

# Lauren Gray, Part 1

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of September 16, 2019)

Benita Albert continues her practice of writing about Oak Ridge Schools alumni who have achieved remarkable success. She has brought us a wide range of experienced alumni. This two-part series features Lauren Gray, who is uniquely qualified for recognition in her chosen field of endeavor. I will let you learn the details from Benita, but know that Lauren is leading amazingly productive and worldwide humanitarian efforts.

Enjoy learning about yet another outstanding alumni of Oak Ridge Schools.

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In writing stories of Oak Ridge Schools alumni, I have been awestruck by the diversity of career paths, by the world-changing impact of their work, and by the extraordinary leadership they have shown. Lauren Gray, a 1996 Oak Ridge High School graduate, passionately works creating partnerships to develop solutions to world problems and to provide intervention resources for victims of crises worldwide. As the Senior Director of Institutional Philanthropy and Partnership for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lauren's job requires business acumen, strong communication skills, and a dedication and love for compassionate mission-based work.

In this part-one of Lauren's story, I will highlight her Oak Ridge origins. A later part-two installment will further detail her collegiate and career journey.

Leonard (Lenny) and Judi Gray arrived in Oak Ridge in 1975 where Lenny began his 36-year career as a mathematician at the Oak Ridge National Lab. After completing studies at UT in 1977, Judi set up her own interior design business while also soon adding daughters Lauren and Jessica (Jessie) to the Gray family. Their girls added new community and school involvements to an already busy lifestyle in their synagogue, sports leagues, and community volunteer work. In recent years, Judi has assumed leadership duties in the Secret City Festival, and Lenny has served as a teacher/mentor for innumerable ORHS student research projects through the Math, Science Thesis course.

Jessie (Gray) Moore graduated from ORHS in 2001. She now works as a grant writer for the Florida State University Medical School. She is married to Nick Moore also a 2001 ORHS graduate and now an associate professor in mathematics at Florida State. They are proud parents of a three-year old daughter, Cecilia.

Lauren attended Cedar Hill Elementary, Woodland Elementary, Jefferson Middle, and Oak Ridge High. During her fourth grade and one-half of fifth, Lauren's family lived in Bergen, Norway while Lenny was on a leave of absence to work at the IBM Research Center. Lauren attended an international school which used a British curriculum and in which students were enrolled from fifty-eight countries worldwide. Lauren's Mom, Judi, claims that this was where Lauren learned independence at an early age, riding a city bus by herself across several miles of city to her school. Lauren's family enjoyed extensive travels in Europe; perhaps the beginning of Lauren's broader world conscience.

Lauren described her academic preferences as "a generalist nerd." She pursued a rigorous ORHS academic program which included numerous Advanced Placement (AP) courses. She mentioned two inspiring teachers, Naida Finane in AP Junior English and George Davis in AP Economics. She loved history and English, and spoke highly of special writing projects on specific authors, better known to ORHS students as major author research.

Her community activities, as she described them, included: "Lots of sports, but mostly swimming for ACAC and ORHS, and AYSO soccer." Her early swim lessons started in Nona Rowcliffe's backyard pool like so many other young Oak Ridge swimmers-to-be. Lauren has especially fond memories of her first ACAC coach, Lois Weir, and also of her dad's coaching her soccer team. Later, she would join the Washington University swim team advancing to team captain in her senior year. Her artistic side was nurtured by experiences in the Oak Ridge Junior Playhouse, Showkids choir, and dance classes.

When asked what future she saw for herself in her teens, Lauren replied, "(I am) not sure I was that clear, but I think I wanted to make a difference/have meaning; wanted to travel." Although this answer is common for many students still in high school, Lauren's future has become all that she stated. Her pathway through university studies and resets in her early career choices have led her to important and meaningful work with the International Rescue Committee.

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Thanks Benita, for bringing us the story of one of our own who has achieved great things in yet another unusual manner.

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Lauren Gray as a youngster

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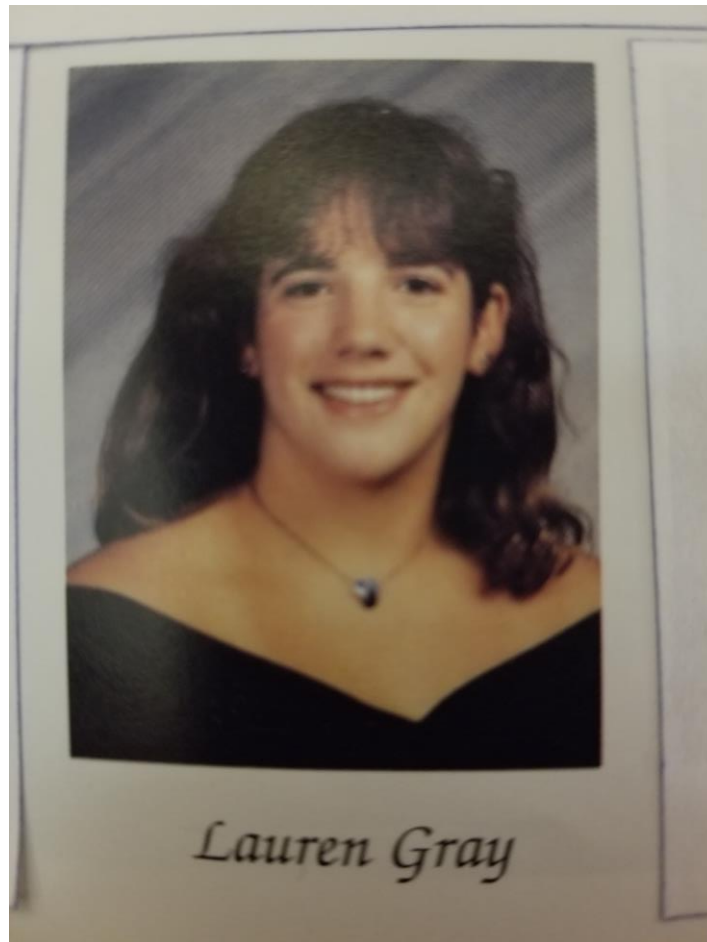
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Lauren Gray and her mother, Judi Gray, when they lived in Bergen, Norway in 1987-89

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Lauren Gray when she graduated Oak Ridge High School