

### Barry Honsel

In seventh grade I had a very bad experience with math. I didn't like math, and I was afraid of it. Then, in eighth grade algebra, I learned that while math was challenging, it could also be fun.

Barry Honsel had a booming voice, especially when excited or enthusiastic. More important, he had a sense of humor. He would walk the aisles, checking our work. He made us present our homework on the blackboard and lead the class through our process in solving a problem. Students could see where they might have made mistakes. Mr. Honsel would offer extra credit to those who could teach the class a new algebra skill. In his classroom, you had to be engaged from the time you walked in until the bell rang. High engagement = high achievement.

He was ahead of his time in encouraging girls who excelled in math and science to consider careers that would use those skills. It was the 1960s, and the national push for girls to pursue STEM careers didn't start until the '80s. One in our class became a doctor, another an engineer, another a medical technician. In the '60's students didn't discuss their home lives. Mine was often in chaos, and school felt safer than home. Little did Mr. Honsel know he was a stabilizing force in my life as my family was falling apart.

He mentored students as adviser to the National Junior Honor Society and new teachers in best teaching practices. He tutored at-risk students before and after school. He even offered an optional 8 a.m. class in slide rule, which was going to be so important to us in future courses like physics. The slide rule has gone the way of the buggy whip, but I still know how to use one.

He laid groundwork for advanced high school and college coursework. I flew through college algebra. I was the star of the class – which I found amusing – and could tutor other students. Professors asked, “Where did you go to school, and who was your algebra teacher? . . . Well, that explains a lot.” In 1999 Mr. Honsel won the Howard Klopp Award for Exemplary Teacher from Cedar Crest College.

When I became a fourth grade teacher, too often I saw colleagues putting math on the back burner and telling students they really didn't like math. I used the Honsel method: Students presented their problems on the blackboard and then explained their process in solving the problem. “Math problems are like puzzles that need to be solved.” Years later, as a Director of Assessment, I needed to show how district assessments could predict student success on state tests. A director in our regional lab in San Francisco began to explain: “Do you remember  $Y = Mx+B$ ?” “Of course, slope intercept.” “Yes, that's what you need to know to figure out predictions. You must have had an amazing math teacher to remember that formula from so many years ago.”

I had.

*Janice Florey*