



# ESL MiniConference

**Professor Emeritus Donald Huffman**

**A Life Well Lived**

**By Robb Scott**

My mother was the fourth of seven children in her family, and grew up in Pittsburg, Kansas. Their father was a high school biology teacher and their mother was a homemaker who canned a lot of fruit and vegetables to help the family enjoy good nutrition all winter long. On cold nights, each child carried to bed a red brick that had been heated at the fireplace, and wrapped in a cloth holder, something like today's oven mitts, to keep them warm under the covers until body heat took over.

Born next after my mother was Don Huffman, one of her five brothers, who loved sports while growing up and worked at an ice house while he was in high school, picking up heavy blocks of ice with giant hooks and transporting these to various restaurants around town on his daily route. My Uncle "Mick," as everybody in the family called him, played basketball in high school and college, and was so tall that he was excused from participation in the Korean War because he did not make uniforms that big. Uncle Mick studied history and social science in college, then earned a masters in plant pathology at Kansas State University, and a Ph.D. in plant pathology at Iowa State University, before eventually arriving with his wife, Aunt Maxine, also a Ph.D., at Central College in Pella, Iowa, where they settled and established themselves as scholars and community members over a span of several decades.



When my mother and father died in October of 1975, Uncle Mick and Aunt Maxine, along with nearly all of my mother's other brothers and her sister, Lillian, traveled to Sterling, Kansas, for the funeral. Aunt Lillian is now the remaining sibling of those original seven Huffman kids who grew up on South Georgia Street in Pittsburg, Kansas; Uncle Mick passed away earlier this week, and his children, my cousins Jim and Kim, are making arrangements for a springtime family gathering to celebrate a lifetime of happiness, hard work, friendships, and accomplishments--a life that made a positive difference in the lives of many hundreds of students, colleagues, friends, and relatives.

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**The Huffman Family: Jim, Maxine, Don, Kimberly**

I remember as a child when we always received at Christmastime "Dutch shoes" chocolates from Uncle Mick and Aunt Maxine, a cultural treat from Dutch heritage in Pella. One Christmas they sent something different, and the four of us Scott kids wrote them a thank-you note that also conveyed our hopes that they would switch back to the Dutch shoe chocolates for future holidays.

When our family visited their home, I remember they had a very high mantle where only 6' 8" Uncle Mick could reach up and take down art objects to show us from Costa Rica and other places they were beginning to visit a lot as part of their Central College activities.

I can also remember later visits, when little Pablo from Ecuador, uncle to my children who had not yet been born, was a sixth grader and spent all his time running everywhere throughout their house with our cousins Kim and Jim, who were about his same age.

I can remember on that visit drinking coffee in the early morning on a Saturday or Sunday and my Uncle Mick showing me an editorial that I think was from George Will, titled "Dazed and Confused," about the state of American youth at that time in the late 1970s.

Mick and Maxine were such consummate hosts. I remember a trip my family took to Des Moines for my wife to attend a two-day workshop, and our son, Bill, the youngest of my four children, was only about a year and a half old. I hadn't been sure about schedules and things, and only contacted my Aunt and Uncle in the evening of our first complete day in Des Moines. My e-mail prompted an immediate response and they insisted on driving over with Cousin Kim the next day and took us out to dinner at a very nice restaurant where Cousin Jim was the head chef. It was a short, fast, and unforgettable visit filled with wonderful conversation, another trait of their active, intelligent approaches to life.

Uncle Mick lost Aunt Maxine four years ago, and the celebration of her life at the memorial service was overflowing with friends, loved ones, and a community of people whose lives had been touched by her words and actions.

I saw Uncle Mick again in 2011 at Thanksgiving Dinner with our Huffman relatives in Altamont, hosted by Aunt Betty Huffman, the wife of another brother of my mother's and Mick's, Eldon (Ed), whose children and children's children filled that day with friendly, warm sentiments and conversations. I had last seen Aunt Maxine when she and Uncle Mick drove down from Iowa for Uncle Ed's funeral in the summer of 2008, and I remember at that time her handing out silk scarves from China to all the young cousins.

This fall of 2014 has been a tough season for losing very close Huffman relatives. Aunt Betty Huffman passed away in early November, really in the prime of life and feeling great about this year's bountiful harvest from her pecan trees, which she shelled by hand, as was recounted to me by her son, my cousin Curt.

Aunt Betty and Uncle Ed lived close to my folks during a certain period in the early stages of our family, when my older brother and sister were very young children and our father was studying, first at Pittsburg State Teachers College and then at University of Kansas Medical School. Curt was born in December the same year I was born just a few weeks earlier, in November.

My folks were also quite close to Uncle Mick and Aunt Maxine, and I know my father enjoyed talking with Uncle Mick--indeed everyone who ever met Dr. Donald Huffman (only nephews and neices still called him "Mick") shared that same enjoyment.

If you sent Uncle Mick an e-mail, you could be certain that his reply would be prompt and erudite. During my efforts to develop my academic career, he gave excellent advice and never wasted any words on fluff or what some might call "b.s." When I told him I was struggling with the load of grading associated with college teaching, his answer to me was that it was kind of like "washing dishes," which is not fun but a chore which must be done. Recently, earlier this fall, I sent him a poem I had written, and his first comment was "don't quit your day job."

I am going to share another e-mail from Uncle Mick, here below, that he sent after I sent him some photos from a short race my wife had run in nearby Schoenchen:

*Hi Robb, Meribel and Bill,*

*Thanks for sending along the info and photos from Schoechen, KS. I must admit that I have never heard of it before. My only visits to Hays were to play basketball against Ft. Hays State when I was attending Pittsburg State.*

*There were apparently many such little conclaves of German (and others I'm sure) settlers who had their own plans for building a new life in the Midwest. We have many such little places in Iowa, but most are not kept up very well, and not so attractive.*

*In Iowa most of the German imigrants were in the NE part of the state, and if prosperous, became centers of agricultural commerce. However, only a few such places have tried to make it a project to keep the area looking as it did earlier. One such village is Spillville, Ia where the musician Dvorak -not German but Czech I think- came and lived for several years, and where he wrote several well known classical music pieces. They have kept the little town and buildings in nice condition, and it is quite a tourist attraction. Too bad all little villages cannot have the same attractive buildings, etc. Our small Dutch towns in this area are not much to look at or visit.*

*I notice that Bill is now about as tall as Meribel, so he is really growing fast! Good photos, and my guess is that you had a nice visit there.*

*It's good that you are having time to learn about the history of the area, which I'm sure is interesting. Stay well and enjoy the family times together. That is a very important thing in these days when often our professional and business tasks take us away from family too much of the time.*

*Stay well, and keep in touch,  
Uncle Mick & Kim*

And here below is an example of Uncle Mick's exquisite use of the English language, with his trademark meticulously clear writing on any topic he found interesting, in this case the food in Hawaii during a year (1983-84) when their family lived and taught there on a faculty exchange.

*One could write almost endlessly about the food differences between Hilo and the U.S. in general. There we found more fresh fish, lots of dishes, taro root and poi ( a fermented taro root powder) which was widely eaten by Hawaiians, but which we found difficult to*

grow to like [One student I had, who came to the U.S. for Podiatry School brought along enough poi powder to last him for a full year. He felt he just could not live without having it every day!]. All sorts of fruit including mangos, bananas of many sorts, papayas, citruses, etc. were common, and Macadamia nuts were a specialty food produced there, which we loved. Even the McDonald's sold fried rice, and it was much in demand there. One of my friends in the Biology Dept. did quality testing of papaya juice for a commercial firm, so he had unlimited supplies of papaya juice which he gave to us, and we drank it cold and mixed it with other juices most of the time we were there. Milk and eggs were good, but more expensive in Hawaii. Bread was about comparable with the U.S., but some local types were available, and we like some of these whole-grained dark breads. We ate out occasionally and took advantage of the fresh fish of the many types available locally.

In an obituary at <http://news.central.edu/news-release/don-huffman-central-college-professor-emeritus-dies-at-85>, my uncle, Professor Emeritus Donald Huffman, was eulogized as a community member and Central College scholar who contributed significantly during a very productive life.

*In 1957, Huffman came to Central, where he later created the pre-health major with professor emeritus of chemistry Art Bosch — and helped design the Vermeer Science Center. He secured continuous research grants from 1961-1996 and served as president of the Iowa Academy of Science and the Association of College Undergraduate Biological Educators. Huffman and Maxine supported Central's Visiting Chinese Scholar Program, and they jointly received the Asian Achievement Award in 2005 for being "Asian Ambassadors."*

*After retiring, Huffman collaborated with Zhejiang University colleagues to write and edit all editions of the textbook "New College English." A best-selling text in China, the book won national honors in "Best Academic Work of the Year." Huffman also authored more than 30 journal articles and seven books — including a mycology textbook on mushrooms and other fungi in the Midwest, published 12 years after he retired.*

*At Central, the Huffmans' legacy includes the Huffman Faculty Award for Outstanding Support of Education, the Maxine Huffman Scholarship for students studying abroad and the International Student Loan Program.*

When my cousin Kim posted the news that her father had passed away Tuesday evening this week, she wrote it simply and eloquently:

*Rest in Peace, Dad, Donald M. Huffman, November 28, 1929 - December 16, 2014. He was your teacher, uncle, friend.*

**Remembrance by Robb Scott**

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**Hays, KANSAS**

**2014 ESL MiniConference Online**



