

# Rachel and Adam Moses, Part One

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of July 19, 2021)

Benita Albert brings yet another Oak Ridge Schools alumni story. This one features two lawyers who are siblings.

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Selecting alumni to feature in my writings is easy given the impressive numbers of candidates, former Oak Ridge Schools students who have gone on to make significant contributions to society. However, it is also a challenge to make these choices knowing that there are so many alumni stories that beg to be told, that offer evidence that this community has raised and fostered extraordinary talent.

In making my selections, I have covered alumni across all decades of the Oak Ridge Schools, across race and gender, across a variety of academic applications, and across national and international affect. All have an important commonality, an Oak Ridge Schools education and an Oak Ridge community, childhood environment. Least covered among my stories are the very early year graduates and the more recent graduates. Perhaps it is obvious that many alumni are now deceased from those early years, and the more recent grads are very busy people in the process of building their career resume's and proving themselves.

Rachel and Adam Moses are in the prime of their careers. The siblings graduated from Oak Ridge High School (ORHS) in 1995 and 2000 respectively, and they both chose career paths in law. Rachel is a rural legal aid advocate in the middle eastern and Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee, and Adam is an immigration lawyer in New York City. I chose these former students of mine, because they are in the midst of their careers, and they represent a field, the field of law, that I have not featured in previous alumni stories.

Their busy lives, interrupted by pandemic constraints, allowed me the chance to catch them at home and to capture their Oak Ridge memories and influences for this Part One installment of their story. Part Two, to run later, will concentrate on their collegiate and professional paths. Both Rachel and Adam have shared endearing memories of Oak Ridge and candid views of their careers in law and their passionate advocacy for human rights.

Their Oak Ridge story begins with the arrival of their parents and pre-school age Rachel in 1981, followed soon by the birth of Adam. Their father, David Moses, had just completed a PhD in Nuclear Engineering from Carnegie Mellon. During his graduate years, his wife, Bonnie, was a Purchasing Supervisor with Westinghouse Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory. Her career transition to Oak Ridge was as Purchasing Manager for the Westinghouse Clinch Breeder Reactor Project while David accepted a position at the Oak Ridge National Lab (ORNL), ultimately becoming a Senior Program Manager.

Adam proudly described his father's ORNL work: "He oversaw research in high temperature materials, ceramic reactor fuels, reactor physics, and plutonium and actinide disposition in Russia. His work involved close collaborations with his foreign partners, particularly from Russia and Japan, some of whom remained his closest friends until his death (in 2017)."

Bonnie's work assignments changed over her career while she added a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Tennessee and became a Procurement Group Manager at Y-12, a position she held until her death in 2001.

Rachel and Adam attended Woodland Elementary School, Jefferson Junior High School, and ORHS. Reminiscing about her Oak Ridge Schools education, Rachel said, "I remember all my teachers," at which point she began naming each grade by grade. Her kindergarten teacher, Charlene Thompson, left a lasting impression: "From the start I loved the diversity of Oak Ridge Schools, my first teacher and many of my friends were African American...now Mrs. Thompson and I serve on the Oak Ridge Board of Directors for Girls Incorporated."

Rachel continued, "We took amazing field trips such as Kerns Bakery (2<sup>nd</sup> grade), Cherokee, NC (4<sup>th</sup> grade), and an overnight trip to Huntsville, AL (5<sup>th</sup> grade). Now, as an adult, I handle special education cases and attend IEP (Individual Educational Program) meetings in rural areas. I now realize that Oak Ridge was fortunate to have encore classes like orchestra, band, art, gym, and music."

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She fondly recalled music programs for parents, mentioning a patriotic show in third grade and Alice in Wonderland in the fifth grade. Rachel listed favorite memories of: "Loving to sing,...learning all the state songs, and playing the recorder and string instruments on our desks." She soberly stated, "This is not the norm for other school systems. Oak Ridge had a solid elementary school program."

Rachel's junior high years evoked memories of new opportunities in sports and student government. Her sixth-grade teacher, Theresa Venable, inspired her interest in civil rights and student rights. That interest blossomed into advocacy by the seventh grade where she remembered, "We had projects out the wazoo, involving research, posters, collections...I liked reports, researching, writing, but not posters. I was not creative. I also noticed that some of my friends did not have the funds or parents like mine to grab a last-minute poster. I met with Principal Robert Moss about the fairness of this, about kids failing assignments due to lack of resources."

Rachel's concerns prompted the school to make supplies available in the library, provide current events publications, and provide copying services for students. No doubt, Rachel was beginning her future career path.

Rachel recalled that in junior high, academic tracking offered advanced coursework in math and science classes with hands-on laboratories. She observed that such opportunities are still largely unavailable in the rural counties where she serves as a legal advocate for students. She enjoyed oral book reports in English, and the fun Earth Science class led by teacher Dan DiGregorio. She described algebra and geometry classes as "Fun for me, the homework was easy to knock out."

At ORHS, Rachel said, "Academics was 100%. In Combined Studies as a sophomore, we were doing college level work, truly combining English and Social Studies via time period studies and sitting major exams with emphasis on essay writing." Rachel elected many Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and it was in AP Calculus BC that I met the incredibly talented minds of both Rachel, and later, Adam. It is with great pride that I can report that their studies eventually led Rachel to a minor and Adam a major in mathematics at the collegiate level.

Adam's school memories included fifth grade with teacher Monty Koons about whom he said, "He used to put Beatles posters all over his classroom. He was the first person in my life to express guilt about how the United States treated Native Americans." Adam's seventh- and eighth-grade English teacher, Jane Gulley, left the following impression: "Not only did Ms. Gulley inspire me to love the humanities, particularly the classics, but she taught me a lot about character. I'm embarrassed to say that as a young teenager, I used to make fun of people who were different than me. Ms. Gulley showed us that using stereotypes isn't funny, it's harmful. These are fundamental concepts that I carry on to this day."

In his senior year, Adam recalled his AP Calculus BC class, saying of me, his teacher: "To this day, I don't know what wizardry you used, but you made very complex math very, very easy. When I started studying economics in college, one professor took me aside and complimented my math skills and asked me where I learned it so well. More than just making it easy, you instilled a logical method of problem solving that I use as an attorney.

When meeting clients for the first time, I 'map out' the solutions to their legal problems just as though I was solving a differential equation. While I never loved the more abstract aspects of math, you laid the foundation for how I approach problems to this day."

Both Rachel and Adam honed leadership skills in school and community activities. Rachel was the captain of her JJHS basketball team in ninth-grade, an honor she still treasures though she candidly admitted to be a second-string player. Many of her teammates would go on to successful play at ORHS and collegiately, and Rachel was their ever-supportive fan. She joined a diversity of clubs at ORHS including the Future Business Leaders of America, influenced by an ORHS course in Business Law where she read her first court case summaries and found them to be incredibly interesting.

She renewed connections to many former friends and classmates via membership in SECME (Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering), a popular club with a mission to promote STEM careers and post-secondary educational

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opportunities. She expressed pride in serving as Student Social Services Committee Chair her senior year, especially providing gifts for needy kids through the Angel Tree Project.

Adam recalled getting in trouble with the ORHS administration when, as senior class president, he chose to play a Jimi Hendrix version of the National Anthem over the school intercom. It was his job to select and play a recorded version of the anthem and to lead the Pledge of Allegiance during each Monday morning homeroom period. He remembered being chased down the hall in an administrator's attempt to have him "turn off the noise."

He candidly wrote of that event, "Those (administrative) interactions have been a source of frustration and wisdom for me over the past twenty years. On the one hand, I had to respect the attempt to enforce decorum on the school. Now, as a professional, I find myself agreeing with the attempt more than not.

By enforcing these boundaries, I was taught that behavior has limits...but...I was never satisfied with calling my actions 'inappropriate.' I believed, and still believe, that the term is wildly ambiguous and subjective making its use fundamentally unfair." Adam was on his way to a law career, perhaps well before he knew it?

Reading Adam's response to special childhood memories reminded me of a quote by pop singer Katy Perry. She said, "It takes a village to make me who I am." Adam's Oak Ridge roots provided him a special village of which he writes effusively. "The most memorable, indeed unbelievable, thing for me was my street. My closest friends for life all lived within one quarter mile of my house on Clemson Drive, including Michael Vanderlan, Brad Radle, David Dahl, Lindsey Land, and Nathaniel Powell. Together we experienced a near idyllic setting to learn the values of friendship and forming lifelong bonds."

He continued. "Also notable about Clemson Drive was its diversity, at least by East Tennessee standards. On our street lived families from every corner of the world, from India to China to Sri Lanka to Peru. Our neighbors' varied backgrounds made a lasting impression on me and what I wanted to do."

Rachel recalled Girls Inc. as being her go-to place from second grade to her present position there as Vice-President of the Girls Inc. Board. She loved playing basketball and softball, serving as a day camp counselor for five years beginning in high school, and working as a referee/umpire for games.

Her connections to community civic organizations were first made via high school affiliations where she served as: President of the Anchor Club (a Pilot club affiliate), President of the Key Club (Kiwanis affiliation), and member of the Interact Club (Rotary affiliation) and the Lions Club. Rachel's service-minded spirit continues in the several civic organizations where she now holds leaderships positions.

Both Rachel and Adam were participants in the Children's International Summer Village (CISV). Adam wrote, "At the end of fifth grade, I attended a month-long camp in Cayenne, French Guiana as a member of a four-person delegation from East Tennessee. There we met with about a dozen other delegations each representing their own country, as well as a half-dozen Junior Counselors also representing different nationalities. Over the course of a month we participated in games to teach each other about our different cultures...Afterwards, my parents continued to place strong emphasis on my travels."

His subsequent travels included another CISV program in Norway; Italy with a family friend; Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Paris with his dad; London to visit sister Rachel during her study abroad; ORHS trip to Spain; and a European adventure with fellow ORHS graduating senior David Dahl. During university years, Adam visited Guatemala, Thailand, Australia, and South America.

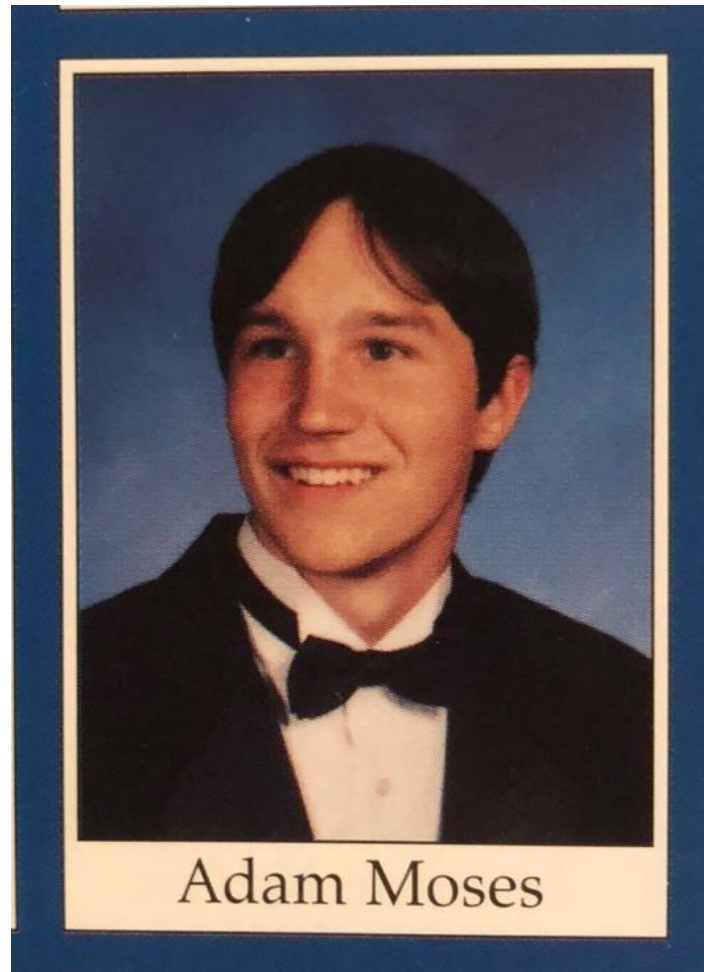
Concerning his travels, Adam wrote, "Through my travels, I learned to love bridging cultures, to find commonality in disparate people with disparate experiences. I had a thirst for understanding not just individuals, but also the culture, customs, and history of their people. I also became skilled at conversing with people whom I had nothing in common, even language. These are fundamental skills I use every day as an immigration attorney in New York City."

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Rachel's CISV itinerary included visits to Senegal at age eleven, a family-home visit exchange in Ontario, Canada at age twelve, and a seminar camp in Brazil the summer after her ORHS graduation. She continues to travel extensively, planning at least one international trip annually with the exception being 2020 due to pandemic constraints.

Their stories will continue in a later, part two, installment covering their ultimate decisions to pursue legal studies. Like their childhood interests, both Rachel and Adam have chosen to devote their talents to human advocacy, to careers in legal aid services and immigration law.



Adam Moses senior photo

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Rachel Moses senior photo