



Quarterly

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Berlin Brats celebrate Homecoming

By Maggie (Ellithorpe) Stafsnes '63

The only thing higher than the temperatures and humidity in Berlin July 27 – 30, 2006, were the spirits of the Berlin Brats attending the first Brats Reunion held in Berlin. For many it was the first time they'd returned to Berlin since school days. It took no time at all to reconnect with classmates even though for some over 40 years had past since they'd last seen each other. Squeals, hugs, huge smiles, and laughter rang through the lobby of the Steglitz International Hotel as friends recognized others who were registering for the exciting weekend of festivities.

Over 230 students who had attended one of three schools established for children of military personal and government stationed in Berlin from 1946 – 1994 came to the reunion. Twenty-eight former faculty member, family members and friends brought the total attendance up to 401. Jean (Crews) Derry'48, who told about being driven to school in an ambulance, was there along with Marianna (Lieurance) Mounsey '50, who told about ambassadors' children coming to school in limousines. There was at least one representative from every class of the '60's and '80's. The class of '85 had the most attendees with 23. The last class to attend school in Berlin in '94 was represented by Stephen Rippelbeck.

Many of the stories circulating during the three days had a similar ring – arriving in Berlin feeling lost, missing friends and former schools, and having no idea of what was facing their fathers. Upon entering Berlin American High School they immediately became members of a family of teenagers with vagabond lives just like theirs and discovering that friendships made during their years at BHS and their time there were some of their fondest memories. How easily the years in between their last encounters melted away and how vividly the memories of school years in Berlin came flooding back.



Photo by Bryan Duckett '84

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Berlin Brats celebrate Homecoming *(Continued from page 1)*



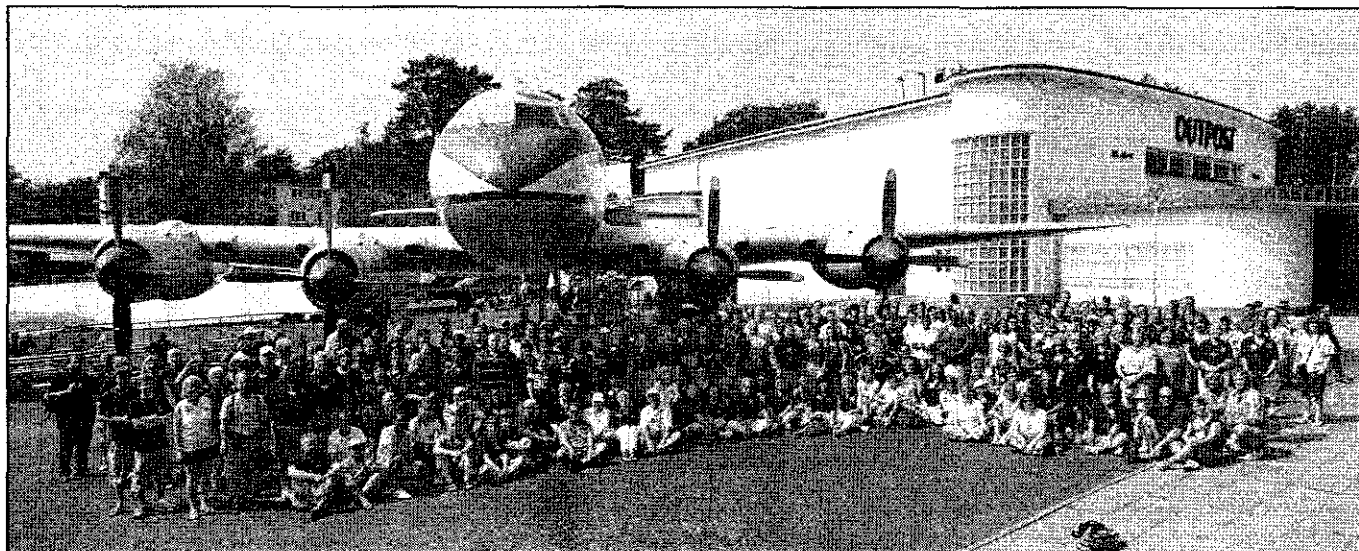
For many, the first activity was a bus tour of Berlin. Memories poured forth in excited voices as classmates road by familiar places in Dahlem, the Kurfursten-damm, the Kaiser-Wilhelm Memorial Church, the Victory Column, the Reichstag, and then the Brandenburg Gate. For many, the Wall, a symbol of the cold war which stood from 1961 to 1989, had prohibited them for entering East Berlin. Walking freely through the gate and into a reunited city was a tremendously emotional experience, and sharing that in the presence of former classmates was too good to be true. Seeing the extensive rebuilding of East Berlin and development of a united Berlin into one of the most impressive international cities in the world was thrilling to observe. Visiting Checkpoint Charlie, where many had solemnly observed world history as it unfolded, filled the hearts of many former students with pride for the dedication of their parents and a renewed sense of patriotism.

Later, while watching the documentary, "Brats: Our Journey Home", memories again poured forth as Berlin Brats were taken back to their childhood. Discussions continued throughout the weekend about how the film did or did not relate to their Berlin experiences. Almost everyone agreed that their lives were deeply affected by these experiences and were a big factor in determining their direction in their adult years.

The first day ended with a "Welcome Reception" at the hotel. The noise level was well above recommended decibels as groups of former classmates got higher on memories, each other, good food and great German beer. Teachers were honored and the newly remade school flag was presented. Diane (Green) Kempton '72, who won the design competition as a 7th grader, explained the contest, her win and the design, and Bill Planz '71, who was featured in the yearbook parading the flag in to see the Astronauts at Templehof back in '69, paraded the flag into the reception. There was also a 20 minute Berlin Wall Presentation about the Wall's purchase, transport and donation to AOSHS last spring. After the reception many Brats headed off to the Brandenburg Gate for pictures, or went out to dinner with long lost friends, or headed to bed to try to recover from jet lag.

Friday, July 28th was "School Spirit Day" and the Dahlem area of Berlin was inundated with the Berlin American High School colors of maroon and white. For many the return to their former high school was the highlight of the reunion. Although the names have changed, the schools are very much like they were 12 – 60 years ago. Voices could be heard ringing in the halls once again, but instead lots of teenagers there were lots of adults finding their former lockers, remembering assemblies, the rooms of favorite and not so favorite teachers, lunchrooms, locker rooms, athletic events, ad infinitum. The memories were further enhanced at the opening of a new exhibit at the Allied Museum, the former military "Outpost Theater" entitled "Berlin American High School 1946-1994".

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Berlin Homecoming (Continued from page 12)

The special exhibition of memorabilia collected from former teachers and students was designed like a class room, with photos, yearbooks, letter jackets, documents, and other items covering the walls and desks. Many recognized themselves and their classmates and the stories and memories continued. The official opening began with speeches by Florian Weiss (American Curator of the Allied Museum), Karin Schubert Vice-Mayor of Berlin), Peter Claussen, (Cultural Attache of the U.S. Embassy), Diane (Green) Kempton '72 (AOSHA Board Member), and Katrin (Lindroth) Planx '71 (Berlin Brats Project Leader for the Exhibition) and then the official ribbon was cut. Two panel discussion made up of a teacher and a student from each decade allowed everyone to fill in the blanks of the years they were not in Berlin – a devastated city that had 65% of its buildings destroyed in WWII and the Berlin Airlift in the 40', the workers' strikes in the 50's, the building of the wall in the 60's, the terrorist bombings in the 70's, the opening of the wall in the 80's, and the end of the American military presence in the early '90's. Just before the second panel began, Jasper Kump '87 gave an impromptu singing of the National Anthem, and emotions soared. The day ended at the German-American Volksfest which has been held on the same ground (the former post football field) since it was introduced as a fundraiser for the AYA in 1961.

The culmination of this incredible reunion was a cocktail party and dinner/dance in the hotel's banquet room. Seated at the big round tables were friends who no outsider could have imagined had not had been together for decades. Gleaming faces, cameras flashing, endless chatter, and then the music began and the dance floor filled with "teenagers" dressed like adults, the dances of each decade returning to Berlin one more time. The classmates of Berlin American High School had come "home" at last. Their time in the "Outpost of Freedom" would be remembered by all of them until the end of their lives and documented forever in history books.

A very special thanks to Jeri (Polansky) Glass '72, Director of the Berlin American High School Alumni Association, Katrin (Lindroth) Planz '71, Cate Speer '85, and Florian Weiss for their incredible efforts to provide 60 years of Berlin Brats with the reunion of a lifetime!

Who said you can't go home again?

Interviewees wanted for book

Mary Edwards Wertsch, author of the non-fiction book *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*, is looking for DoDDS/DoDEA teachers to interview for an upcoming book.

Wertsch, who founded a publishing company (www.brightwellpublishing.net) specializing in books that explore military brat cultural identity, plans to write a book aimed at current educators and counselors whose work with military children would be easier if they understood more about this unique group. The book is not a history of DoDDS. It will be focused on military brat traits, needs, strengths, and issues.

Wertsch would like to hear from teachers, current and retired, who have stories to tell shedding light on any of those things. She has a list of questions she can send as well. Teachers living within reasonable driving distance of St. Louis, and in a few other locations, can be interviewed in person; others are invited to write up their responses or, in some cases, be interviewed over the phone.

"The goal," Wertsch said, "is to make available a book that will be of real assistance to teachers, counselors, and—most especially—to the military children who can benefit from mentors who truly understand them.

If you are interested, please contact Mary by e-mail at publisher@brightwellpublishing.net, by phone at 314-662-2736, or by mail at Brightwell Publishing, P.O. Box 16171, St. Louis, MO 63105.



Curtis Carter, parent of Betty, class of 1972, and graphic artist, Susan Sams, class of 1985, created the Berlin Postage Stamp by incorporating the Berlin High School mascot with the Berlin City Flag.