for one of his quotes online to share with a former student about “human potential” noting Dr. Purkey had died only 10 days ago. I am so glad he had all these years to “dance” and I send him off with the “Purkey Wave”. I hope he knew that his legacy has strong roots and still being shared by those of us that are long since retired who have passed it to new generations.

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**Sue Thuma** - April 17, 2024 at 12:52 PM

TS

“ My last correspondence with William was on March 9th. His final words via e-mail were, "The best is yet to be." As we go forth without the physical presence of William, may we all take these words of William with us.

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**Thomas Sexton** - April 15, 2024 at 06:02 PM

MM

*Cynthia, I am so sorry to read that your dear Daddy has died. May He hold you and yours in His hands as you need. Our thoughts, prayers, and love are with you. The depth of your grief is measured by the breadth of your love!*

*The Millsaps Family*

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**Melinda Millsaps** - April 27, 2024 at 08:03 PM

TS

“ I had been teaching high school students for about ten years when, around 1974, I came upon a book entitled, “Self- Concept and School Achievement, by William Purkey. I loved the book (published in 1970) and contacted William and the rest is history. Soon I was attending and presenting at conferences, teaching courses in Invitational Education to teachers, becoming a Board Member for IAIE and writing a philosophy of coaching book entitled “Creating a Team Like No Other.” Most importantly I became a better and more effective teacher because of the values of Invitational Education. Needless to say, I feel indebted to William and the Alliance for helping me find a rewarding thirty -five-year teaching career and a fifty-one-year career as a cross country coach. For the past few years William and I stayed connected as he had me writing thank you letters to folks who were still supporting The Alliance. This was his way of nurturing his precious Alliance until the very end. How could you not love Wiliam Purkey? I also wrote a book review for William on one of his books. I reminded him frequently over the past few years how grateful I was for his presence in my life. I also reminded him of the thousands of teachers and students whom he also impacted. What a total blessing it was to know William. Definitely one of my heroes.

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**Tom Sexton** - April 15, 2024 at 05:39 PM

HH

“ In the late 90s, While working fulltime, I was struggling to finish my master's degree. I needed one class to graduate. A friend mentioned how great Dr. Purkey was. I signed up. For the remainder of my career, I used the strategies and techniques I learned from Dr. Purkey. He was a great educator and an all-around fine human being. Rest in enteral peace.

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**Helen Dennison Hebert** - April 15, 2024 at 02:42 PM

SR

“ Dr. William Watson Purkey welcomed me to the 2014 IAIE Annual Conference in Nashville with a friendly smile and an encouraging hello. Later, while serving on the International Alliance for Invitation Education (IAIE) Membership Committee, I was impressed with the one-to-one connection that Dr. Purkey provided when welcoming new members and encouraging current members to renew. His email that welcomed me to IAIE had the signature line of “Mahalo Nui Loa” which is Hawaiian for “Thank you very much and being in a state of constant gratitude.” Dr. Purkey knew I lived in Honolulu, and he felt that it was important to use the language, and underlying values and beliefs, that the language brought with it.

*Dr. Purkey encouraged me to join the IAIE Board of Trustees and become Board Chair. He was understanding and patient as I learned the position. He was a constant source of creativity, suggestions, and support. Dr. Purkey was forever passionate and tireless in promoting Invitational Education. His influence continues to model care and compassion, resilience and professionalism, expertise and warmth. The memory of Dr. William Watson Purkey helps me strive to become a better version of myself. Mahalo Nui Loa Dr. Purkey.*

*Scott Robinson*

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**Scott Robinson** - April 14, 2024 at 06:43 PM

JF

“ Dear Imogene and Family,

*On behalf of every school leader, teacher, and counselor around the world that William's insights and teachings guided to becoming intentionally positive contributors in this challenging world, I thank you for sharing him with us for all of these precious years. We don't need to tell you how unique, wise, bold, and gifted he was. We do need to thank you for supporting his work and making it possible for him to contribute so profoundly, until his last days.*

*My path in education was defined by William's teachings and like others, I would have never been able to articulate my philosophy of education without the perspectives I gained from William. The greatest gift he gave me was inviting me to co-author his last book with him and John Novak. My most precious memory was the conversation we had while riding in a car together to his first keynote speech on Long Island, followed by the awestruck audience who gave him a standing ovation.*

*William never gave up on anything or anyone. I will do my best to keep his wisdom, words, and work alive. He will forever make this world a better place to teach, learn, and grow. Please accept my deepest condolences.*

*Joan Fretz*

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**Joan Fretz** - April 12, 2024 at 07:31 PM

TS

*It is hard to think of anyone who has given more to William and to the Alliance than Joan Fretz. Thanks so much.*

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**Tom Sexton** - April 15, 2024 at 05:47 PM



“ *Dr. Purkey is the reason that I am the counselor I am today and have been for the past 32 years. He invited me to be a part of his work on Invitational Education during my undergraduate studies, which lead me to the graduate program at UNC-Greensboro. I use what he taught me every day and keep his insights at the forefront of my work. I always teach my clinical interns lessons that I learned from Dr. Purkey. I am sending his family my deepest condolences and hope that you all know the profoundly positive impact that he had on the world, through the ripple effect of his teaching and his spirit. May God rest his soul and may his memory bring you peace and light. Amber Kelley, Class of 1992.*

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**Amber Kelley** - April 11, 2024 at 09:21 PM

EC

“ *Learning of Dr. Purkey's passing, I could only reflect on the many years of our professional and personal relationship which truly enriched my life. He was truly a man of all seasons. The memory lives on.*

*Dr. Eddie L. Collins Jr.*

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**Eddie Lee Collins** - April 11, 2024 at 10:52 AM

GJ

*1972 was my first year teaching and I had my letter of resignation ready to mail. I felt education just wasn't for me. Fortunately, we had an inservice for teachers in the Fall and the speaker was William Purkey. His 45 minute keynote address changed my life! I purchased his book, began applying Invitational Theory in my classroom, and my student's excelled. Dr Purkey was my mentor, teacher and cherished friend. Because of his support, I finished my Masters Degree and Ph. D. and dedicated my professional career to education. YOU WILL ALWAYS REMAIN MY HERO!!*  
*Judy Lehr (Guarino)*

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**Guarino Judy** - April 14, 2024 at 09:32 AM

TS

*Eddie, I remember you well. Thanks for all you have given to the Alliance. Tom Sexton.*

Tom Sexton - April 15, 2024 at 05:48 PM

KA

“*Dr. William Watson Purkey was my beloved friend and mentor. How appropriate that the world went dark after his death. He was a bright shining light in this world and in my life.*

*I was blessed to meet Dr. Purkey in 1985 and quickly became a follower of William and an active member of The Alliance for Invitational Education. It soon came clear to me that IE was really INVITATIONAL LIVING. I was never the same. William changed the trajectory my life and blessed me in countless ways. He added a new layer to my existence. I can not express my deep appreciation, admiration and love for this dear friend and mentor.*

*My thoughts and prayers are with Imogene, other family members and a multitude of friends and followers who will remember (and "quote" him)*

*forever... 🙏❤️☀️*

*Kate Asbill*

*Artesia, New Mexico*

Kate Asbill - April 11, 2024 at 10:00 AM

TS

*Kate, I remember you well from our many conferences together. I love what you wrote here. "a new layer to my existence." Best wishes. Tom Sexton*

Tom Sexton - April 15, 2024 at 05:51 PM

KA

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Kate Asbill - April 11, 2024 at 09:42 AM

JM

“ It's hard to put into words the impact of William Purkey upon educators across the world. I first met him in the early 80's and quickly embraced Invitational Education. No one could express the implications of this theory of change better than William and his practical messages to practitioners that accompanied it. His candle of optimism, hope, and love has lit 1000's of others and they in turn have passed that passion onto others making Dr. Purkey's legacy —legions of educators that have made education a human endeavor. We will miss him but his lessons will continue to inspire new generations to place relationships at the center of their work with students and colleagues. The mantra " who you are is how you lead" was never more true than with him. Bless you William and prayers for his wife and family. Thank you for what you have done for so very many of us.  
Jim Mahoney

Jim Mahoney - April 10, 2024 at 08:15 PM

TS

Jim, What you gave to William and to the Alliance over the years can't be measured. Thanks so much. Hope you are well. Best. Tom

Tom Sexton - April 15, 2024 at 05:43 PM

TS

*Jim, As a faithful runner, I remember your getting up early on the mornings of the conference to get your run in. Hope all is well. Tom Sexton.*

Tom Sexton - April 15, 2024 at 05:53 PM

DT

“*Dr Purkey had a smile and a fun filled spirit that was contagious. I met him when he spoke to our faculty on the first day of school in August several years ago. He ignited everyone in our district to discover ways to bring Invitational Education to their classroom and school. From that point forward, I got involved in the organization and enjoyed the learning from all the wonderful members of the organization. Dr.Purkey's IE is needed now in all areas of life...perhaps more than ever. God bless him for all he achieved and offered thousands of educators and students. I hope in his new home he has boxes of chocolate pop suckers available for his pleasure, as those were his favorite.*

Dr. Jetta Tenee Tarr - April 10, 2024 at 05:37 PM

RD

“*When I first met Dr. Purkey was at my first conference where my school was earning the first of many more to come. It was like having a friend for life. After my retirement, Dr. Purkey would from time to time text or write me a note. We have lost a true friend. Prayers to the Purkey family.*



Robin D Davenport - April 10, 2024 at 12:23 PM

PW

“ 9 files added to the album highlights



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**Peter WONG** - April 10, 2024 at 11:40 AM

“ My first encounter with Dr PURKEY went way back to 1998 when I did a six-week attachment in Dr Purkey’s University (UNCG) where he was the professor in the Education and Counseling Department. In those few weeks, I got many opportunities to sit in his lectures and visit schools as arranged by Dr Purkey. I managed to visit a lot of schools in different States such as North & South Carolina, New York State and Nebraska! I could see many outstanding schools practicing IE!

I was mostly impressed with the Invitational Education (IE) theory and Dr Purkey’s way of interacting with people reflecting what IE is! To cite a few examples: his door in the University corridor is always open to receive students and guests, he always invites his students to participate in his work and make them feel being valued (most of his books are co- author with his students), and he always expressed appreciation to people around no matter how small the acts are etc!! He is also a popular speaker on IE! He received a lot of phone calls over the country every day, inviting him to give lectures and presentations on IE. Because of his effort and dedication, IE has been spread not just among United States and is well received in many countries that value the development of quality education to unleash the potential of every individual student!! IE has been making lots of positive impacts to the education systems globally including HK and mainland China as well!!

In the year 2000, Hong Kong was undergoing Education Reform. In 2002 I invited Dr Purkey and Dr John Novak to come to Hong Kong to present IE to schools in my school district. There are around nine schools joining in that one-week training. Dr Purkey named the project as ‘Tipping Point Project’. This really reflected Dr Purkey’s wisdom as he said ‘if these schools are having good results after adopting IE, they will become the model schools and attract many more schools to join! This will serve as the ‘Tipping Point’ for schools to adopt changes!! He is right! Many schools joined IE after seeing the success of these schools and the positive impacts to students and inviting environment created.

*In 2004. We have been able to establish the Hong Kong Center on IE and host the first Conference on IE outside America in 2005 with the support of Dr Purkey! IE has been flourishing in this part of the world with new schools joining every year. In 2012, HK is hosting another world IE conference. There are over hundreds of schools in HK and several provinces of China have schools adopting the IE initiatives and many are being awarded as IE schools by now! Dr Purkey being the one having the global vision of developing IE and his support and inspiration always is the attraction when we come into close contact with him! Every time when we went to the world conference in the US, Hong Kong teachers and principals were very eager to take photos and have conversations with Dr PURKEY. He has lived IE beyond the education profession and has grown as a way of life.*

*In recent years, due to decline of personal health and Covid, through online meetings, and email messages with Dr Purkey, we still could tap on his wisdom.*

*On a personal basis, he always treated me as his 'son' and gave his best to encourage and support my work, family and self-development both personally and professionally!*

*Dr PURKEY, thank you, we miss you! But as you said, death will not end the relationship and we will not just remember you, but we'll try our very best to continue to develop IE and bless people around us and make the world a better and inviting place! May God's grace and love be with your family and give them strength, peace and comfort! Your inspiration will continue and those great works of yours on IE are eternal. Thank you, Dr PURKEY!*

*Peter WONG, your honorary son, friend and coachee*

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**Peter WONG** - April 10, 2024 at 11:12 AM

PW

<http://www.iaie.org.hk/>

*The Hong Kong Center's tribute to show our great respect to Dr Purkey!*

**Peter WONG** - April 10, 2024 at 11:27 AM

MM

*How very touching Dr Wong's eulogy is to Dr Purkey's gifts to our world.*

**Melinda Millsaps** - April 10, 2024 at 12:31 PM

MM

*“ I first met William at the very first meeting of the Old North State Detectorists club meeting. From then on I had a friend. Organizing metal detectorists is like herding cats. It always amazed me how he kept the club active and moving in positive directions. He was missed when he moved away from our area and will be missed as the days go on. I am proud to have known him.*

**Mac McAtee** - April 10, 2024 at 09:39 AM

JF

*“ This man was a wonderful person that will be truly missed. I met him when I was just starting into being a detectorist. He invited me to participate with the ONSD club in a NC State sanctioned event. Learned a lot from this man and he was as kind hearted as you could ever hope to meet. My prayers are with his family. He will be deeply missed.*

**James Furmage** - April 10, 2024 at 07:42 AM

RJ

“ 5 files added to the album ONSD



Rodney Joslin - April 09, 2024 at 10:29 PM

EP

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Edwin Poon - April 09, 2024 at 10:26 PM

EP

“ *Dearest and Be Loved Dr Purkey,  
I am very thankful to know you in the IAIE training since year 2000,  
your ideas and passions inspire me forever and ever. Our teachers,  
students and friends of IAIE from Hong Kong want to give our  
highest respect and say thank you to you from the bottom of our  
heart . We are different because we have IE. R.I.P.*

*Edwin Poon*

*Ling Liang Church M H Lau Sec School, Hong Kong*

Edwin Poon - April 09, 2024 at 10:20 PM

LC

“ *His legacy will live invitingly in humanity forever* ❤️

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**Lan Lan Chin** - April 09, 2024 at 07:56 PM

LC

“ *His legacy will live invitingly in humanity forever* ❤️

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**Lim Lan Chin** - April 09, 2024 at 07:52 PM

VW

“ *William was an extraordinary leader and a delightful person. I cherish every moment I spent in his company. His legacy includes the multitudes of invitations he's given to thousands of leaders, teachers, and most importantly students. A blue card for Dr. Purkey!*

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**Vicki Wilson** - April 09, 2024 at 05:31 PM

DS

“ *I met Dr. Purkey in 1979 in San Antonio, TX and as a newly graduated professor of nursing, I was so taken with the concept of Invitational Education that I attended a 2 wk course in Cullowhee and became a disciple. Over the years I have won awards in nursing education; all attributed to Dr. Purkey and IE. It has been a privilege and pleasure to serve on the Membership Committee with William and to hear from him each month. He was a blessing!!! Dr. Jamie Spikes*

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**Dr. Jamie Spikes** - April 09, 2024 at 04:54 PM

JJ

“ Dr. Purkey, a former professor of mine, is such a towering figure that nothing I could say will do him justice. I can't say I have ever met a person who could match his level of accomplishment. However, most importantly, I can't say I have ever met a person who has done more good in the world either. His teachings exercise positive influence in my life literally every day, as they do, I am sure, with many thousands of others. The tens of thousands of students who have been under my tutelage have all been positively influenced by him even though many of them have never heard his name. The impact of his life on this world will undoubtedly be eternal.

*John J. Ivers, Rexburg, Idaho*

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**John J. Ivers** - April 09, 2024 at 04:02 PM

DF

“ It is significant that William's departure from this Earth coincided with a total eclipse. Both events left the world temporarily cold and dark, but in time the Sun came out and we once again felt its warmth . While William's passing after a very long and eventful life will leave all of us saddened, his memory will warm our hearts and gladden our spirits because he left us a legacy of hope and love. I have known William since the early seventies. He has been my friend, mentor and when I needed it - critic. As a recent widower I can tell Imogene and the family, you will never get over his loss, but in time you will get through it, and enjoy the warmth of the wonderful memories you created.

*Dean Fink, Ancaster Ontario*

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**Dean Fink** - April 09, 2024 at 12:23 PM

DS

*Amen, Dean, such an apt connection.*

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**Dr. Jamie Spikes** - April 09, 2024 at 04:56 PM

KA

*Yes, Dean, you are right. William was a bright light in our lives and our memories of him will never be eclipsed.*

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**Kate Asbill** - April 11, 2024 at 09:34 AM

GJ

*Dean, beautiful tribute!*

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**Guarino Judy** - April 14, 2024 at 09:41 AM

JM

“*Dr. Purkey was a kind gentle and inspiring leader. I appreciated his emails and welcoming leadership style. His passing is a very sad loss, but his impact will live on.*

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**Jude Matyo-Cepero** - April 09, 2024 at 11:00 AM

JJ

“*I only knew Dr. Purkey for a few short years, but he made a big impression on me. Gracious. Kind. Supportive. Intelligent. Inspiring. Engaged. I suspect he was communicating with and building up others right up until his last days. We can all take notes on how to be a better human from William Purkey.*

*Jonathan*

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**Jonathan Jackson** - April 09, 2024 at 10:53 AM

KF

“ I will miss my dear friend William! We met when I moved to Tallahassee and quickly became great friends. We had lunch together and happy hour on the back porch with our wives. His wit, charm, humor, and good attitude are unreplaceable. He and Imogene were the cutest couple, and their daughter Cynthia and husband Jim are wonderful.

He would always say to me, let's talk shop! For someone who retired from such a memorable career as an educator, he still was curious how things were. That shows the passion he had for teaching and student development.

Until we can break bread again and have that cold Yuengling, you will be in my thoughts and heart my dear friend!

Keith

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Keith E Ferguson - April 09, 2024 at 10:29 AM

RC

“ RIP

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Richard Choi - April 08, 2024 at 11:22 PM