

Todd Livesay, Part One

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of April 25, 2022)

Benita Albert brings us the story of a local family and focuses on Todd Livesay, a teacher. I am pleased to see his involvement of the Training and Technology program at Y-12 highlighted in the story. There are many more aspects to this local story that you will enjoy.

Todd Livesay, a 1981 Oak Ridge High School graduate, has deep Oak Ridge roots. Born in Oak Ridge and attending Elm Grove (K-5), Glenwood (6th grade), Jefferson Junior High School (7-9) and ORHS (10-12), he has remained an Oak Ridge resident. Since 1999, he has worked for the Oak Ridge Schools as a teacher and educational innovator.

I knew Todd as my student in Algebra 1 during his sophomore year. He was an energetic teen with an outgoing personality and a well-established work ethic honed in his after-school jobs. Those traits are still very much a part of his persona. Interviewing him at ORHS recently, Todd enthused over his latest appointment, a 60% assignment at ORHS where he is in the process of setting up a new advanced STEM lab/classroom. The room displayed creative student projects such as team-collaborative Rube Goldberg machines and wooden, in-construction trebuchets. I wanted to sign up!

Todd's Oak Ridge story is equally entrancing as I learned when he shared his family's history. His paternal uncles, Hubert and Marion Livesay arrived in Oak Ridge at the beginning of the Manhattan Project. They heard that there was work to support the war mission, though they did not know the location. The brothers and their families boarded a government bus destined for what would be their secret assignments at K-25. Their sister, Edith Livesay Taylor, came soon after World War II with her husband, Tommy, a Navy veteran who began work at Y-12. Edith joined the nursing staff at the Oak Ridge Hospital.

Todd introduced the fourth Livesay sibling to move to Oak Ridge as his dad, Jim Livesay. He said, "My dad was my hero." The youngest of eight siblings, Jim chose to enlist in the US Army where he served in the European Theater under General George Patton as a combat engineer in the 103rd Infantry. His group cleared routes for troop advancements, a dangerous mission including such as disarming land mines and necessary construction or demolition projects. He suffered shrapnel wounds that he was told would not permit his return to the front. However, after hospitalization, he returned and was later shot twice in his foxhole during The Battle of the Bulge. Subsequently, Jim spent eighteen months in recovery and rehabilitation at Walter Reed Hospital.

Jim returned to the family homeplace in West Virginia where he chose to farm and to use the GI Bill to pursue a degree in animal husbandry. He married Betty, a nurse in training, and they started their young family on the farms Jim worked. Todd's older brothers, James Jr., and Kim were born in West Virginia and Ohio respectively, but both would later graduate from ORHS in the Classes of '71 and '73.

Hubert bought a "filling station" on the corner of Manhattan Road and Northwestern Avenue in the late 1950's. Todd said his business in tires boomed to the point that Hubert realized it could become his specialty. He was right. In 1960, during a visit from Jim, Hubert asked him if he would consider moving to Oak Ridge to help with his business venture, Modern Recapping and Tire Sales, established circa 1959 on Midway Road and Lafayette Avenue intersection.

Jim had considered getting out of the demanding cattle business to be able to spend more time with his family. The deciding factor for Jim and Betty was the reputation of the Oak Ridge Schools and a stronger educational program for their young children. Settling into a B-house they rented on Endicott Lane, they later purchased a D-house where they lived the remainder of their lives. They added a third son, Todd, born in 1963.

Thus, Todd had a wealth of family, four close family units, all settled in Oak Ridge for their lifetimes. Jim worked at Modern Tire until 1978, then K-25 in the barrier division, transferring to Y-12 in assembly/disassembly in 1981 until his retirement in 1988. Marion continued to work as a chemical operator at K-25, dying a month short of his planned retirement, and Edith continued her nursing career at Methodist Medical Center until her retirement. Todd's nine, Oak Ridge first cousins are all ORHS graduates.

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After Todd's brothers graduated from ORHS, his mother worked several jobs in Oak Ridge: Elm Grove Drug Store, Elm Grove Grocery as an assistant butcher, and the downtown Revco. He said, "She worked to help with Jay's college bills. Even though her work included many evening hours, mom would always have something in the Crock Pot for supper. My parents did whatever it took to make sure their kids had what they needed." Kim (like Todd would later choose) completed the Training and Technology (TAT) program in his senior year at ORHS. He married an ORHS graduate, Robin Broome, and he is now retired as a project manager with Dow Corning in Michigan. James Jr. recently retired from his job as a CVS store manager in Rogersville, TN.

Todd fondly recalled his Oak Ridge school experiences: fun community nights at Elm Grove Elementary; his dynamic fifth grade teacher, Teresa Venable; and physical education teacher, Rick Evans, and the big battle ball competitions played after school. At Jefferson Junior High School his eighth-grade social studies teacher, Ray Foster, and ninth-grade science teacher, Dan DiGregorio, kept him engaged and interested in their subjects. At JJHS, Todd found his real passion was industrial arts where he discovered that: "I liked everything involving drawing and building." He formed a special connection with his ORHS welding teacher, Bill Moser, who Todd said, "...Taught an advanced course, a course that prepared me well for my senior year. I took as many welding classes as my schedule allowed"

The second semester of his senior year was spent in the Training and Technology (TAT) program, in an off-campus training site just inside the gates of Y-12, sponsored by the Department of Energy and operated by Union Carbide Corporation, managing contractor operating the Y-12 Plant and Oak Ridge Associated Universities. His coursework included twenty-five weeks of welding training, a course he finished in half the time, a feat he credits to Bill Moser's ORHS classes. He spent much of the rest of the time as an unofficial teaching assistant assigned to help other students in the course. Todd proudly showed me his framed TAT Training certification/diploma which hangs above his desk.

His certification in welding technology landed him a lucrative job in the summer of 1981, but that job in North Carolina came with homesickness and Todd's decision to return and try a college course of studies. He was worried that his parents might be upset, his dad had told him in high school that he needed to commit to either a vocational training program or college. When he chose the TAT program as an ORHS senior, he assumed his fate was set. However, his mother laughed when he called to give his parents the news. She told Todd that she had predicted his change of heart. She had already arranged for his UT enrollment. She said, "Come on home, I have it all worked out." Todd added, "Mom had even arranged for me to have a good ORHS friend, Ruffin Stirling, as roommate."

Todd reflected on the Oak Ridge community and the beginnings of his lifelong attachment to his hometown. "I delivered newspapers on the east end of town beginning at age twelve. I started as a bus boy, pizza maker, and then greeter at Big Ed's Pizza in the ninth grade and later made and flipped pizzas four nights a week throughout high school. When Big Ed's home burned, I worked weekends helping to reconstruct his kitchen." Todd credits Big Ed with his admission to the TAT program saying that Big Ed knew everyone in town. ORHS was given only one student scholarship position in the program, a slot for which Todd was not chosen. Big Ed learned of his disappointment, and of his own volition, decided to advocate for Todd. It worked!

Ever resourceful and eager for a new challenge, Todd said, "I was able to buy my first car at age fifteen, a 1971 Ford Capri for which I paid \$300. I fixed it up with my dad as my mentor and helper, repainted it, and sold it. My next car was a silver, 1975 Ford Mustang Fastback that I bought at age seventeen. I drove it throughout my college years." Of course, Todd and his dad had to enhance it by repainting it candy apple red. His love of cars and rebuilding/stylizing them continues to this day. Todd describes his current project as a "1966 Ford Mustang Shelby GT 350 wanna-be," a blue and white beauty nearing complete restoration, a labor of love spanning two and a half years.

Todd's family were early members of Covenant Presbyterian Church where he remembers his dad's expectation that they sit together as a family unit--always three rows from the back of the sanctuary. Todd loved the church youth group activities, especially the strong leaders and role models of sponsors Dan Kuban and Dicky Jenkins

In the fall of 1981, Todd enrolled in the UT College of Engineering, but he soon discovered that the program of studies was too academic for his purpose. He said, "It wasn't hands-on enough. I wasn't going to quit, but I wanted a way to go back to welding."

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During the 1982 winter quarter Todd further refined his career goal. He decided to become a welding teacher, something he had enjoyed when he was asked to work with struggling welding students in the TAT program. He discovered the UT College of Technology Education and met a professor, Robert Hanson, who became his mentor and lifetime friend. "Dr. Hanson was a former Industrial Arts teacher. He continued to advise me throughout my degree program in technology education. He introduced me to the American Industrial Arts Student Association (later renamed the Technology Student Association, or simply TSA), and he supported my appointment as a teaching assistant in Industrial Arts during my UT senior year where I worked at night assisting students with their assigned projects."

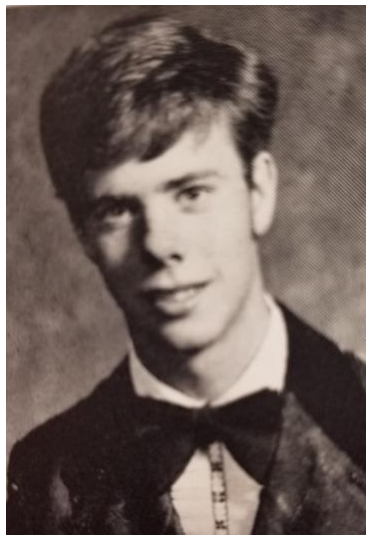
Accepting his first teaching position at Northwest Middle School in Knoxville, Todd sponsored the first TSA student club in the Knox County Schools. He brought twenty-one of his students to the state convention in 1985, his group constituting one-third of the total attendance. He would build strong TSA chapters in all his later teaching assignments, often seeing his students advance to national TSA competitions.

This lifelong Oak Ridger and educator has had an amazing professional career, including with the Oak Ridge Schools where his project-based instruction has encouraged students to reach for new heights, a partnership with NASA and a satellite experiment now orbiting the Earth. More on that and Todd's new plans in a Part Two installment to follow.

Thank you, Benita, for this insight into Todd Livesay's growth over the years into the amazing instructor he has become. I know our readers are anxious to read part two of this series where we will learn about Todd's partnership with NASA and the satellite experiment that makes us all even prouder of Oak Ridge!

Should you want to know more at the TAT training program at Y-12, here are some 14 articles at Y-12: *Oak Ridge Treasure*, *National Resource* columns in a series written about that:

Just use this link: <https://www.y12.doe.gov/about/history/our-historian> and search for "TAT" or you can just look for the dates the articles were written between March 2010 and June 2010.



Todd Livesay's Oak Ridge High School senior photograph