

# BERLIN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL

to travel 12 hours by military 'duty' train to play a rival American high school elsewhere in West Germany.

There were fun times as well. The school had the extra activities of most high schools - they were just contained behind the Wall. The AYA Teen Center in the American community was the focal point for high-schoolers, with weekly dances, pool and ping-pong tables, a snack bar and music, from doo-wop in the '50s through the Beatles and Bee Gees in the '60s and '70s and on through the early '90s.

But always there loomed the gloom of the ever-present Cold War.

In 1986, Sandi (Hoosack) Trader '70, Cindy (Lee) Brewer '68 and Debbie (Hoosack) Jones '72, all three cheerleaders at BAHS at the same time, came up with the idea of holding a Berlin American High School reunion. The first reunion was held that summer in Virginia Beach, VA. From a hand written list of names and addresses an astounding number of 198 people showed. More than 300 of the 'Berlin Brats' - as in military brats who lived in Berlin - registered for the latest reunion, now held every few years at spots around the USA since 1986.

When the Wall came down in 1989, a military drawdown slowly began, and the school was closed five years later.

Ogden Lazenby taught at the high school for 19 years, from 1975 until it closed. As he walked out the door for the last time, he was overwhelmed with sadness.

"I knew that it was the end of an era, that there would never be another time like it, that it was the end, forever," Lazenby, who attended his first reunion of the Berlin Brats this year, nodded his head, "It's something you have to experience to understand."

"I don't consider these my high school buddies. I consider them my family." ☉



All photos: Berlin Brats

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## BERLIN BRATS

### A unique group organizes reunions

It was a special time and a special place: Berlin during the Cold War. The children of American military personnel and diplomats there during those six decades share today a special bond.

"We had each other, and that's all we had," said Jeri Polansky of Phoenix, class of '72 and executive director of the high school's alumni association. "We were isolated from every body else, and you either made friends or very quickly you became a very lonely person. I think that's why we're still so bonded."

"We took care of each other, and it didn't matter if your father was a private or a general," said Charlie Warnock of Tampa, Fla., who attended the school from 1958 to 1963 and witnessed the construction of the Berlin Wall.

The Berlin American High School opened in 1946 to serve the children of military personnel, U.S. State Department officials, and other Americans stationed in Berlin to help with the postwar re-building of Germany. Like most military families, the students often moved from place to place. Few were lucky enough to stay at the school from start to finish.

After the Wall was constructed in 1961, life in Berlin became more constricted, almost surreal, with Soviet soldiers with guns, armed guards at check-points, and

tapped telephone lines. "We were told that everything we did would reflect on America," said Yhoshekia Loftin Lowe of Houston, class of '83. "If you mentioned that your dad was going to the field or was out of town, you might be giving (the Soviets) information about troop movement. Every time you picked up the phone, a voice would come on and say, 'This line is not secure.'" Someone, either a Soviet or American security officer, was always listening. Those who got on the "S-Bahn" metropolitan train controlled by the East Germans rather than the "U-Bahn" subway controlled by West German allies risked causing international incidents. Jeri Glass remembers the occasional daredevil - always a boy - who would hop on the S-Bahn and ride into East Germany, risking being stopped by guards, taken into captivity and grilled about his father's military activities.

"I knew what my dad did for a living (a Russian linguist with the Air Force)," Glass said. "And I could see them pulling my fingernails out one by one, torturing me until I told them what he did." In the faces of all this, the adults and teenagers at the Berlin school tried to continue a normal life as cheerleaders, athletes, yearbook editors, band members, faculty advisers and coaches. But they had

