

Molly Brown, Part One

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of October 17, 2022)

Molly Brown concluded her senior class, yearbook memories in the 2004 Oak Log with the following: "One word. CONFERENCES." That summarization personified her Oak Ridge High School (ORHS) leadership resume', and it could still be her mantra in her professional career.

She currently serves as a Deputy Program Manager for the US Navy where she said, "I stumbled upon the arms control treaties and agreements world with my first job and have stayed in this niche field since. I started working in chemical and biological treaties, eventually working my way to the Compliance Assessment Group." Her work with the US Navy requires that she render policy advisement and oversight on international and domestic laws requiring compliance. Her job involves research, problem solving, travel, communication skills, and diplomacy.

In interviewing Molly, I was curious to get a sense of her teenage aspirations regarding her future. Her educational choices, beginning as early as ORHS, no doubt helped to secure the career she now enjoys. She answered my question as follows: "I saw myself spending time in DC doing something in politics." Her current work, which is largely apolitical, is vital to national security. More on her specialized assignments will follow in a subsequent, Part Two, of her story while this Part One installment will concentrate on her Oak Ridge and Roane County origins.

Raised in Oliver Springs near the Hopper farm and surrounded by extended family, Molly attended school for grades K-8 in Oliver Springs. The Hopper clan, her mother's family, traces their local origins back to a young slave girl named Adeline who was sold to William Staples of Oliver Springs in the 1840's. In the late 1940's, the same land that Adeline worked was purchased by Molly's grandfather and his brother, William and Benton Hopper. Now, Hopper descendants count eight family homes on same property and seven generations of Hoppers who have lived and worked in the area. Blake, older brother of Molly, lives with his family on the farm. One of Molly's fond childhood memories is accompanying her Uncle Julian Hopper and Grandmother Nannie Hopper on trips to sell farm produce at the Oak Ridge Farmers Market, a tradition that continues into the present day.

Molly's parents, Emmitt and Abigail (Gail) Brown, met as students at Campbell High School in Rockwood, TN, the segregated school for Black students living in Roane County before the middle 1960s. For grades 1-8, Gail attended a one-room schoolhouse, the Oliver Springs Colored School. Gail's sister and family historian, Julia Daniel, said that students called their school by the preferred name of "Miss Mayme's School," in honor of Mayme Carmichael who taught three to four generations of students there.

Gail graduated as valedictorian of her high school senior class in 1963. She completed an undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee as one of the earliest Black student graduates in UT's history. Emmitt, a Rockwood native, joined the US Navy post high school. Gail and he spent their first years of marriage in Puerto Rico and Maryland, Emmitt's last Naval assignments. They transitioned from military life to live nearby the Hopper family homestead in Oliver Springs. Emmitt was employed by the Oak Ridge National Lab (ORNL) where he became the Chief of Security before retiring. Gail's teaching career at ORHS spanned more than three decades from 1969-2001.

Molly transferred from Oliver Springs Schools to ORHS in her freshman year of 2000-2001. Given that Molly's mother was a respected faculty member and Chair of the ORHS Business Department, and her sister Carla was a 1991 ORHS graduate, the transition was made easier.

Molly immersed herself into the academic and extracurricular life of ORHS. She played AYSO community soccer until her junior year when she sustained a sidelining injury. Notable among her many activities were selection as a representative from ORHS to Girls State, a four-year member and senior-year president of SECME (Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering), and the TN State President of FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America). She honed public speaking/communication skills and leadership through these activities, and her advanced academic coursework positioned her for challenging post-secondary studies.

One of her beloved high school mentors was Cassandra Osborne, ORHS history teacher and Social Studies Chair. Cassandra also holds the honor of being Molly's godmother. Cassandra sponsored SECME, a popular club with ORHS students, and she recalled Molly's special talents. She wrote, "Molly served as President of SECME and always received the highest academic awards bestowed by the organization. She gave up her spring break each year to travel to various

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colleges with the organization. Molly always stood out to college reps based on her inquisitive and well thought out questions regarding higher education."

Cassandra continued, "Molly has always been a very capable debater and is diligent in checking her facts before speaking. I think one of the best ways overall to describe Molly is very knowledgeable, intelligent, trustworthy, and a genuine individual who is a lifelong learner. She respects everyone and has the interpersonal skills to make others feel comfortable around her."

During the summer preceding her ORHS senior year, Molly was accepted for a pre-college program at Northwestern University called LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development) through the Kellogg School of Management. LEAD exposed Molly to opportunities for team project work in developing and writing a detailed business plan, in giving presentations, and in responding to critiques by the university faculty and MBA graduate mentors. The month-long program offered the student scholars an academic survey of marketing, finance, managerial leadership, management communication, team collaboration, negotiation skills, social responsibility, and business plan development. The student scholars' project work imitated a similar process used in training MBA graduates of the Kellogg School.

Molly said that her participation in LEAD convinced her that Northwestern University was the undergraduate experience she desired. LEAD certainly provided the specialized skills for her ORHS senior-year assignment as the State President of FBLA and an eventual trip to the FBLA national convention. Her Northwestern undergraduate studies were directed toward a double major in political science and international studies. She wrote, "(My classes) taught me how to analyze, process, and synthesize my thoughts which have been critical skills needed in my career."

Ever seeking a new challenge, Molly used her summers and other free time to pursue internships in various fields. In the summers before and after her Northwestern freshman year, Molly completed an ORNL internship in Environmental Science where she studied the cumulative thermal stress on fish during chronic exposure to high temperatures. Contemplating the possibility of law school, Molly elected to spend the summers of 2005 and 2006 working in the Anderson County Juvenile Court. The final quarter of her collegiate junior year, as well as parttime during her senior year, she interned with a public consulting firm whose CEO was the Mayor of Evanston, IL.

Molly's high school career was filled with conferences and meetings where she learned to take the lead. Her journey was just beginning when she transitioned from Wiley the ORHS Wildcat mascot in cardinal and gray to Willie Wildcat of Northwestern University, the NU mascot wearing purple and white. Even with a double major in political science and international studies, she completed both Bachelor degrees in less than four years. Her teen professional dreams of a career in DC were coming true when she subsequently accepted her first job as a National Security Analyst for the Computer Sciences Corporation in Alexandria, VA. To be continued.

Per official government guidelines: The views presented for this story are those of Molly Brown and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense or its components.

Thank you, Benita for this introduction to Molly Brown and her educational credentials. She is indeed an outstanding graduate of Oak Ridge Schools.

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Molly Brown and Willie Wildcat of Northwestern University