

Pearl Price: ORHS Class of 1944

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of December 10, 2018)

Benita Albert brings us an insightful story about early Oak Ridge High School gathered as she was collecting stories for the amazing book recently published by the Oak Ridge Public School Education Foundation, "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education: Oak Ridge Schools 1944-2018." Information on the book is found at:

<http://www.orpsef.org/purchaseBook>

What you will find here is an excellent example of the type of content you can expect to find in the book and also insight into how the book was created. We owe a great debt to Benita Albert and all the alumni who contributed to the 75th Anniversary book giving unique insight into the history of Oak Ridge Schools! Enjoy the read and if you have not yet gotten your copy of the book, don't wait any longer, get it now!

Pearl Price and her twin brother Earl count as two of the twenty-six seniors who graduated from the first Oak Ridge High School senior class in June 1944. Pearl, Earl and younger brother Charlie, a freshman, enrolled on the first day of school, October 1, 1943. Though none of them wanted to make this move from their farm home in Jefferson County, their father's promise of a better paying job and also a chance to support the war effort overruled any misgivings.

Thus, the three Price children registered for Oak Ridge High School classes along with eighty-four other students on that first day. They experienced a new school still under construction and new students who were added to the school roster virtually every day throughout the year, finally totaling 400 students by the end of the year.

In the planning for writing, "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education: Oak Ridge Schools 1944-2018," it was my charge to find first-hand stories from each of the seventy-five ORHS classes. A major concern was finding students from the earliest years, alumni who are now in their nineties.

Compounding the search were females whose maiden names had changed to married surnames and alumni who no longer lived in the Oak Ridge area. Charlie Price has been a resident of Oak Ridge for a total of seventy-two years, only leaving for military service and a year of working on the family farm in the late 1940s.

I found Charlie as my Class of 1947 story was being written, and Charlie became my link to his sister Pearl, the only 1944 graduate I was able to find. I interviewed Pearl by phone, and she agreed to read and approve the Class of 1944 story as did Charlie for the Class of 1947. Only after the book came out could I find an opportunity to meet Pearl in person. Charlie and I traveled to her lovely home in Morristown, TN in mid-October 2018 to present her with a copy of the book.

Pearl Dearing, as she is now known, is a delightful and energetic woman who enjoys church activities and family gatherings with her husband E. C. Pearl was eager to hear stories from Oak Ridge, see pictures of former classmates and friends, and recall details of that time. She, along with Charlie, worked evening jobs during the school year, and she says that made it difficult at times to keep up with her school work.

She laughed remembering senior skip day, an impromptu decision by members of her class to take a spring afternoon off and attend the movie, "For Whom the Bell Tolls," at the Ridge Theater. She says she doesn't really remember that the consequence of this action was that every skipper was required to submit a 1,500-word essay on "Good Citizenship" before reinstatement and good standing for graduation (per the Oak Leaf of June 1944).

She also remembered climbing the hill to the high school, more than seventy board steps from Midtown Center (now Jackson Square) to the top. Those boardwalk steps are now concrete and still exist on the property between Jackson Square and the top of the hill where the first ORHS stood. The class of 1944 was the first of "All Those Students Who Climbed the Hill," a phrase the classes of '44-'51 later gave themselves. A new ORHS building opened on Providence Road in the fall of 1951.

Charlie fondly remembers the good times at Ridge Recreation Hall in Midtown Center, a place for ORHS students to meet, to bond, and have a place of their own for socializing—the precursor for a future gathering place to be named the

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Wildcat Den. Charlie is one of very few students who received a diploma from ORHS having entered on the first day of school in 1943, but he did leave early for military service in his senior year.

Notably, seven of Pearl's senior class left at the end of their first ORHS semester for military service. At the June 1944 Commencement, ORHS Principal Charles Oliver's parting admonition was, "Some of you boys, by choice or otherwise, will soon find yourself in some branch of the armed services. It is regrettable but true that we have a war to fight, a victory to win, and a peace to win. I dare you to make valiant soldiers, courageous sailors, or fearless marines." Earl Price would join the U.S. Navy within a year of his 1944 ORHS graduation. Earl came back to Oak Ridge to work for Union Carbide and to marry a 1947 ORHS classmate, Rose Frederick, who survives him.

Both Pearl and Charlie acknowledge that their lives drastically changed with their arrival in Oak Ridge. Pearl went on to business college, completing her requirements within a year and working as a secretary for Union Carbide and Carbon Chemical. She attended and joined First Baptist Church before they had a church building, instead, the services were held at ORHS. She attributes this experience to her eventual transition to Carson Newman College and to meeting her first husband, a ministerial student.

Pearl and Clay Frazier were married in Chapel on the Hill in 1951, and they lived in numerous states during his ministry with the last assignment being in Morristown, TN. Clay died in 1997, and Pearl then married E.C. Dearing with whom she has celebrated their twentieth anniversary this year. Pearl and E.C. have been active in church missions including a three-year church-establishing assignment to Romania in the early 2000s.

Charlie's Army tour of duty included being a part of the U.S. occupation forces in Japan. He saw the devastation of World War II all around Tokyo, and notably, he also made a visit to view the ruins of Hiroshima. Charlie said he never knew what his father did for work in Oak Ridge. He does remember his father deflecting questions about his secret work and always smiling while saying that he made "striped paint."

Charlie's parents moved back to the family farm after his dad's retirement in the 1950s. Bell Telephone hired Charlie to work in teletype services, assigning him to the Oak Ridge area in 1950. He is proud to have seen his three children graduate from ORHS.

The alumni stories from the early years of the Oak Ridge Schools are fascinating and compelling reading. The Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation is honored to have sponsored the book, "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education: Oak Ridge Schools 1944-2018." The Foundation is grateful for the more than 250 alumni who contributed their memories over 75 class years, and to the educators who submitted stories and history.

The book is available in both a hardback collector's edition and a paperback. For more details on the book, visit the Foundation website at www.orpsef.org The book is available for purchase locally at: Jefferson Drug, The Ferrell Shop, and the Methodist Medical Center's gift shop.

Thanks again, Benita, for even more insight into the wonderful book that has been produced to celebrate Oak Ridge's 75th anniversary. Your focusing on the history of Oak Ridge Schools through stories written by alumni makes the book a remarkable achievement and a very personal history to help coming generations appreciate the special place that is Oak Ridge!

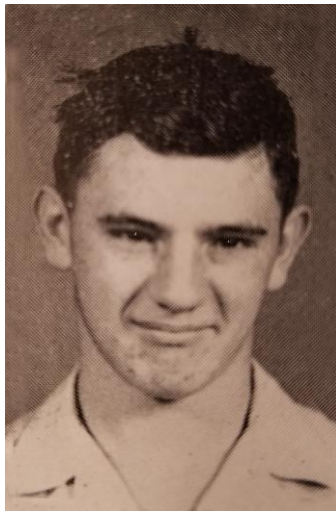
Readers, be sure and get your copy soon of "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education: Oak Ridge Schools 1944-2018!" <http://www.orpsef.org/purchaseBook>

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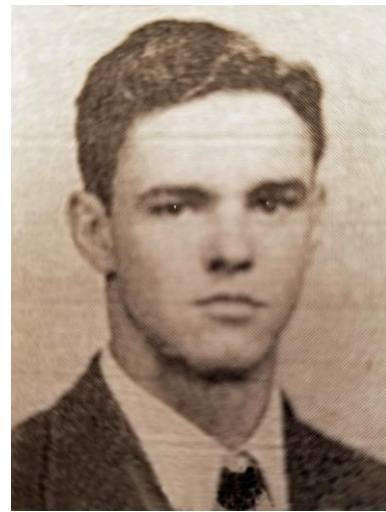
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Pearl Price



Charlie Price



Earl Price



Pearl Price Dearing and Charlie Price with a copy of the 75th Anniversary book