

A Tribute to Robbie Young

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 9, 2009)

Please let me interrupt the series on The Oak Ridge Pioneers to share with you a most fitting tribute to a wonderful lady. This tribute comes to us from Rose Weaver, who is dedicated to preserving Oak Ridge's unique Black history. I have come to better appreciate her endeavor since attempting to document the early history of baseball in Oak Ridge.

My efforts were focused on the professional baseball story in Oak Ridge and did not include a most significant element of Oak Ridge baseball history – the Black team that also used the name Oak Ridge Bombers. While the professional Bombers only lasted a few months, this unique Oak Ridge team lasted many years. I am grateful to Larry Gipson for making me aware of this history. You will enjoy it when I get all the details and can tell the story accurately.

But now, let's focus on Rose Weaver's tribute. She brings a personal perspective to the story that enhances our understanding of Robbie Young and gives us a most unusual insight into Oak Ridge Black history.

The First Black Girl Scout – Robbie Young

Written by Rose Weaver

A most interesting lady with a huge historical legacy will be missed in the Scarboro community and the city of Oak Ridge. Last week, Miss Robbie Robinson, or Robbie Young as we referred to her on Bethune Circle, died taking her knowledge of Oak Ridge's Black history with her, except for the Oral History interviews she had granted. She was a sweet lady who provided day care services and served as a second mother to several children in the City of Oak Ridge.

She was loved by all the children for whom she cared. My niece, Anniece, and nephew, Terry, could go across the street to 115 Bethune Circle and be cared for in a loving manner when my brother Terry Weaver Sr. and Millie were at work or at special meetings. This was fairly often. It was refreshing to know that a vivacious and sweet lady would take time from caring for her four children or other children in her family and take care of your children as if they were her own.

For a long time I saw Robbie as the lady who cared for children and did not think about her life before I knew her. Little did I know that this caring lady who made the best homemade yeast biscuits and preserves I had ever eaten, was herself a relic of our Oak Ridge history.

Two years ago I had the opportunity to interview Ms. Young as part of my ongoing research into the early history of African Americans in the Oak Ridge community. She set the record straight in that interview by saying that, "There were no Negro children in Oak Ridge until 1945 because there was no housing available."

Now, do you find that amazing? I do. The Black workers were brought here to work on the Manhattan Project, but were NOT ALLOWED to bring their children.

Ms. Young continued, "I can remember coming to this city and being excited...there was no name given, just a place to work and raise my family."

Ms. Young also said, "Arlie Teasley, was my instructor at the Scarboro School and she started the first Black Girl Scout Troop. I was the first scout."

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"I remember the Army limousine that took the first colored children to the Negro school in Clinton," said Young. "Ms. Teasley was my Girl Scout leader. In 1946, with enough children to open a school for children in grades one through eight, Arlie Perry was hired as a Home Economics teacher but also organized the first troop of Black Girl Scouts."

Ms. Young shared so many other things about her experiences and observations that I will include in other articles. She will be so missed with the tremendous personal history that she had lived and the resulting dignity that she displayed routinely as well as the positive attitude that she reflected in her day to day life. One of the most important attributes of her life was her walk and talk with God that she displayed daily for all to see.

In a 2007 presentation to Wackenhut Services Inc. during Black History Month, she said, "History is making the most of your talents daily - not just once a year by giving back to your community." I am sure Robbie is now up in heaven testifying with the angels and busy making those homemade angel biscuits for all to share.

Thank you Rose. I know readers agree that you have brought us a treasure with your insight and attention to details. Robbie Young will be remembered as a part of Oak Ridge history.

I am pleased to be engaged in the capture of Oak Ridge Oral History. The Center for Oak Ridge Oral History is getting its feet on the ground with the leadership of the Oak Ridge Public Library director, Kathy McNeilly. The main feature of this initiative will be the capture of stories such as Rose describes above.

There is, of course many oral histories that have been collected already and those will be included in the center as well as new histories as they are recorded. If you have a story, such as Rose shared, or know of someone who does, then please contact COROH at 865-425-3455.

The first Oak Ridge Bombers I wrote about was the professional team that only lasted a few months in 1948. At that time I was unaware of yet another Oak Ridge baseball team with the same name. Larry Gipson helped me by contacting me regarding the Black baseball team that was named the Oak Ridge Bombers, too.

Since that phone call from Larry, I have learned a great deal about these most unusual baseball players. I am anxious to tell you that story.

Since beginning the *Historically Speaking* column over three and a half years ago, I have attempted to maintain an inclusive attitude toward all aspects of our history. It is not easy and I have appreciated all the help I have gotten from readers through personal contact and helpful suggestions.

As I have tried to capture all the wide variety of the great history associated with the Manhattan Project, the Medical Isotopes, the Cold War, and other more recent Oak Ridge history, I have often had help such as that provided by Larry Gipson.

The Oak Ridge Black community, from the early Manhattan Project years, to the desegregation in 1955 that was without significant incident and thus went virtually unreported and almost forgotten, has many stories such as that of Robbie Young. There are also historical stories in every other aspect of Oak Ridge life where the details are known by select individuals or small groups.

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It is important to effectively document those stories and the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History is a key method. We must act quickly if we are to capture other details such as Rose has done. We are losing our history as we are losing the individuals who actually lived it. If our history is to be accurately captured, their voice must be heard!



Robbie Young, first Black Girl Scout, is the young girl holding the flag. Others in the photograph are unidentified...do you know any of them?