

May 9, 2013

Re: Dr. Irwin Hoffman

The passage of time is the greatest determinant of the insight, influence, and effectiveness of an individual. Whether it is a politician, teacher, or parent, looking back through the magnification that time provides gives the details with 20/20 vision. As I look back with a vision of almost 40 years, the contribution of Dr. Irwin Hoffman, "a high school math teacher," "a tennis teacher," and a mentor like few others at the time are clearly in focus.

As a "math teacher," my involvement with Dr. Hoffman occurred in the computer room. I was privileged to actually begin this work before attending George Washington HS, through Computer Labs at the University of Denver (my brother [Alan] was paid to teach a class that I paid to attend). Little could I or anyone appreciate that we were involved in the beginning stages of technology that was going to revolutionize the world. Little did we know how the understanding of this technology would manifest itself and allow for advancement and achievements in ourselves in all categories of life.

Continually throughout life, I found myself going back to the core knowledge that was acquired through this exposure to computers. The comparison of the computer now sitting on my desk to the original equipment (PDP8, Olivetti, Hewett-Packard, Burroughs, CDC 6400, time share, teletypes, computer cards, punch tape) is inconceivable even in my own mind (these are now museum pieces). Through the years, I continually returned to the computer for tasks occurring in my profession of medicine (my children are amazed that Dad can 'program' a computer), running a business, and a hobby of digital photography.

The understanding of the development and progression of computers, their use and application, as well as their potential, is continually shared with my children. What a powerful and sharp picture, knowledge taught to a young student in the early 1970s, that goes on to advance, expand, and dominate society and easily transfers with the same excitement and relevance to that young student's children forty years later.

But there is more to the story of Irwin Hoffman. The focus of many teachers is in the classroom. I was one of the very fortunate students for whom Irwin Hoffman was as much a mentor outside the classroom. Early in high school, Irwin made me a 'manager' of a tennis shop. He provided similar other opportunities to other students, allowing them to experience challenges and responsibilities with both successes and failures. But the growth and personal development occurring in the process and the skills carried forward provided the strength to take on the challenges of life with confidence and character. This was an exceptional experience from an exceptional mentor, which has never been reflected or measured by a report card from a school.

Looking back through my life, through the glasses of time, reveals an individual teacher/mentor/person, larger, sharper, and more prominent than the others, laying the foundation for years of growth and development, years of education and self-improvement, and acquisition of the skills for a lifetime. I am grateful for the opportunity to have received these gifts early in my education from Dr. Irwin Hoffman, these gifts that have lasted a lifetime, that I have continued to build upon and will pass down to my children and likely continue forward to their children. Wishing Dr. Irwin Hoffman the best and thanks.

Mark Frank  
George Washington HS, Class of 1974