

Dr. Hans Klaustermeyer

1940-2017

Principal

German International School Washington DC



Books. Books about books

Anyone who takes a look at the library of the former principal of the German School Washington will immediately know who or what Dr. Hans Klaustermeyer was passionate about. The room in his house, located in the North German lowlands between Bremen and Bremerhaven, is still literally brimming up to the ceiling with books. Among them are crime novels as well as a lot of antiquarian books such as an entire Brockhaus encyclopedia, which makes the heart of every book lover beat faster.

Reading was as important as water for the man who died in 2017 at the age of 76. Not just books, but newspapers and magazines like *Der Spiegel* were also part of his daily reading. It was always his desire to learn something new, to expand his knowledge, and not only to acquire this knowledge, but also to pass it on, and that is what this native of Bremerhaven made into his profession.

The exchange with the students -- not only teaching the subject matter in the most exciting and entertaining way possible, but also learning

from them and hearing about their everyday lives and interests: That was what Hans Klaustermeyer enjoyed most about his teaching career throughout his life.

As a newspaper article in *Bremerhaven's Nordsee-Zeitung* put it in August 2003, the summer of his return from Washington to his old home: "When he was 63 years old, Klaustermeyer could think about retirement, but he probably has too much inner drive for that. 'I still enjoy engaging with students,' he says." He enjoyed it so much that he extended retirement until 2007.

His professional career ended as director of Bremerhaven's Wilhelm Raabe School at the school where it had begun as a trainee teacher in the late 1960s: his professional life came full circle in the hometown where he felt affectionately connected throughout his life. Thus, he never tired of emphasizing that he was "*a Leher Butjer*." *Lehe* was an allusion to the district of Bremerhaven where Hans Klaustermeyer was born on August 27, 1940. *Butjer* is a colloquial term formerly used in northern Germany for small, wild boys.

Nevertheless, he was drawn away from that region at an early age: He went to Göttingen, Tübingen, Berlin, and Bonn to study German, history, and political science. He began his teaching career back home, but in 1978 the "call of the wide world" beckoned for the first time; it was time to say goodbye to northern Germany and begin a new chapter in his life as a teacher at the German School in Rome. In spite of many difficulties, it became an unforgettable seven years for the entire family, which now consisted of his wife and two children, and which formed the basis for a continuing longing for foreign countries. It is hard to believe that

this time could be topped. But Hans Klaustermeyer and his wife were thoroughly mistaken in this assumption.



During his years as teacher and principal at the GISW, he enjoyed having lunch with students and colleagues in the school's cafeteria.

After some professionally remarkable years, during which he rose to the position of senior secondary-school teacher (*Oberschulrat*) in his home country, the chance to move abroad presented itself again in 1996--this time to Washington as principal of the German International School (GISW). And if he and his wife Sabine had thought that Rome in 1985 had been their best time, they were to be proven wrong in the following seven years: "Bine and I experienced the best years of our lives in Washington," Hans Klaustermeyer later recalled in a short reflective history of his family.

Although that period was marked by some trials and tribulations, the positives outweighed and compensated the setbacks. Once again, it was, above all, the people who made these years up to 2003 so impressive: Colleagues, friends, and especially the encounters with the students. They quickly made contacts in their new adopted country, some of which developed into deep friendships that continue to this day.

In addition to these friendships, it was the country, its people, and their enthusiastic manner, among other things, that impressed the director and his wife and made them feel so

at home there. For Hans Klaustermeyer, the school was at the center of these years: it was not always easy to lead this large school abroad; there were also challenges. Decisions had to be made that did not always meet with everyone's approval. That's the life of a principal. But what always satisfied him was this work with the students. That's what he told the family about the most. That's what made his work so valuable to him.

When he talked at home about school life, it was usually not about any special achievements, but rather about how some students impressed him with their wit and originality. He appreciated humor very much, probably because he himself was blessed with a fine sense of humor.

It was not only humor that distinguished Hans Klaustermeyer: "For me, he was a man who could approach people," his older brother said, describing one of his characteristics. Getting in touch with people; talking to them; listening to their stories is what he enjoyed.

So it's hardly surprising that he became involved in the church in his youth and kept up his volunteer work later on. However, Hans Klaustermeyer was not only involved in school or church, but also in politics. For example, he continued to lead the small village of Hetthorn near Bremerhaven, his last place of residence, from 2006 to 2011. Social commitment and



Hans Klaustermeyer was rarely seen without a newspaper and a pipe; for him, both were his "daily bread."

justice, in particular, were always important to him in politics.

And finally, everyone who knew him associated two other things with him: His pipe ("My peep," as he liked to say) and his dress shirts and suit pants. He was rarely seen without them. Even in his northern German homeland, when mowing his lawn, his family could hardly ever see him without a (usually white) dress shirt.

However, he kept his sense of humor until the end: despite his brief serious illness from a neurological disease, his humor could not be taken away from him. And without question he will be remembered as such by all who knew him, as a contemporary with a fine sense of humor, a great deal of knowledge, and the gift of being able to listen to people.



The former principal maintained his ties to his northern German homeland throughout his life: Here in the garden of his last residence in Hetthorn, where he served as local councilman from 2006 to 2011.

My father, Hans Klaustermeyer, passed away very unexpectedly on May 20, 2017, but was released from an insidious illness. He has left a gap not only in the circle of his family, but also of his friends, which cannot be filled. All the more my mother, my sister, and I were very grateful for the numerous supportive condolences. In the same way, I was happy to comply with the request to write an obituary for this column.

Frederik Klaustermeyer
Rome, April 2022

