Gary Chartrand was born on August 24, 1936 in the small town of Sault Ste. Marie (pronounced “Soo Saint Marie”) in the upper peninsula of Michigan, across a river from Canada. Although his parents valued education highly, none of his parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles ever finished high school, although his father later received his high school diploma through correspondence school.

Both parents worked for the telephone company. His father had many interests. He played semi-professional hockey, he played the piano in a band (although he could never read music), and had his own ham radio station (call letters W8PRL). In fact, he built his own radio receiver, even blowing glass for the tubes, and it worked. His father worked part-time for local movie theaters, playing his own music on the piano for silent movies. His parents loved the movies (especially musicals) and took Gary to the movies regularly from the age of 3. In fact, Gary was named for the movie actor Gary Cooper. They bought him comic books regularly, and he learned to read before attending school. He became interested in famous writers such as Charles Dickens, Alexander Dumas, and Victor Hugo, and their lives. When Gary complained to his mother that a story he was reading didn’t come out as he had hoped, she encouraged him to write his own story. His father was transferred to Lansing, Michigan, in 1949.

Although Gary was always interested in mathematics, he became fascinated with it while in junior high school in Lansing. His interest in literature, grammar, and mathematics continued throughout high school. During his senior year in high school, he was accidentally introduced to a stage production of the musical “South Pacific”. This was the beginning of a lifelong interest in musical theater, with a special interest in composers and lyricists. He had developed a strong interest in baseball as well, playing baseball in the summers and becoming a lifelong fan of the Detroit Tigers.

Since all of his high school friends went to Michigan State University (MSU), he went there too. Initially, he declared no major because he didn’t know what he should do with his life. His father eventually convinced him to major in chemical engineering so he could get a job when he graduated. The only part of engineering he enjoyed was mathematics and so he changed to a mathematics major. After receiving his only B in mathematics (in Calculus II, from Professor J. W. Gaddum), he decided he wasn’t good enough to major in mathematics and went back to having no major again. However, he enjoyed Calculus III so much, he switched back to being a mathematics major and this time stayed with it.

While a junior, he was invited to join the Pi Mu Epsilon Mathematics Honorary, which he did. He never missed a meeting and got to know the faculty advisor (and Chair of the Mathematics Department) J. Sutherland Frame, who encouraged Gary to apply for a graduate teaching assistantship, which he did. Gary received a B.S. in 1958. He missed only one class the entire four years, when he cut a class in French to watch the All Star Baseball Game on television.

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He earned an M.S. in 1960 and continued on towards a Ph.D. After a year or two, he decided he was studying to do well on exams and not to learn the mathematics, so he changed his approach. He started constructing his own exams and problems to try to determine what was important in the mathematics he was studying. This strengthened his interest in mathematics even more. In 1962 he was called into the office of the director of graduate studies asking him if he was ever going to specialize in some area. Gary said that he liked the courses he took but didn't see himself contributing to these areas. The director arranged for Gary to start taking reading courses beginning with functional analysis. He had the same reaction to functional analysis. All graduate assistants at MSU were required to attend every colloquium talk. That semester Professor Edward A. Nordhaus, a faculty member there, gave a talk about Ramsey numbers in graph theory. Gary had never heard of graph theory before but he was fascinated by it and asked Professor Nordhaus if he could take a reading course in graph theory from him during the following term. Nordhaus said that the only book on the subject that he was aware of was in German but he was willing to give Gary a reading course in lattice theory. Gary didn't know what to do but, as luck would have it, shortly afterwards he noticed an advertisement for a new book on graph theory and in English, written by Oystein Ore. Gary immediately ordered a copy and received it soon afterwards. When he got the book he leafed through it and noticed a reference to a paper written by E. A. Nordhaus and J. W. Gaddum (the professor who, at least temporarily, contributed to his leaving mathematics). When Gary showed the book to Professor Nordhaus and the reference to his paper (the only paper he had ever written on graph theory), Nordhaus said, “Let's both read the book.”

The following term (Winter 1963) Gary started reading the book. Eventually he encountered the concept of line graphs (called interchange graphs by Ore) and he asked Professor Nordhaus if he could study this concept for his thesis. Nordhaus agreed and Gary starting working on his thesis and learning graph theory at the same time. Gary came up with his own questions for his thesis but was unsure that the questions were interesting enough or the proofs were sufficiently deep. While working on his thesis, he had encountered the name Frank Harary several times, not noticing that he was a professor at the University of Michigan. Nordhaus said that he knew Harary and asked Gary if he would like to meet him. When Gary said yes, Nordhaus arranged a meeting in Ann Arbor. Harary asked Gary to bring along what he had written so far on his thesis.

Gary and Ed Nordhaus went to Ann Arbor in October 1963 and entered Angell Hall, home of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Michigan at that time. There were several ominous-looking ads posted around the Department, advertising a talk to be given by Frank Harary on Halloween. It made Gary feel uneasy about the meeting with Harary. Eventually, they located Harary's office and visited Frank for a 30 min visit. Despite the fact that Gary felt in awe of Frank, he liked him instantly. Frank asked Gary about his thesis and asked to see a sample of his writing. Afterwards, Frank said to Gary, “You'll do.” As it turned out, Frank had applied for a grant and requested funding for a “research associate” to assist him with a book he had planned to write (the well-known text *Graph Theory*). Frank offered this position to Gary for 1964–1965 provided the grant was funded. Gary accepted it on the spot. At the conclusion of their meeting, all three walked to where Frank had parked his car – in an area marked *Park at Your Own Risk*.

Early in 1964 there had still been no word on the possible awarding of the grant, but Frank was optimistic. Nevertheless, Gary felt he should apply for jobs. He had no experience of doing such things, but he wrote to seven schools in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio (not even knowing whether a position was available). He received two responses – surprisingly from the same city: Kalamazoo, Michigan. Kalamazoo College didn't even interview Gary but offered him an Assistant Professorship at an annual salary of $7200 with a three-course teaching load per semester. Western Michigan University (WMU) brought Gary in for an interview but required no talk from him. During his visit, he was offered an Assistant Professorship at an annual salary of $8700 with a two-course teaching load per semester, with the added bonus of the expectation of a Ph.D. program in mathematics within five years. While he turned down the offer from Kalamazoo College, he decided to think about the offer from WMU. He contacted Frank Harary again: Still no news but Frank remained optimistic. The opportunity to work with Frank Harary seemed so exciting to him that he decided to gamble and turned down the offer from WMU. Finally, in May 1964 Gary was informed that the grant had not been funded. Gary received his Ph.D. in June 1964 but had no position for the following Fall, although he was offered the opportunity to teach two courses at MSU during the summer, namely set theory and graph theory (the first time graph theory was ever taught there). Only by accident did he happen to encounter a faculty member from WMU who was visiting MSU. When he asked Gary where he would be in the Fall, Gary explained what had happened. Then Gary was told that the position at WMU had evidently never been filled. Everyone who had been offered the position had declined it. Gary called the Chair of the Mathematics Department at WMU to see if the position was still open. It was, and it was offered to Gary for a second time. The Chair said that he might even be able to raise the offer to $9000. This time Gary accepted the position but the $8700 offer, for he said he hadn't done anything yet to even earn the $8700. (Gary later said that he should have accepted the $9000 offer but this was the way he was brought up.)

Despite the fact that Gary wasn't able to spend 1964–1965 at the University of Michigan, Frank invited Gary to attend his weekly graph theory seminar. Gary did this often and thoroughly enjoyed it. About two months into Fall semester 1964, Frank informed Gary that the grant had come through for 1965–1966 and that he was offering it to Gary for that year. Gary accepted it instantly. At his first opportunity, Gary went to the Chair of the Mathematics Department at WMU to inform him that he was resigning, effective at the end of the academic year. After the Chair learned the reason for this, he told Gary that this was a good decision but that he should apply for a leave of absence for 1965–1966. (Gary had never heard of a leave of absence.) Gary applied for this leave, which was approved. In late August 1965, Gary went to Ann Arbor and before even settling into his apartment, he went to Frank's office to find out what he should do. Frank said that he was going to a meeting at Cornell and asked Gary whether he would like to come along. When Gary said “I guess so.”, Frank said, “Good.
You’re driving.” And so the year with Frank Harary had started. On the way to Cornell, they stopped off at Niagara Falls. As Gary has said, “The only time I was at Niagara Falls was with Frank Harary.”

Gary felt that 1965–1966 was an amazing year for several reasons. Frank had two offices at the University of Michigan. His morning office was at the Institute of Social Research (Research Center for Group Dynamics) and his afternoon office was in the Department of Mathematics. Frank arranged Gary to have two offices (actually two desks) not far from him. Gary’s main job for the year was to locate proofs of many theorems in graph theory, read them and understand them, and rewrite them using Frank’s notation and terminology so that the proofs would be clearer. Then he would meet with Frank, the two of them would discuss the proofs, and Gary would rewrite the proofs again.

It was customary for Frank to meet with his doctoral students (Steve Hedetniemi, Mike Plummer, and Ed Palmer) from 10 to 11 each morning at the Institute of Social Research to discuss research, and he invited Gary to attend the meetings. Gary was fascinated by this and paid great attention to the way research questions originated. Clear writing was always emphasized. Near the end of his year at Ann Arbor, Frank invited Gary to join him on two research projects. One of these involved determining which permutation graphs of cycles were planar. In the process of doing this, they needed to work with graphs embedded in the plane where every vertex was on the exterior boundary. Frank said that a term for this was needed. Frank gave Gary three choices. Gary chose “outerplanar graphs”. The other research project involved a connectivity question. That year marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship between Gary and Frank Harary.

When Gary returned to WMU for Fall 1966, he did so with renewed excitement in graph theory. Since then, Gary Chartrand has been the founder and center of the graph theory area in the Department of Mathematics, bringing national and international attention to WMU and attracting numerous people and graduate students all over the world to do research at WMU. Gary has directed the dissertations of twenty-two doctoral students: John A. Mitchem, Donald W. VanderJagt, James E. Williamson, Linda Lesniak, John A. Roberts, James M. Benedict, Ronald J. Gould, John F. Fink, Sergio Ruiz, Hung Bin Zou, Ortrud R. Oellermann, Garry L. Johns, Karen S. Novotny, Grzegorz Kubicki, Songlin Tian, Héctor Hevia, Elzbieta B. Jarrett, Steven J. Winters, Kelly Schultz, Heather Gavlas, Lisa Hansen, David J. Erwin. He has been inspirational in involving both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as both regular and visiting faculty colleagues, in mathematics research on a regular basis.

Gary’s outstanding skills in both oral and written exposition have served as a model for all who have come in contact with him. He has given over one hundred invited and contributed talks and has been a co-director of many regional, national, and international meetings and conferences, including a series of popular and influential quadrennial conferences at WMU dating back to 1968. He has authored one and co-authored four textbooks in graph theory, one edition of which has been translated into Japanese and another into Chinese. He is co-author of the popular text on graph theory Graphs & Digraphs, now in its fourth edition. The first edition was co-authored with Mehdi Behzad and Linda Lesniak-Foster in 1979. The later editions were co-authored with Linda Lesniak. Every edition of Graphs & Digraphs is superbly written and imparts an appreciation of graph theory as an important and beautiful mathematical subject. Gary is co-author of the book Mathematical Proofs: A Transition to Advanced Mathematics, now in its second edition, written with Albert Polimeni and Ping Zhang. He is currently working on two texts with Ping Zhang, namely An Introduction to Discrete Mathematics and Chromatic Graph Theory, the second one scheduled to be published in September 2008.

Gary has authored or co-authored over 270 research articles in graph theory. He served as the first managing editor of the Journal of Graph Theory for seven years and is a member of the Editorial Boards of the Journal of Graph Theory and Discrete Mathematics.

Gary Chartrand is the recipient of the University Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award and the Alumni Association Teaching Award from Western Michigan University and the Distinguished Faculty Award from the State of Michigan. He also received an award as managing editor of the best new journal (Journal of Graph Theory) by the Association of American Publishers in the scientific, medical, and technical category. He has been awarded four research grants from the Office of Naval Research and one from the National Science Foundation. He served as a source for a 1996 article in The Detroit News about graph theory and research in graph theory at Western Michigan University and was the subject of a 1996 article in the Western Michigan University Research Magazine about research in graph theory.

It is clear to see that Gary’s contributions to graph theory have made a legendary and lasting impact on the field. Knowing him has also made a lasting impact on many graph theorists, including us. He has served as our mentor and friend. He is one of the kindest people we’ve ever met. We admire his accomplishments and respect the special person that he is. It is an honor and a privilege to pay this tribute to our good friend and colleague, Professor Gary Chartrand.