

# The Ed Westcott Project at Jefferson Middle School

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on December 7, 2015)

Jim Dodson contacted me to ask if I would speak to his class at Jefferson Middle School. He did not say more except to let me know I was one of a few speakers he was bringing in to speak to the students. I got the idea it was more than just his class and also that they were working on a special art project pertaining to the history of Oak Ridge. Of course I readily agreed to do as he asked as I jump at any opportunity to talk to students about history...a subject that I believe is lacking or not well represented in many of today's schools.

Little did I know and I surely did not appreciate the magnitude of what Jim and other teachers were attempting. He did try and prepare me for the scope of the project when it came near to the agreed upon time for me to speak to the students. He said they were using Ed Westcott images and he would like me to emphasize the importance of Ed Westcott when I talked about the Manhattan Project and Oak Ridge history. Okay, I do that every time I speak to any group, so no problem.

Still not real sure just what Jim was up to, I arrived at the speaking engagement at the appointed time. Jim met me and took me to the auditorium. There he introduced me to the students. Well, that is when it got exciting. I did not even get to show the first slide of the PowerPoint presentation before questions were being shot at me and as I answered one questions, at least three other hands would shoot up with additional questions. Wow, I was in hog heaven! These students were serious. Their questions were really good ones!

Finally, Chris Layton interrupted the process to remind the students that I had a presentation and they might want to let me do that rather than asking so many questions. I was having a ball and did not really care if I got to the presentation or not! The questions were great! But he was right, the presentation did have information that would not get conveyed unless I showed the photographic images. Ed Westcott photographs are really the heart of my presentation, and both Jim and Chris wanted the students to see how I used those images to tell the history.

It was a great experience and I believe the students enjoyed it, I know I certainly did. Now let me give you a bit of background on the overall project and I believe you will see how my presentation fit into it, and also how I was able to help connect Ed Westcott and the students, something I am very proud to have had a slight role in accomplishing.

Jim told me, "Jefferson Middle School teachers and students were given the opportunity to combine forces for some really creative and innovative learning this year during our second period enrichment class titled 'Eagle Time.'"

Here is how Jim said they did it, "During our first quarter Chris Layton's history students and Jim Dodson's visual art students recreated some of the Manhattan Projects most famous photographic images utilizing black and white tempera paints. Rules of proportion and tonality were emphasized while developing space and telling the story of our town in its infancy. While creating the reproductions students also studied the history of Oak Ridge and the origins of several of the iconic images in the photos of Ed Westcott."

Jim said he and Chris Layton, "wanted students to work to create a unique work of art that was inspired by an 'Ed Westcott' photo. In Mr. Layton's class, they studied, analyzed, and learned about the context of the photo, The Manhattan Project, and the history of World War II in general. Students were then asked to create a script to tell us about the picture based upon their knowledge of Oak Ridge, The Manhattan Project, and World War II."

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Then in Dodson's visual art class, students created their own version of Ed Westcott photos. They spent at least three weeks working with Dodson creating their artwork. When they returned to Layton, they recorded a video explaining the following: the story and history of their photo, what context does the photo have to WW II, the Manhattan Project, and the city of Oak Ridge. In addition, they also talked about how they created the work of art and the art techniques used.

Once the artwork was completed and the video had been filmed, students created a QR code. You have probably seen these in public as they are designed to be scanned. QR codes can be connected to websites, videos, etc.

The purpose was then for some students to be able to display their final product complete with a QR code connected to their artwork. Some would be displayed at Jefferson Middle School and others possibly with businesses in Jackson Square. Jim said, "We wanted our student's to have a real audience for their final product."

Several guest speakers were involved with this unique project including former Oak Ridge Mayor David Bradshaw, Camera Club of Oak Ridge representative Yvonne Dalschen, and myself. Ed Westcott and his family visited on the final day of the project as the students presented to the combined classes.

Here is where I was able to help Jim again and am so proud to have been able to do so. Jim was somewhat hesitate to contact Ed Westcott directly but he really wanted the students to meet him. Jim asked me what to do. I said, call Emily Hunnicutt and gave him her phone number. The rest is history, he made the contact and Don and Emily Hunnicutt, Ed's daughter and son-in-law, helped Ed to understand what was being asked and I am sure Ed agreed to come to the students right away. He is just that way...he loves kids and is eager to help them gain an interest in photography.

Ed's photography has been featured in many ways ranging from a Western Kentucky University joint appearance in September, 2015, with Denise Kiernan, author of "Girls of Atomic City" where Ed's photographs were the centerpiece of an evening's discussion with Denise. His photos are on display currently at the Huntsville, AL, United States Space and Rocket Center. They have been displayed in Atlanta at the National Archives and the East Tennessee History Center in Knoxville, TN.

But this was truly a special event for Ed, I am sure. He has been awarded special recognition for his photographs a number of times, but by just looking at the smile on Ed's face in the photographs with the students, you have to know just being there with these students was likely as meaningful or more so to Ed as would have been having yet another award presented to him.

Jim proudly observed, "The project culminated with a grand display of more than 35 of the paintings in the foyer of Oak Ridge High School as visitors and honored guest participated in the ceremony honoring the signing of the Manhattan Project National Historic Park in the Performing Arts Auditorium of the high school. Nicholas Malagon, a Jefferson Middle School student, honored Mr. Westcott by presenting him with his painting that had been professionally framed by Appalachian Frame Shop of Oak Ridge."

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Finally Jim put the whole project into perspective when he said, "This was such a timely project that involved so many of our citizens both young and old to help tell the story of the history of our town so that our young people will understand how important the residents of Oak Ridge were in the war effort through visual images and the people behind those photographs."

I am delighted that Jim Dodson agreed to help me write this *Historically Speaking* column. I believe it is representative of what can be done with creative teachers decide to bring history to their students in meaningful and artistic ways. I am so proud to have played even a small role in this project and just can't say enough good things about Jim Dodson and Chris Layton! Their students are the greatest and are blessed to have these two as teachers.



Nicholas Malagon, a Jefferson Middle School student, presenting Ed Westcott with his painting that had been professionally framed by Appalachian Frame Shop of Oak Ridge as Jim Dodson proudly looks on