

# Online archive features more stories, plus on 75 years of OR school system

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of March 20, 2019)

One of the most exciting things that occurred during the year-long 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Oak Ridge was the publication of a book by the Oak Ridge School's Education Foundation. Now they have taken it a step further!

Jessica Steed, Executive Director of the Foundation shares the following with Historically Speaking readers:

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Oak Ridge High School alumni have had much more to say about their experiences in Oak Ridge Schools than the print edition of the book, "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education: Oak Ridge Schools 1944-2018," could contain. Thus, the Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation (ORPSEF) has created a virtual archive of additional alumni stories on their website: <http://www.orpsef.org/archives>. The archive collection is a dynamic repository for continuing student and educator stories.

Contributing writers from across numerous class years share remembrances of special friends, teachers, and school events. Many stories reflect the social and political influences of their time growing up in Oak Ridge:

Richard Bowman (1954) shared, "I first met Bill Gent (1955) when I was in the eighth grade. We were at a Jefferson Junior High school basketball game. Little did I know that this meeting would lead to such a lasting friendship. I had very little interaction with Bill until I was a sophomore in high school. Bill had continued to play football and baseball and was one of the best players in the state. By my senior year I had grown big enough to go out for varsity football. I was placed at the same position as Bill, wingback. This was when I really saw the kind of person he was. Bill, an all-state player, took me under his wing and coached me on my blocking and all other aspects of the game. The greatest thrill I experienced during that year was during the last game of the season. Bill was scheduled to receive the football used during the game if we won. This was an award for players on the first team only. Oak Ridge won, and Bill was presented the game ball. But as soon as Bill received the ball, he came over to me and presented me his prized trophy. Bill said "This is your ball. I'll get another one next year." I have never forgotten that moment! To this day that ball has been one of my most prized possessions."

Rushil Dave (2010) still remembers the lessons he learned playing sports and the legendary, cross-town middle school rivalry, saying: "Eighth grade at Jefferson Middle school was one of my favorite school years while growing up in Oak Ridge... That year I was lucky enough to make the JMS basketball team and form lifelong friendships and memories with my teammates. Coaches Mike and John "Dad" Murphy not only taught us about basketball but, more importantly, about how to conduct ourselves as professional young adults and to hold ourselves accountable for our actions. We learned to be humble in both victory and defeat and that it was normal to express our emotions when upset. To this day, I still remember "Dad" Murphy telling me, 'I am not a sore loser, but I sure do hate losing.' I realized that by being a team member I not only represented our school, but our community and the city of Oak Ridge. We learned how we could give back to the community through car washes and pancake breakfasts while earning our sweats and basketball shoes. Our coaches reminded us of those who were less fortunate and how much we took for granted in our daily lives. I know Coach Murphy is extremely proud that he took a group of immature teenagers and taught them lessons that were used to help them become successful young men on and, more importantly, off the court. In the end, after all the wild bus rides, intense team scrimmages, and crunk locker room antics, what really mattered the most was beating the team across town three times that year!"

Gloria (Williams) Bryson (1959) remembered practicing for shorthand class with good friend Linda (Seyfried) Haffey while listening to favorite music by such popular artists as Johnny Mathis and Nat King Cole. Their classmate Suellen Alfred wrote, "One of the most interesting things ORHS students did each day was play records during lunch in the lobby of the auditorium next to the cafeteria. It was fun to dance or watch others dance before or after lunch."

Chris Gillenwaters (2013) reflected on his Oak Ridge schooling from a different perspective, as a substitute teacher in his former schools. At Linden he fondly recalled the playground and kickball with teacher McCord Carter. At Robertsville Middle School, he passed hall lockers pondering which locker was his and the combination. And at ORHS, he humorously recalled fall afternoons of two-hour marching band rehearsals, endured as he said, "Just so I could get in the football games for free and yell a whole lot."

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The innovative academic programs in the Oak Ridge schools are often noted by students. One alumnus proudly wrote of the impact of his special science training. Stephen Cristy (1959) wrote, "In retrospect, I clearly see that our move to Oak Ridge was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Particularly in ORHS, I had opportunities, competition, and fellow role models that I never would have had at the much smaller rural school in Texas (his first school)." Steve has especially strong memories of the late fifties and the effect of the Russian launch of Sputnik on his ORHS science education. The Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) was inaugurated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956 as an attempt to reorganize the teaching of physics in American high schools. This effort received considerable government funding after Sputnik, and ORHS was chosen by PSSC to offer a demonstration class in the summer of 1958. Twenty ORHS Class of '59 seniors were chosen for the eight-week course along with forty high school physics teachers from across the nation who joined the students in class and lab work. Steve remembers: "We got high-powered lectures from outstanding physicists from ORNL and ORINS, such as Dr. William G. Pollard and Dr. Alvin Weinberg. We also got to do some lab work with radioisotopes at ORINS. After a week there, we received a diploma proclaiming our degree: "Serendipitous Quoter of Unclear Information about Radioisotope Techniques" (SQUIRT). Other people who took a longer course earned a "DRIP" degree, to be defined when you read Steve's full story. Steve credits his early immersion in science in the Oak Ridge schools with his pursuit of a PhD in analytical chemistry and a thirty-eight-year career at Y-12 in the Development Division.

The Foundation would love to hear from other Oak Ridge Schools' alumni and educators who have a story to share that is untold. There are plans to post the Class of 2019 story (the 76<sup>th</sup> class) as well as to continue collecting future class stories in the virtual archive. To current and former Oak Ridge educators, ORPSEF makes a special appeal for your input as an extension of the book's section, "The Teachers Get the Last Word," now to be continued via the archive. If you were fortunate enough to have known ORS educators who are no longer with us, their memories and contributions deservedly await your telling.

The Foundation may choose to edit submissions to the archives for content, length, grammar, and sensitive material. You may submit your stories to Jessica Steed, ORPSEF Executive Director, at [jessica.steed@orpsef.org](mailto:jessica.steed@orpsef.org) or call 865-241-3667 for more information. ORPSEF is proud to be an ongoing supporter of the fine tradition of "Excellence in Education" in the Oak Ridge Schools. Copies of the 75<sup>th</sup> book are available for purchase at Jefferson Drug Store, The Ferrell Shop, and the gift shops of Methodist Medical Center and the American Museum of Science and Energy.

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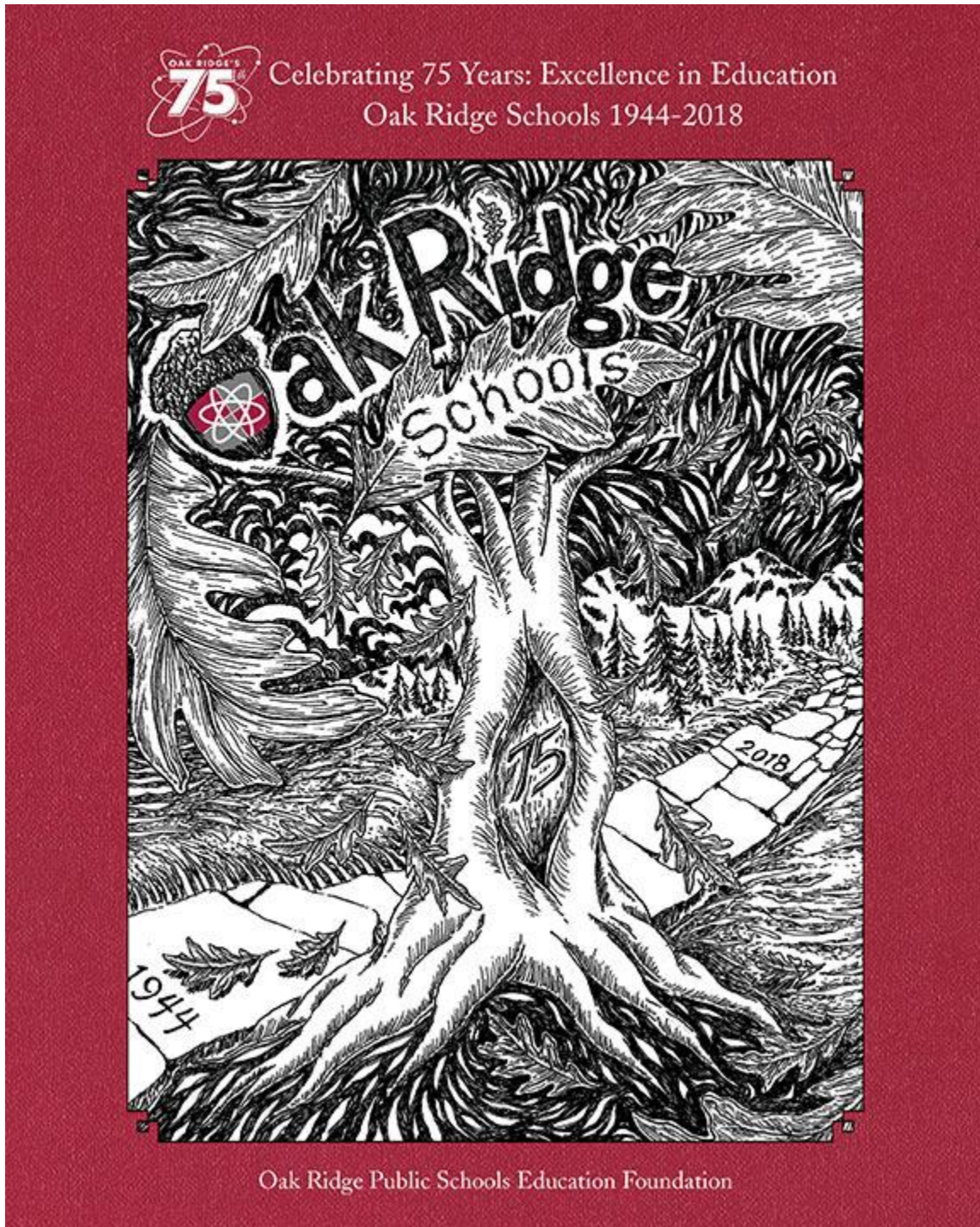
Thank you, Jessica! The virtual archive is a great addition to the history of Oak Ridge. We should use all avenues to help tell our amazing story. This is a good next step!



Bill Gent presents the game ball to Richard Bowman, who has treasured the gift since



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The Oak Ridge Schools' 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book