

Herbert Dodd looks back, Part 2

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | April 24, 2007

Last week's column contained the first part of a speech by Herbert Dodd, Oak Ridge's first elementary school principal hired by Dr. Alden Blankenship. Today we pick up with Mr. Dodd noting that in addition to being a principal, he sometimes had to substitute teach.

Substitute Teaching

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Dr. B had a shortage of substitutes due to some having become pregnant and other preparing for the holidays. So he asked me if I would pinch-hit, subbing when they were unable to find a substitute.

Due to lack of home phones it was necessary for one of Dr. B's secretaries to drive a government vehicle, go to the home of a person willing to substitute, wait for her to get dressed, and deliver her to the

school needing a substitute. The secretary told me that she regretted not having gone over to the bookcase of a substitute in an 'E' apartment on Tennessee Avenue and looking inside the cover of the book in her bookcase titled "The Impatient Virgin."

Well, I even substituted at Robertsville in music for Lucille Middleton, and substituted for a sixth-grade teacher having a tonsillectomy another day or two. Then I was asked to report to the high school located near Blankenship Field to teach English. The class period was well along when I reached the classroom. It was utter chaos and I hadn't seen the type of drama textbook being used. Try as I might I never got the show on the road or the class under much control.

The following day I was asked to teach social studies at Oak Ridge High School. I had the first period to plan and went to the assigned room before the class arrived. I had an outline on the board, work to do, etc., which I had worked out during the planning period. As it happened there was one boy in the class, the son of a top military officer, who had been in the disaster class the previous day. He asked me if Mr. Oliver, the principal, had worked out my plans for me and I assured him, "No, Mr. Dodd did it for himself." But I knew he thought I did not have the ability to run a smooth-functioning classroom, judging from the disaster of the previous day.



Herbert Dodd served as Oak ridge school principal at Cedar Hill and then Willow Brook for a total of 38 years

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In all my school experience that is all the substituting I ever did and I have remarked that I had as soon be in Hell with my back broken as to be a substitute teacher. I had to do it all by sheer force and control rather than staging using backup teaching materials, preplanning, etc. It was much like trying to cook in a strange kitchen.

Cleaning

Roane Anderson cleaning crews came to Cedar Hill early on and helped keep us de-mudded. I was able to pick out three great cleaning maids from the crew — Fleta Bell, Gertie Mae and Frances. There was no head male custodian at Cedar Hill but the maids and Principal Dodd had a gentleman's agreement. They would clean as high as they could reach and keep it spotless and they did just that.

Pinkeye

By the second time I contracted pinkeye from the kids the Army doctor named it conjunctivitis. Suggested treatment required using ice packs. The only ice available at night for me, I had to swipe from the small cafeteria in East Village.

GI Shots

The Robertsville principal, H. Parker, turned out to be allergic to army shots and was put out of commission for more than a weekend. Dr. B had me work for him with doing "rigger duty." When books finally began arriving, they needed to be hauled to libraries and buildings over the weekend. Riggers, as the movers were called, said it was against their rules to carry books to the second floor of old Robertsville. Dr. B was a former Washington football player and built for it, but having a collapsed lung from a car accident and being '4-F' I had a hard time not over lifting my limit.

Laundry Sale

Some people left Oak Ridge in such a hurry they left their laundry at the Laundry without picking it up. A money-raising project was needed for Girl Scouting in Oak Ridge. So some of the mothers contacted the authorities and were able to have all the unclaimed laundry turned over to them for a big sale. The laundry was located about where the Oak Ridger building was.

That sale was worse than a fire sale, with women customers elbowing and circling around the counters of clothing until I was having a rather difficult time wedging myself in. Fortunately, a Mrs. Taylor, wife of an Army officer, saw my predicament and asked me what shirt size, I needed as I was eager to get white Arrow shirts and boxer shorts. She came over soon with an armload of each. I would have never thought I would be so eager to have the shirts and boxer shorts worn by no telling who, but these were rationed articles in the stores. And I was in need!

PTA

We were not allowed to join the national PTA lest parents' names get outside of Oak Ridge, even though some families were said to be under assumed names. So, Dr. Dew and some other parents got together with me and formed the Cedar Hill PTO. It worked so well that Cedar Hill parents a few years later were reluctant to disband and form the PTA. Dr. Ray Ostrander, our second superintendent, was eager for Cedar Hill parents to become affiliated with national PTA and asked me if he might attend the next meeting, which he did. But when he saw how worked up some parents were over the matter, he never asked again why Cedar Hill parents were not interested in becoming national PTA members.

Church and Sunday School at Cedar Hill

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Church of Christ held its Sunday morning services in the Cedar Hill gym. And the Chapel on the Hill United Church used most of the classrooms for Sunday school classes. Books have been written about what a great idea it is to have constant use of schools when not normally in session. Sounds great and worked reasonably well but being principal on Monday morning when younger kids who had had their crayons removed and/or broken were in tears wasn't without problems. Even the goldfish were at times taken out of their aquariums by eager little hands.

No Cafeterias

The earlier elementary schools were without cafeterias. Buses ran at noon and took the Cedar Hill children home for lunch. The teachers had a stove and refrigerator in the teacher's lounge and ate their own lunches, and even combed their hair and applied a new coat of lipstick. As you know elementary teachers at that time were supposed to be entirely self-contained, often for the entire day, without even bathroom breaks. The "no-cafeterias" resulted in teachers getting a noon break. They returned refreshed for the afternoon.

Double Shifts

The population grew so rapidly ahead of new building construction and portables that it was decided we would of necessity go on double shifts. The early morning shift arrived on buses and departed at noon as buses brought in second-shift children. We were so well-organized that it was amazing. Two teachers used the same classroom and were in the building for some overlapping time for planning. In most cases these two teachers worked quite well together sharing materials, workbooks, etc.

Clientele

Principal Dodd tried to be fair with each set of parents and in turn each parent, like Ivory, was 99 percent fair with me. People in all phases of Oak Ridge operations were well-represented at Cedar Hill. Among the children were: Dr. Weinberg's two sons; Dr. Pollard's sons; Dr. Larson's sons; Dr. Blankenship's three daughters; Dr. P. R. Bell's two sons; Dr. John Googin's four daughters; PTA President Al Bissell's five children; as well as Dr. Lewis Preston's children.

Most often I refer to my early days in Oak Ridge as "Pioneering with Plumbing!"

Now don't you wish you could have heard Herbert Dodd give his speech from those key ideas? He was the first principal hired by Dr. Alden H. Blankenship, Superintendent of Schools in 1943. He helped Dr. Blankenship hire teachers for all schools that first year and led the effort to name the schools and get each one started operating, starting his own Cedar Hill after the other schools were up and running.

He served as principal of Cedar Hill for 23 years, during which time he began the first student council in an elementary school in Tennessee. He also began an environmental program that evolved into the highly regarded and successful Tremont program in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

In 1966 he became the principal of Willow Brook and remained there until retirement in 1981, three years beyond mandatory retirement age, at the special request of then-school superintendent Bob Smallridge, the Willow Brook PTA, and the Oak Ridge School Board. Over the course of his 38-year career, Mr. Dodd was an elementary school principal for 13 different superintendents of schools.

I have copies of at least two other documents that Mr. Dodd wrote. One is a speech titled "Early Days of Oak Ridge Schools," given when he spoke on a panel for an Oak Ridge Institute of Continued Learning class on July 24, 2000.

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The other document is "Pioneering in the Oak Ridge Schools," an expanded version of the two speeches that concludes with the following paragraph, "The Oak Ridge Schools consistently have been considered 'tops' and a pioneer in the field of education. The Oak Ridge Schools continue to seek out, interview, and employ the very best academically trained and experienced teachers and administration. These teachers working with talented Oak Ridge students continue to produce the largest number of Merit finalists and semi-finalists of any school system in Tennessee. It is not surprising that the number of Oak Ridge teachers ranking high on the Tennessee Career Ladder is at the top. The citizens of Oak Ridge and the Oak Ridge Board of Education continue to strive for the best education possible for the boys and girls of Oak Ridge."

His final one-liner was, "Ole principals never die ... they just lose their faculties."

Don't you agree that Mr. Dodd would be exceedingly glad to see the community support for Oak Ridge Schools today? He spent his 38-year career in Oak Ridge schools as an elementary school principal, yet his contributions exceeded that of any one school. He contributed to teacher education through teaching summer school at the University of Tennessee and supervising student teachers.

I think he would also appreciate seeing his speech highlighted in *Historically Speaking*, as he spent 10 years after he retired volunteering in the Oak Ridge Visitor Center and enjoyed telling visitors about Oak Ridge's unique history.