

# Tribute to Charles Huffer, FAC '69-'87

by Sarah Lewkowicz '79 and Rick Martin '77

Many will remember Mr. Charles Huffer as a math teacher at BAHS during the 1960s-1980s. He was an iconic teacher of algebra, trigonometry, and calculus.

While Mr. Huffer was well-educated and an excellent math teacher, less well-known were his roots in Arkansas, his service in the Army, and his many hobbies.

Mr. Huffer's sister, Kay Price, recalled the early years with Charles while they lived in Haven, AR:

*"Charles, also known as "Sonny" to family, was the oldest sibling and was always studious, smart, and insisted on classical music in the home. He played clarinet and was a member of the school band. He also had a keen interest in model airplanes, which we built and flew at the local park. He was also a practical joker and loved to scare me by popping*

*out of hiding places."*

When Charles was in 12th grade, he moved in with his grandmother in a nearby town.



Charles on right, age 11.

After this newfound independence, he announced he would be known as "Charles" from that time on – not Sonny!

Charles excelled in music and academics. He earned a music scholarship to college, 1956-1960, where he played solo clarinet in the band and was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity.

Mr. Huffer was proud of his service in the Army, starting with service in the Arkansas Army National Guard after high school in 1956. He later went to the Army Language School in the Presidio of

Monterey, studying German. That resulted in assignment to the U.S. Army Security Agency (USASA) in Berlin, where he served in the 78th Special Ops Unit, 1961-1963. This was a critical time, as Berlin was in a state of crisis; the Berlin Wall was built just after he arrived. Due to Mr. Huffer's linguistic skills and special operations training, he worked at "Field Station Berlin" at Teufelsberg, a highly-classified site.

After he left the Army in 1963, he returned to the U.S., where he spent the next five years pursuing his love for math. He earned a BA and an MS in Mathematics, taught high school math, and earned a teaching position at Northwestern State College in Alda, OK. He then returned to Berlin in 1968.

During the next 19 years in Berlin, Mr. Huffer was one of three math teachers at BAHS, and often taught advanced, college-prep math. During his free time, he was the high school tennis coach, played in the Berlin Britzer Blas-Orchestra, and was the principal clarinetist in the Berliner Arzte Orchestra. He was also active in the Mensa association.

A student at BAHS once asked about a ring on his finger. He claimed no recollection of how it got there. After the student complimented Mr. Huffer on his handsome appearance and attractive qualities, he replied, "For many years a good part of the female population shared your opinion of my appearance. That sure made things easy! Such behavior had its

risks but it was ever so fun!"

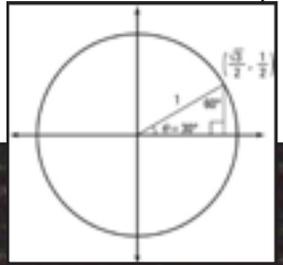
Mr. Huffer returned to the U.S. in 1987, but Berlin was always the city he loved. In fact, Charles frequently visited his German girlfriend, Ute Hoefig, in Berlin.

In his retirement, Charles continued his love of learning. He was a keen reader and would learn everything he could about a topic. His interests included birds, butterflies, travel, music, religion, and networking across the world through his Amateur "Ham" radio call sign NY2X.

Mr. Huffer also had a great interest in Unidentified Flying Objects – UFOs. He would regale students with stories about UFO sightings and other unexplained phenomena. He was quite well-known and a long-standing member of the Mutual UFO Network.

It has been ten years since Mr. Huffer passed. We dedicate this tribute to Mr. Huffer – a life underscored by an enduring quest to teach and share his love of learning. Without a doubt, he left a legacy of students who bear the fruit of his efforts. With fond remembrance and in honor of a life well-lived –

**"Thank You, Mr. Huffer!"**



# Personal memories

**Mr. Bluem, FAC '69-'94:** Charles Huffer and I shared a strong friendship over the years, borne of talks while we were teaching at BAHS and regular contact when he returned to Arkansas. The strongest impression I have was that he was a great teacher! He had an incredible intellect and used that to pursue his passion in math and inspire students. Equally important to him was his time in the U.S. Army and he talked about that as much as he did his teaching experiences. It gives me great satisfaction to know the Berlin Brats Alumni Association Newsletter is doing this tribute to Charles Huffer. BAHS was certainly a good high school thanks to Charles Huffer and many others, and because it was behind the iron curtain, it was a most unique high school experience. Thanks to all who keep this very special and unique BAHS experience alive!

**Joe Lewkowicz '76:** Mr. Huffer was one of the good guys. But when I first met him, I did not realize it yet, and wished him a swift and sudden reassignment to the hot place. Why? At the end of my freshman year, he brought his class of 7th and 8th grade squirrels into our math class for a contest. He would select a problem from our textbook and when someone had an answer, they would raise their hand. It was a humiliating ½ hour. On every question, all their tiny hands instantly shot up, and we sat silent. They even answered questions from chapters far ahead of us - shame, nothing but shame, eternal shame.

After thinking it over, I realized that he must be an extraordinarily talented math teacher and decided to take only math courses he taught. It was a lot of work, but worth it.

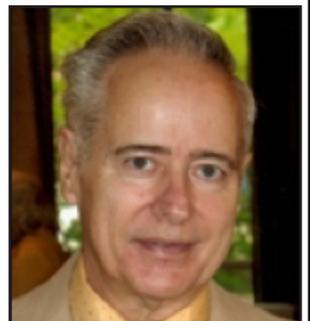
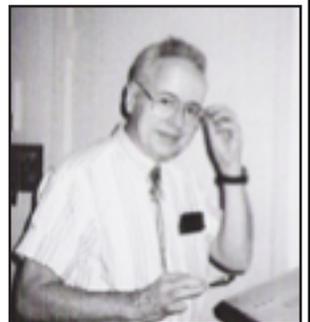
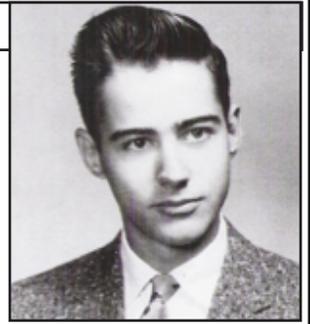
The next year, a week from summer vacation, he gave us a break from math by reading out loud from a gift he had just received. The book, *Letters from Earth* by Mark Twain, was

published posthumously. Over the next few days, Mr. Huffer read his favorite parts to our alternating shock and delight. He had a rare gift. It seemed as though he was speaking extemporaneously. I will never forget him walking around the classroom with the book in his hand, his face shining with delight. I don't remember the math we toiled over anymore.

Then there was the time a Young Earth Creationist spoke after school. The basic premise was that the Earth was created less than 10,000 years ago. During the question-and-answer period, Mr. Huffer appeared and loudly asked a long-winded question. How, if this timetable was correct, could the dinosaurs have survived the deluge? The dimensions of the ark being well known, there would have been no room on board for two of each and fodder, and they would probably have eaten all the other animals. The lecturer paused, and then answered that the dinosaurs didn't need to be on the ark because they could float. Mr. Huffer was delighted with this answer and asked no more questions.

**Mike Hannah '77:** I've thought a few times about Mr. Huffer over the years. He left an impression. I got to Berlin in '72 and left in '76. I remember his green sweater and black-rimmed glasses, and that he was always on top of the subject. He also facilitated the student astronomy club. One cold night we were on the football field for some star gazing and there were maybe ten of us. In the distant sky there was a light that twitched on/off slowly as it zigzagged away from us. That was all Mr. Huffer needed to test our objectivity. It turned into small group discussions on what did you see? And then a discussion from the group on what it was. I don't remember the consensus, but I think it was just a helicopter skipping across the sky with a flashing warning light. I think spaceships did come up as a possibility. :) He got me interested and that's what counts.

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Column, top to bottom: At Arkansas State College, 1956 and again in late 1950s; Army recruit, late 1960s; BAHS math teacher, 1970s; retired life in Springdale, AR; Emeritus Professor Huffer with Berlin Brigade pin. Above: Mr. Huffer's headstone at Carlisle Cemetery in Carlisle, AR. He designed the headstone himself, with emblems from his life, including the Berlin Brigade patch, Berlin Lawn Tennis Club, Army Security Agency, Defense Language Institute, and Army medals.

## *Personal memories,* con't from page 21

**Rick Martin, '77:** Mr. Huffer and I had a teacher-student relationship that evolved over the years to be a strong friendship. He challenged me in math that ultimately led to me pursuing a major in mathematics at the USAF Academy. He also inspired me as a life-long learner. Throughout the years we had many phone calls and exchanged letters on topics from veterans' issues, UFOs and aviation ... to often passionate discussions on politics and religion. I will never forget the long "farewell" conversation we had by phone a few weeks before he passed in December 2008. Heart-to-heart. Poignant. Memorable.

The reason Mr. Huffer was a great teacher? He was passionate in the classroom about learning – not being distracted by administrative details. He had high standards and expected the same from students. He cared about where students were in their life journey and how he could facilitate achieving their goals. God Bless the memory of Charles A. Huffer ... and all the teachers in our lives who dedicate their lives to inspiring life-long learners.

**Julie Ely-Jones '79:** He was an absolute character and a great math teacher who managed to find a way to make a very dry subject interesting. I recall he must've been one of the first adopters of the hand-held calculator – he used to brandish this whiz-bang, sophisticated Texas Instruments scientific calculator at a time when no one we knew even owned one! Mr. Huffer was my first experience with the quintessential nerd (and I use this term in the nicest way possible)! I eventually became a research scientist nerd

when I grew up, so have been surrounded by such folks all my life – he certainly paved the way for me to think outside the box and I am grateful to him for that!"

**Sarah Lewkowicz '79:** He was a great math teacher with a keen sense of humor and pushed us to the limits of learning, including allowing programmable calculators in class so we didn't spend all our time doing long-hand multiplication and could advance to learning spherical trig and calculus. I remember him taking Vitamin C pills long before it was fashionable. With his encouragement, I entered a high school science competition and presented a speech at the Max Planck Institute. I can still hear him in class calling me "Sayrah Lukes" in his Southern drawl. I was very glad to reconnect with him in his final years of life and helped him with some of his projects, including extensive research on actress Irene Dunne, with whom he was fascinated. What a special and unique human being! I am so grateful to have been a student of his.

**Larry Speer '83:** I had Mr. Huffer for three years in a row at BAHS. I remember playing chess against his chess machine. Yes, even back then there were computer programs for playing chess. I still remember a gem of advice Mr. Huffer gave me one day: "You can get a great education no matter where you go. You just may have to work harder at some places than others." Mr. Huffer's math education really helped me succeed with a heavy math workload at the USAF Academy. Many thanks from a grateful Berlin Bear!