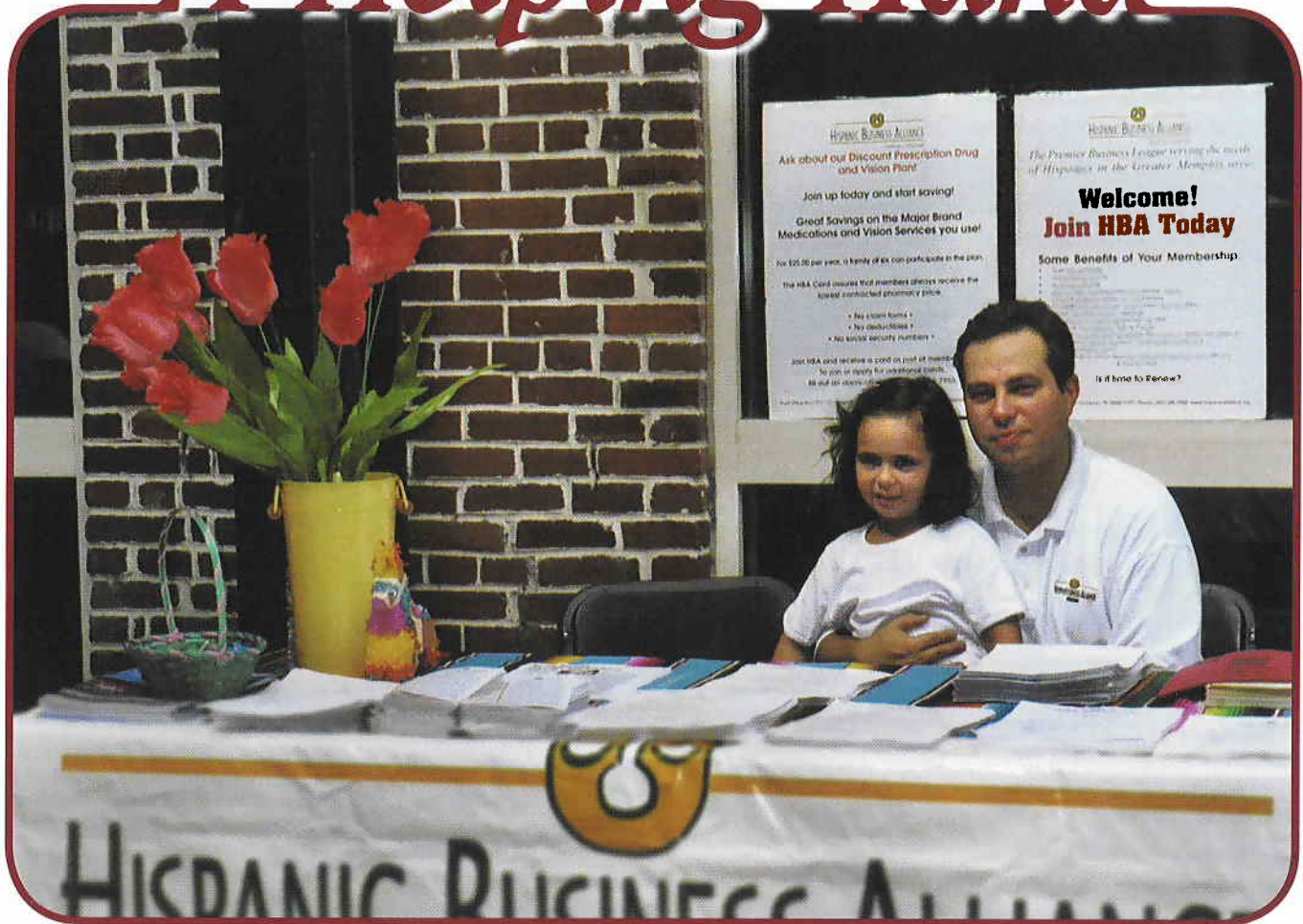


The Magazine of Memphis University School • March 2009

# MUS TODAY



# A Helping Hand



While working for the Hispanic Business Alliance, Chuck Blatteis enlists help from his daughter, Leah.

by Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

An undercurrent of international origin, born of historic tragedy and hope, flows within **Charles Blatteis '82**. It's an undercurrent that eventually led him out of the country to explore his family roots and then back again with a clearer understanding of what his life's work should be. With hard work and perseverance, he is achieving his goal of doing good while doing well.

Blatteis is a partner in the Burch, Porter & Johnson, PLLC, law firm in Memphis, and, earlier this year, he began his term as chairman of the board of directors of the Memphis Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

In his law practice, Blatteis focuses on international business law and immigrants' rights and is a referring or consulting attorney for various foreign consulates. He also is a member of the board of directors of the Memphis Regional Chamber of Commerce, the chair of the International

Business Council, and is the immediate past chairman of the Hispanic Business Alliance, Inc.

One might think Blatteis has the cushy, corporate life. But that's not how Chuck Blatteis thinks. The undercurrent won't let him.

Blatteis is a first generation American of Hispanic and Germanic descent, who lost "almost everyone" on his father's side of the family to the Holocaust. As Jews in Berlin, Blatteis' father and grandparents were forced to flee Nazi Germany, but not before his grandfather was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. His grandfather was released shortly after his grandmother secured tickets for the family's passage to Havana, Cuba, on the German ocean liner, *St. Louis*, on May 13, 1939.

The Blatteis family originally planned to emigrate from Germany to the United States, but, because of quotas, their

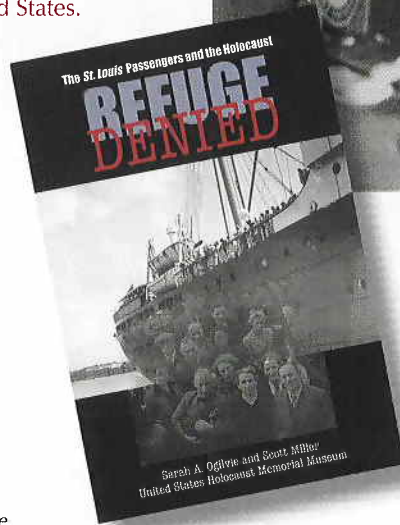
visas would not allow them immediate access to the United States. The family had planned to wait in Cuba, along with other Jewish families, until their visa numbers were called. When the ship reached Havana Harbor, almost all of the passengers were denied entrance to Cuba in an anti-Semitic propaganda move orchestrated by



As Jews in Nazi Germany, Chuck Blatteis' father (Clark, age 6) and grandparents (pictured above) were forced to leave the country and took passage on the *St. Louis*, the first leg of a long journey to the United States.

the Germans. Although the ship's passengers could see the lights of Miami, the ship was also denied entrance to the United States and Canada by both governments. The ship, carrying more than 700 passengers, most of whom were German Jews, then returned to Europe, where it was eventually allowed entrance into Antwerp, Belgium. The passengers were disbursed to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and England. In less than a year, however, all but Great Britain had been occupied by the Nazis, and the former *St. Louis* passengers once again were interned or on the run from the Nazis. The Blatteis family settled for awhile in Brussels until the Germans attacked, forcing them to flee again. They eventually found refuge in Casablanca, Morocco, before finally arriving in the United States in 1948, nearly ten years after the ship left Hamburg.

The family's journey on the ship, on what later became popularly known as the "Voyage of the Damned," is documented in the first chapter of a new book (pictured above), titled *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the*



Pictured on board ship in 1939, Clark Blatteis is the third child, center foreground looking down; his father is standing far right.

*Holocaust*, from the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. In effect, Blatteis' father was a refugee from age 6 to 16, until he came to the United States.

"He's a great example of someone who came here and overcame adversity," Blatteis said. "He's a tremendous example of someone who has made it on merit."

Now, Blatteis' father, Clark Blatteis, is a physiology professor at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine. He was a senior Fulbright-Hays Scholar and completed his postdoctoral work at the University of Oxford at Oxford, England.

Chuck Blatteis' mother, Yolanda, is Peruvian. His mother and father met when both were graduate students at the University of Iowa and married in 1958. After living internationally for a while, the family moved to Framingham, MA, in the 1960s, where Blatteis was born and then moved to Memphis when he was 2 years old. The family spent summers in Peru, Mexico, Germany, and other countries while Clark Blatteis conducted research and taught.

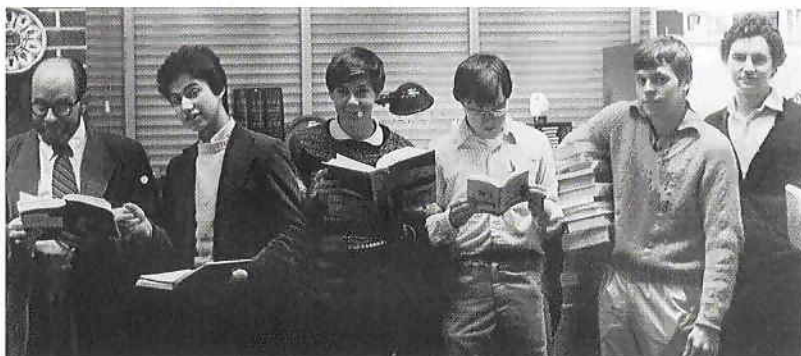
In Peru, Blatteis learned much from and about his mother's family, who were involved in business, civic, and military affairs. The cultural immersion at such a young age was invaluable, Blatteis said. "Even today, I feel like I can plug in internationally and feel at home."

And plug in he does. The second part of Blatteis' career and the undercurrent that guides his life is helping immigrants with legal issues here and abroad. Blatteis serves as a consulting attorney for the Mexican and Peruvian consulates and as a referring attorney for various European consulates. Recently, he represented the family of a Hispanic businessman in rural Shelbyville, TN, who was shot and killed by local police. Blatteis said

said he was never fully Peruvian, and when he was in the United States, he was never fully American, he added. "But, I felt good in both skins."

While a student at MUS, Blatteis said, he did not quite feel at home with his peers at first, although his experience with them was a good one.

"Initially, I didn't fit in, and I didn't like it," he said. "I didn't look like everybody else, and we weren't economically



Chuck Blatteis looks the part of his classmates' label, "the brain," in this picture of the Book Club from the 1980 MUS yearbook. Members were William Hatchett (faculty sponsor), Blatteis, Rob Woodbury, John Norwood, George Woodbury, and Bruce Robertson.



Chuck Blatteis says he comes in contact with several MUS alumni on a daily basis. In fact, at Burch, Porter, & Johnson law firm, 20 percent of the partners attended MUS. Besides Blatteis, the others are:

- Nathan Bicks '74**
- Scott Crosby '82**
- Porter Feild '83**
- Josh Lawhead '91**
- Jay Lindy '80**
- Allen Malone '59**
- DeWitt Shy '69**

wealthy. I was in the advanced class and was immediately categorized as 'a brain.' People wore different clothing than I did. I came in wearing bell bottoms and high tops. I didn't wear the Top Siders and Izods."

But he thrived.

"The teachers were great, the education was first rate, and the friendships I made were for a lifetime," he said.

He recalled some sound advice **William Hatchett**, his MUS homeroom teacher, gave him: "Follow your passion. Become the best at it. And the world will beat a path to your door." It's a goal he apparently has achieved.

After MUS, Blatteis graduated from Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and Tulane University Law School, working his way through both, as he did while a student at MUS.

"I had to have jobs at the same time I was in school," he said. "If I didn't have them, I wouldn't have made it financially. I'm a child of immigrants who are academics. The expense of sending myself and my sisters to high-priced, private schools was a challenge."

Yolanda Blatteis and children Beatrice, Elisa, and Chuck (in the stroller) take in the sights. Chuck Blatteis grew up in Memphis but spent many summers traveling, especially to his mother's native country, Peru, as seen here.

the consular practice door swings both ways, helping U.S. and foreign businessmen conduct business in the United States and abroad while also helping immigrants with their legal and civil rights needs.

"I see myself as a legal and cultural bridge," Blatteis said. "As a bilingual, bicultural, first-generation American and an attorney, I feel not only the opportunity to help, but also the obligation. If I don't do it, who else would or could? It's my identity."

But it was an identity that took awhile to form, he said. When he was in Peru, Blatteis

While his two sisters spent their third year of college abroad in Berlin and Paris, Blatteis chose to study in Quito, Ecuador, as an exchange student. There, he met his wife, Carmen, who was born in Spain. She was a student when he met her but became a successful historian and author in Ecuador before she left to marry Blatteis. She now teaches English as a second language to elementary school students in the Memphis City Schools.

Blatteis said his time in Ecuador was invaluable and highly formative. He interned on a project for the U.S. Agency for International Development and was able to see how the growth of businesses is “really the engine of economic development,” a concept he was inspired to implement in the United States.

After college, he was fortunate to spend several years working internationally in business and law for employers, such as International Paper, the world’s largest paper manufacturer, and Baker & McKenzie, the world’s leading global law firm. Yet, perhaps the most rewarding experiences for him came when he helped companies build businesses internationally.

“A great example is when I did a project high in the Andes Mountains in Cuzco, Peru, where my mother was born and my maternal grandfather had been a city councilman decades earlier,” Blatteis recalled. “It was during the middle of the El Niño weather phenomenon, and people were literally starving for lack of food, given that drought affected production on the coast and flooding rains regularly washed out the mountain roads preventing food from being delivered. We were able to help a local manufacturer in Cuzco obtain and finance equipment in the United States so he could mill and process the rather hard grains that grew at high altitude into a basic food staple that people could distribute on a large scale. Everyone came out ahead.”

After Blatteis’ daughter was born ten years ago, he decided to undertake less international travel and spend more time with his family. Blatteis returned to Memphis where his parents live to set down roots and practice international business law. He was surprised to find he was the first bilingual Hispanic attorney in private practice in Memphis

and that there were more than 100,000 new Hispanic immigrants since he had last lived here.

“I quickly found that the resources to deal with the new and large Hispanic population had a long way to go to adequately address the need,” Blatteis said. “When I attended MUS, I had been president of the Civic Service Club, which gave me insight and inspiration as to the value and importance of community service and outreach. Before returning to Memphis, my frequent international travel had made it all but impossible for me to get involved in just about anything of the sort. When I came back, the needs of the

Hispanic community were too great for me to ignore, and I got involved to help out and to serve to link the majority and Hispanic communities.”

Blatteis served as president of the local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for five years and as legal counsel



As an exchange student in Ecuador, Chuck Blatteis enjoyed a visit from his father.

While in Ecuador, Chuck met and married Carmen, who was born in Spain.



to various civic organizations from the League of United Latin American Citizens to the Society for Latin American Physicians. Eventually, his constructive civic work and his international legal practice caught the attention of Mexican, Peruvian, and some European consulates, as well as organizations such as the United Way and Leadership Memphis, on whose boards he also has served full terms. Thus, his “consular” practice was born alongside his civic involvement.

Currently, in addition to Blatteis’ work at the Fed, his civic involvement reflects this marriage of the international corporate world with the representation of immigrants.

At the same time, he chairs the International Business Council, which promotes international trade and direct foreign investment in the Memphis area. He also works as a board member with the Levitt Shell in Overton Park to bring ten free Latin music concerts a year to Memphis on Saturday nights and 40 other free music concerts from other genres annually.

Blatteis said he hopes Hispanics and the majority communities in Memphis will meet each other, “mix and mingle and see that we’re all human, and mutually benefit from our interaction.”

Now, Blatteis and his wife are raising their 10-year-old daughter, Leah, to be bilingual. “She is learning like I learned, by interacting with her family,” he said, “When

you think about it, our whole family line could have been extinguished. I hope I’m not going to let the opportunity they attained for me pass without making the most of it, and I am going to do my best to create that opportunity for others like me.

“I could have hidden out in corporate boardrooms,” Blatteis said, reflectively. “But I have not done that. It’s important for me to give back to the community. As a first-generation American, the American dream for me isn’t this strike-it-rich, Horatio Alger-type of goal. It’s the opportunity to advance as far as merit will allow in whatever field of endeavor is dear to an individual. That’s what is so good about the United States. Everyone gets a chance irrespective of their race, religion, family name, etc. It’s a meritocracy.”

## Federal Reserve Banking on Blatteis’ Leadership

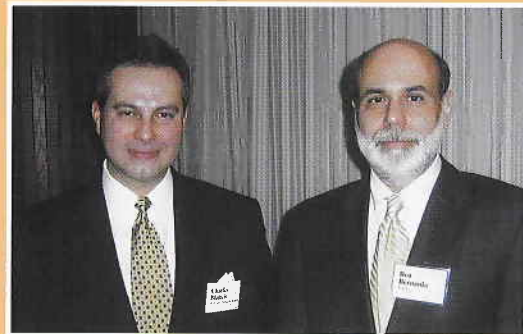
In January, Chuck Blatteis began his term as chairman of the board of directors of the Memphis Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. He was appointed as a director in 2007 by the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, whose chairman is Ben Bernanke. The significance of the role that the Federal Reserve, our central bank, plays in the economy of our nation and the world has recently been magnified by the current economic crises. A network of 12 Federal Reserve Banks and their 25 branches carries out a variety of Federal Reserve System functions, including operating a nationwide payments system, distributing the nation’s currency and coin, supervising and regulating member banks and bank holding companies, and serving as banker for the U.S. Treasury.

According to official Federal Reserve publications, “Boards of directors of the Reserve Banks provide the Federal

Reserve System with a wealth of information on economic conditions in virtually every corner of the nation. This information is used by the Federal Open Markets Committee (FOMC) and the Board of Governors in reaching major decisions about monetary policy (such policy includes setting the Federal Funds Rate, which affects all other interest rates in the United States and abroad).”

Information from directors and other sources gathered by the Reserve Banks is also shared with the public in a special report – informally called the *Beige Book*.

Blatteis explained: “Most economic information is ‘backwards looking.’ It is dated by its very nature. The data must first be collected, analyzed, and reported up the ladder by



Chuck Blatteis and Ben Bernanke

economists. Federal Reserve directors gather anecdotal information about economic conditions in our area [West Tennessee, Northern Mississippi, and Eastern Arkansas] that is ‘forward looking,’ in that we speak with community business leaders in advance of FOMC meetings and confidentially report on their future plans and perceptions of the direction of the economy. We present the Federal Reserve with early feedback as to the real world effects of economic policy with the hope of better informed decisions on monetary policy.”