



Name

Argery Bitchakas Cooke

Year of Graduation

1973

In a few sentences, please provide a simple biography of what you've done since graduating from Port Allegany High School:

For more than 30 years, I had the privilege of working in an international environment, mainly at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, DC. I earned a B.A. degree in Modern Languages from the University of Notre Dame and an M.S. degree in Applied Behavioral Science from the Johns Hopkins University.

I provided expertise in policy development and implementation of human resources programs contributing to effective human capital management, including managing the Language Program at the IMF that became robust after world events created a more global environment in the late 1980s. In this context, I traveled to many countries, including living and working in Madrid, and was offered the additional benefit of using my multilingual skills.

After retiring from the IMF in 2011, I accepted a position at George Washington's Mount Vernon as part of the supervisory team of the Guest Experience Division that manages customer service and large reservations. I welcome friends and families from Port Allegany to visit!

Where do you currently live?

Alexandria, VA, near George Washington's Mount Vernon.

Who was your favorite teacher in high school? Why were they your favorite?

Not too long after graduation, I came to appreciate the excellent education I had at PAHS in the early 1970s. All of my teachers were outstanding. While difficult for me to choose a favorite, I would qualify a few who influenced me behaviorally to achieve and succeed. Just to name a few, Judy Berasi, my English teacher and cheerleading coach, who taught me the importance of being competitively smart; June Dunn, who influenced my appreciation of music and theater; Robert Christensen, who constantly encouraged me to appreciate art; and Fay Zaidema, who gave me the confidence to become a near-native Spanish speaker. Of course, I also learned so much from all of my teachers in the STEM curriculum, who laid the foundation from which I built a deeper understanding of the financial world from both a personal and business perspective.

What is your fondest memory of Port Allegany High School?

My fondest memory is the sense of community that extended beyond the classroom. We all cared about each other and there was a strong sense of commitment to the threads that tied us together as part of PAHS--to every sport, performance, bonfire, parade, and the support we had to one another in times of happiness and need. I think this is a very unique experience of PAHS.

On a more personal note, the most pronounced experience was when our junior class prepared the prom for the seniors in 1972--our class gathered at the Hotel Butler's old dining room (my dad's, Jimmy the Greek) to paint the posters for the decorations and the paint on the wall remained there throughout the years until the Hotel Butler was razed. Those drawings and the aroma of the special Texas Hot sauce that my mother, Nora, would make, permeated throughout time. These moments, and the faces of my classmates, are etched in my memory.

The PAHS Gator pins and patches that I kept still make me smile.