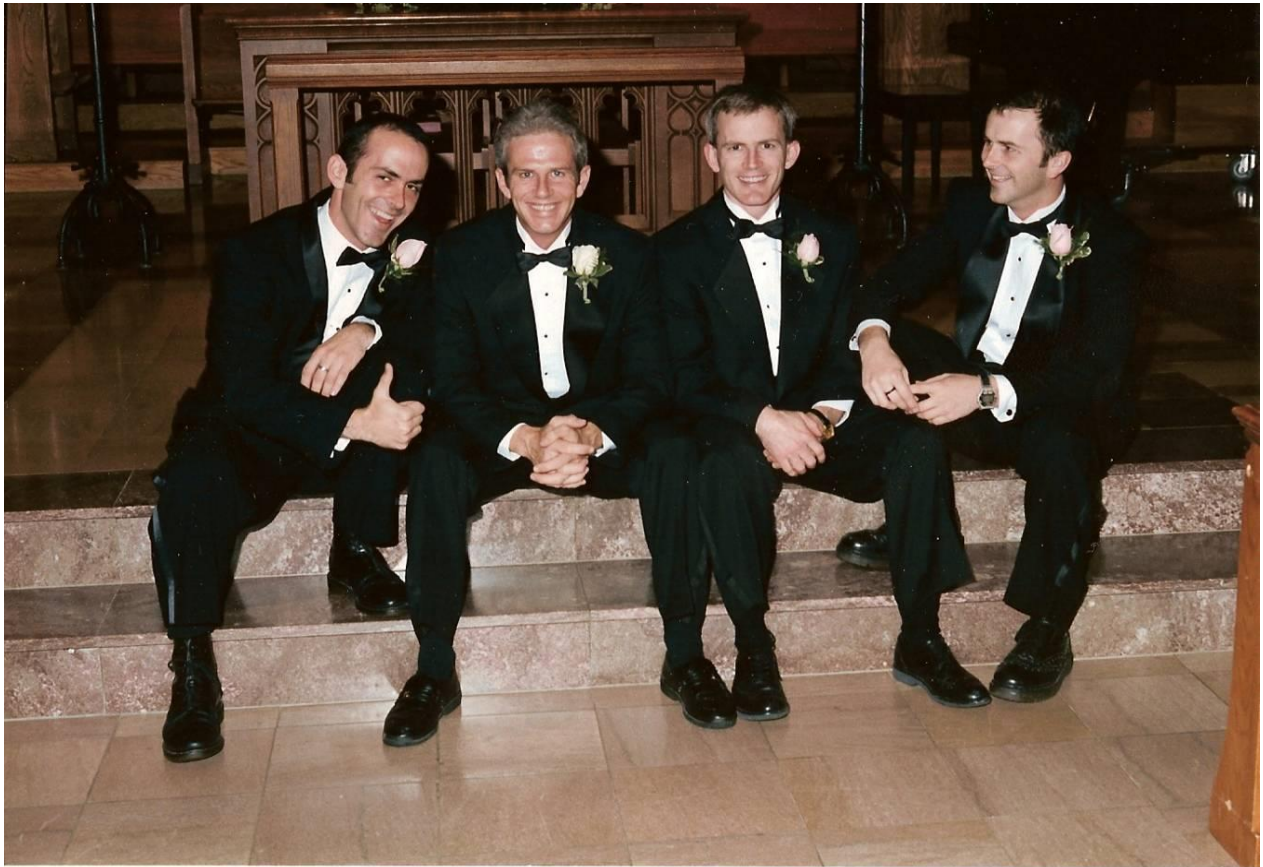


‘The Stanley Boys’ reflect on Oak Ridge schools

By: D. Ray Smith | Historically Speaking |The Oak Ridger | February 20, 2007

The recent series of Historically Speaking columns on the history of Oak Ridge schools resulted in a number of past graduates contacting me with stories of their experiences while attending school as youngsters in Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Society member Sara Gillespie contacted a number of past graduates and encouraged them to write of their experiences. I will publish some of those a bit later. This column comes from an idea from local Realtor and longtime Oak Ridger Nancy Stanley. She asked her four sons to contribute their impressions of growing up in Oak Ridge.

Nancy sent a photograph to accompany this column and said, “My sons will probably tar and feather me for sending this picture. The photographer took about two minutes to take this picture ... and as it turned out, their demeanor (in the picture) is generally their personality: Bob — free spirit; Paul — straightforward; Dan — conservative; and Bill — likable.”



Brothers Bob, Paul, Dan, and Bill Stanley appreciate the educational foundation they received in the Oak Ridge school system

So, here we go with “free-spirited” Bob Stanley:

“World-class artists and intellectuals are surprisingly common among those born and raised in Oak Ridge. In part, this must be a result of the unique demographics of Oak Ridge. Few are as fortunate as children of Oak Ridge are, to grow up in a community with such natural beauty and in which so many parents and friends are scientists, engineers, doctors, teachers and others from such diverse backgrounds!

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“The Oak Ridge school system also contributes significantly to the success of its children. My brothers and I reflected recently on our years in Oak Ridge schools. The school system had its hands full with the Stanley boys! As we shared memories of positive influences we had with instructors and coaches, I realized just how much my years in Oak Ridge schools mean to me. From elementary school I remember many great and lasting influences, including George Walker (principal, Linden Elementary School), Julian Daniels (fifth grade science), Eugene Pickel (civics, history), Coach Winston Russell, Guidance Counselor Henrietta Grant. These individuals and others are remembered as truly fine mentors.

“I learned to identify with my teachers when it became clear that they really were ‘on my side’ and believed that I was on my way to becoming a successful, responsible person. If I performed under expectations, these teachers approached me with authority but also with impressive consideration and empathy. Perhaps most important to me, these teachers would address me and my young friends as if we were almost peers, worthy of respect. These early experiences of authoritative mentoring helped me to learn respect for self and others, and made it possible for me to recognize and pursue productive relationships with mentors in college, graduate school and business.

“This has really made the difference for me, both in education (Bachelor of Arts degrees at University of California; master’s degree at University of Chicago, and working on doctorate at New York University) and in my career (vice president, chief technology officer, IO Informatics — with national labs and global biotechnology research customers and partners such as Microsoft, Cornell University and others).

“Many thanks from this ‘Stanley boy’ to the Oak Ridge school system and the fine mentors it supports!”

Now for “straightforward” Paul Stanley:

“I feel that the Oak Ridge school system (ORSS) prepared me for a life in a variety of different ways, both in formal education and by building character. I find I have a wide range of knowledge in many facets of my life because of the foundation provided by ORSS. Some teachers I remember influencing my character were Mrs. June Smitherman, Helen Knight (high school English), Winston Russell (junior high gym), Mrs. Christen (high school math) and Henrietta Grant (as my guidance counselor, she and I got to know each other pretty well). Many field trips also were very interesting and helpful.

“I feel I had an excellent education, borne out by my performing well on tests years after my high school days. I am grateful to the Oak Ridge school system for all it gave me.”

Paul, who graduated with the class of 1979, is currently a semi-truck driver for United States Postal Services.

“Conservative” Dan Stanley is next:

“I graduated from Oak Ridge High School in 1980. ORHS was a great place to learn in the 1970s. The fondest memories I have are of the extraordinary teachers, and there were some great personalities such as Gene Pickel and Lloyd Wattenbarger. The Combined Studies teachers were outstanding, and I found that the instruction on composition that I received put me ahead of the majority of the other freshman at Indiana University.

“Academically the opportunities were outstanding. I wasn’t much for school in general, since I would rather be working outside or pursuing sports. I was a poor speller, and I knew I would never be a English teacher, so I shied away from some of the AP courses. However the fact that University of Tennessee night school credit was offered for the American History class was very helpful. Because of the quality of foreign language instruction, I was able to test out of most of my college foreign language requirements. I

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found that even though I avoided school work as much as possible, I was able to avoid more college courses than I thought would be possible because of the opportunities at ORHS.

“I went to college at Indiana University with a full scholarship. I remember how plush the high schools were in Indiana. Even though there was carpet, air conditioning, swimming pools and who knows what other amenities, I didn't feel like I had missed out. I looked back and realized that the important part of the education was that I learned responsibility and discipline in learning. I had a great learning environment as well as excellent teachers and classmates. I developed and learned about life through the relationships which were built and the knowledge that I acquired at ORHS.

“There were, however, the problems of the '70s. I don't think that the parents of our time understood the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse. I was more of a hellion than even I realized at the time.

“A sad time was when Coach Hale left. Our culture had decided that teachers such as he should not be allowed to pray with his players prior to football games. He had been a great influence on many of young people in Oak Ridge during the '70s and he gave us football bragging rights! We were in a time of transition and rebellion.

“I feel very blessed to have been educated in one of the best high schools in Tennessee. I think it was that way because Oak Ridge was and is one of the finest communities in Tennessee. I know that the commitment that the community has towards academic excellence will ensure that the high quality of secondary education will endure in Oak Ridge.

“PS: I hated English (no fault of the teachers) so much that I decided to go into medicine so that I wouldn't have to do much writing. I am currently a surgeon and assistant professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. My wife and I have adopted three children. I have a personal interest in the history and philosophy of education in the western world and have given several lectures on the subject.

“I have also helped to start a non-profit organization which provides mentoring programs for troubled children in the public school system. While I am not an expert on education, I have some experience that has helped me to recognize many of the challenges that educators and parents face today. Within that context, I particularly appreciate the tremendous job that the community of Oak Ridge has done in the area of education.”

And the last of the Stanley boys, “likable” Bill Stanley:

“I am the youngest of the four Stanley boys, and teachers in the Oak Ridge schools were always curious to see what would come next. Each of my brothers is really unique, with different personalities and interests that have translated into different choices in life paths, political and religious philosophies, and life choices. We must have kept the teachers guessing. I recall entering one class and having a teacher state, 'Oh, I have heard about you Stanley boys.' I wasn't sure whether that was bad or good, but some say that any publicity is good publicity. While the Oak Ridge schools made an impression on us for certain, I also like to think we made an impression on them.

“Even with all of our differences, I realize that my brothers and I share some similarities. In particular, I think we are all pretty nice guys, all have streaks of mischief balanced by a measure of responsibility, and we are all confident that we have the educational foundation to succeed. Many of our similarities come from the influence of our parents, but certainly Oak Ridge schools made a difference.

“I realized soon after graduating from high school that the public education experience that seems normal to kids in Oak Ridge is actually extraordinary. My brothers have already mentioned many of the teachers

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and mentors that also made a strong, positive impression on me. I feel that the education was strong, across the board, in all subjects (except for geography).

“After attending Oak Ridge schools for our entire lives, many of the students who wanted to go to college were able to score well on achievement tests and get into some really good schools. Advanced Placement courses gave us experience with college level requirements early, and also gave us some college credit that made our parents happy. One of the things that I really valued was the teaching in applied thinking rather than rote memorization. This is characteristic of a good college experience. It was something that my brothers and I received in high school. Oak Ridge prepared us to excel.

“I am now able to do work that I am passionate about that takes advantage of my education, a master’s degree in forest science. I am working at The Nature Conservancy, a nature conservation organization. Others have stayed in Oak Ridge and are doing work important to humanity right in their hometown, by working at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory for example. Colleagues are still surprised by the fact that so many of my classmates from Oak Ridge, a small city in Tennessee, are living in places like Washington, D.C., and New York, and Tokyo, working as White House Staff, as members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and doing other interesting and meaningful work. To me it seems normal. In Oak Ridge we have come to expect the extraordinary.”

Bill Stanley received his undergraduate education at the University of Virginia and attended Yale University for his graduate degree. He is currently the director of the Global Climate Change Initiative at The Nature Conservancy, a large and well-respected global nature conservation organization.

As I think you will agree, the insight into the success of Oak Ridge schools provided by “the Stanley boys” is worthy of consideration. After all, they represent the product of the Oak Ridge education system and serve as past students who have now gained the requisite life distance to afford an accurate perspective on their education.

All teachers, staff, parents and numerous others who contribute to the Oak Ridge schools can read the above testimonials with pride. Coming from four young men well established and secure in their own chosen paths and universally contributing the firm grounding in life skills and applied thinking to the education they received while in Oak Ridge schools, the entire community of Oak Ridge has a right to feel most extraordinary! Indeed, Oak Ridge is just that — an extraordinary place to live, work and raise children. The key now is to always do what is necessary and sufficient to keep it that way.