

Secret City: The Second Generation – a book review

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on December 9, 2014)

Tollie Moore De Graw has written a wonderful book of her recollections about growing up in Oak Ridge, titled, *Secret City, The Second Generation*. I am pleased to review it for you here in *Historically Speaking*.

She opens the book in a straight forward fashion by stating, "Growing up in the Secret City, Atomic Energy Capital of the world, we are the children of the brave pioneers who built the atomic bomb. We are the second generation, and although we didn't know it at the time, we were special."

Then she proceeds to state her pride in growing up in what she calls an exceptional environment that was Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project years and for several years thereafter. I would add that the "exceptional environment" that she experiences is still in Oak Ridge, it is just beneath the surface holding fast in spite of the cultural changes that have taken place in the years since the Manhattan Project era.

By noting the absence of negative stories in her work, "is not because I intentionally left them out, but rather because I don't remember any!" Tollie lays the groundwork for the style of her story-laden book. As you might imagine, I find her style comfortable, being an avid storyteller myself!

Let me give you a personal flavor of the book by sharing the experience that resulted in the book being written. Tollie says, "Several years ago, seven of us girls, close friends since early childhood, got together for a special weekend reunion. Then in our fifties, Ellen Gardiner Morgan, Sandy Shapiro Guryan, Gage Frye Woods, Linda Krattler Prickett, Anne Ergen Delozier, Jane Ann Jett Wheeler, and I gathered at the Morgan home in Knoxville."

Tollie said, "Having arrived from all over the country, we hugged, laughed, cried, and re-connected as if still at a high school slumber party; only this time, we were also sharing pictures of children and grandchildren. Since then, Linda has passed on, having finally lost her long battle with brain cancer, but in spirit she is always with us."

She continued, "We got together again recently at the Ergen Ranch in Colorado and re-affirmed what we already knew. Caught up in our own special world, we talked non-stop for three full days, never even bothering to turn on the TV! Those bonds we built growing up together in Oak Ridge can never be broken."

Now here is a special insight, Tollie says, "Our fathers were metallurgists, nuclear physicists, enrichment technicians, mathematicians chemists, purchasing agents, engineers, and carriers of briefcases, probably filled with blue-green powder, heading for Los Alamos. As the story of the Secret City unfolds, I see it as a confirmation of life and a tribute to the first generation, who came here to save the world and stayed on to raise us, the second generation, so beautifully."

Then she said, "And so, to Selma and Ted, John and Helen, Doc and Marie, Viola and William, Ruthie and Gil, Shelby and Ruth, Tot and Dorie, Kay, Mack, and Martha, among so many others, thank you for bringing us together and raising us as family, still connected after all these years."

Tollie was four years old when her family moved from Cleveland, TN, to Oak Ridge in 1951. Their first home was an E-2 apartment. Early memories include popsicles from the Service Drug Store (now Big Ed's Pizza), Easter Egg hunts on the grounds of "The Castle on the Hill" - with real eggs, the Carbide Christmas Party, Carbide Park and the family puppy her brother even named "Carbide!"

Of the many topics Tollie recalls, such as, Schools, Coaches, Carbide, Bootleggers, Rabbit Ears, Friday Night Football, Hissy Fits, Tear Jerker, and my favorite, The Wildcat Den. Here is some of what is included in *The Wildcat Den*.

"One of the best things about making it to tenth grade and entering Oak Ridge high School was getting a Den Card. The Wildcat Den was the social center of our high school universe. Operated by the city recreation department, it was a youth center for ORHS students only."

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"There were weekend dances with live bands... It served as a teenage hangout after school and on Saturdays... Friday nights after the ball game, we would head for the Wildcat Den and dance for hours. Shep Lauter was the man in charge and he did a great job...

But there was a problem. The Oak Ridge High School had 1,800 students! The Wildcat Den could only hold 200. The class of 1964-65 decided to do something about the overcrowding situation.

Tollie says, "It all started with a Teen Talk Topics column in *The Oak Ridger*." She took a personal interest in solving this issue by writing columns and stirring up interest. Soon a committee was formed consisting of six students and 13 adults. Tollie contacted the National Guard Armory and they agreed to allow temporary use of their facility.

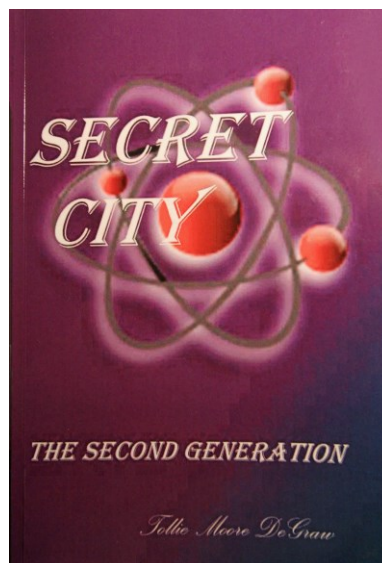
Before leaving for college, Tollie was among the people who formed a Youth Center Action Committee. After a feasibility study was completed, Carl Yearwood, city recreation director, helped get City Council to agree to move the project forward. The Youth Center was included in a larger complex design that resulted in the Civic Center that we know today.

Tollie looks back at this accomplishment of the 1964-65 ORHS class she says, "Today, as a senior citizen living in the Secret City, I look proudly at this fabulous facility, and remember fondly what we high school students accomplished, so many years ago."

A humorous story she tells is that of the "Upside-Down Acorn." She says, "I don't know who first discovered the upside-down acorn. The bright white symbol of the atom with an acorn at its center was a gift from us, the class of 1965. It stands out against the brick cafeteria wall, clearly visible from Oak Ridge Turnpike. The acorn and the atom seemed a fitting combination to symbolize our vision of the city.

"Our class moto was, 'To look backward with pride, to look forward with hope,' from Robert Frost's poem, 'The Death of the Hired Man.' I don't know when it was finally corrected, but sometime after we graduated, the symbol was reinstalled, this time with the acorn right-side-up.

What fun to read Tollie's memories! *Secret City: The second generation*, can be purchased at the Appalachian Frame Shop in Grove Center.



Secret City: The second generation, by Tollie Moore De Graw