

## ORHS Class of 2022, Part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of May 23, 2022)

Benita Albert and Jessica Steed bring us the second and final part of the series on Oak Ridge High School's class of 2022. Enjoy:

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Caroline Elliott wrote, "Some of my favorite memories at Oak Ridge High School (ORHS) have been tied to the performing arts. I have been singing the entirety of my life." Caroline, the daughter of Steven and Alison Elliott, chose as her senior quote: "Where words fail, music speaks." Her quote was borrowed from an esteemed man of words, author Hans Christian Andersen, who recognized the power of music as an international language expressing emotions which can bring listeners together.

Caroline has had thirteen years of piano training. She spoke glowingly of her AP Music Theory course with teacher Douglas Philips and the "eye opening" experience it was, even with her extensive musical background. She advised students to take a music course at ORHS for the required art elective, especially if you have not had a music background. I saw such fellow students advance from introductory choir as freshmen and choose to return for a second year."

Caroline is one of four ORHS Class of 2022 students who submitted their memories to AP English teacher Michael Feuer for inclusion in the Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation's (ORPSEF) virtual archives accessible at [www.orpsef.org](http://www.orpsef.org). ORPSEF published the book, "Celebrating 75 Years of Excellence in Education in the Oak Ridge Schools: 1944-2018" in which class memories for each of the first seventy-five years appears. It is a goal of the Foundation to continue the class memories for each successive class as well. ORHS alum across the now 79 class years of the Oak Ridge Schools are invited to add their own class memories by emailing stories to [Jessica.steed@orpsef.org](mailto:Jessica.steed@orpsef.org).

A common theme among the Class of 2022 submitted writings was praise for the arts opportunities they have experienced in the classroom and in extracurricular activities at ORHS. Those interests range from Dance Cats to band, theater, chorus, and broadcasting. Their selections in art are in addition to ambitious academic coursework, or as Grant Walters described it—"the hardest classes at ORHS."

Grant Walters, the son of Glenn and Vashti Walters, enrolled in three years of Broadcasting classes at ORHS. He briefly summarized the skills earned in each course: "In the first course you present the news and learn reporting, the second course includes creating fictional films, and the third course is a mix of both earlier courses with a large final project." He had high praise for teacher, David Kolodney, saying, "He truly did inspire me and my friends to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. He did that through believing in us and helping us find our strengths. My strength is in the horror and comedy genre of film."

The remainder of Grant's written memories describes his and four classmates' 21-minute film, the final project in their Broadcasting 3 course. "(The project) could be about anything, and we decided to make a mafia comedy film. I was the mob boss of the film, and I loved playing the bad guy." They wrote a script, filmed at multiple sites and edited hours of film. Grant found his passion, and he plans to pursue a degree in broadcast journalism with a minor in cinema studies at UTK.

Grant recently worked as a production assistant at Discovery Network in Knoxville where he had a first-hand experience aiding on sets. It reinforced his desire for his career choice. His mother is a producer and director for television shows through Discovery Network.

Audrianna Williams transferred to Oak Ridge Schools from a nearby private school. She already knew many ORHS students through her training at the Oak Ridge Academy of Dance (since age three.) She wanted a high school with more diversity in the student population and in extracurricular opportunities as well as a broader and deeper academic program. She also wanted to dance, and she joined the ORHS Dance Cats in her freshman year.

Of her Dance Cats experience, Audrianna wrote, "I was lucky enough to perform on the sidelines of football games for four amazing seasons with teammates for whom I will forever be thankful."

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Audrianna has served as a Wildcat mentor for underclassmen, and she participated in Wildcat Pride where she helped organize pre-game activities and presented themes for student involvement at athletic events. She wants to continue on a dance team in college. She will soon be traveling to her "five or six finalist schools" for dance audition tryouts after which she will make her college choice. Audrianna is the daughter of Michelle and Scott Williams.

Elijah Roth said that his top memory/takeaway from his school experience was in the arts program at ORHS. He wrote, "As a member of band, chorus, and theater, my time at ORHS (which despite feeling like an eternity, I now realize has flown by) was defined by my performances." His writings spoke enthusiastically of his ORHS Band career, specifically experiences with the indoor drum line and resultant leadership assignments. He plans to pursue a career in music.

Elijah profusely praises the friendships he has made through Masquers, and the feeling of magic created on the stage. He recently assumed the role of Colonel Mustard in the ORHS fall production of the play, "Clue." And he added that: "Chorus let me find an avenue to share my voice with the world and taught me to never be afraid to put myself out there."

It is "out there" where he plans to be with an exciting summer invitation to audition for the prestigious Music City Drum and Bugle Corps in Nashville. In the fall, Elijah is off to the University of North Texas where this National Merit Finalist has been awarded a full scholarship. He described North Texas as "the top percussion school in the world." Elijah has been in the Oak Ridge Schools since kindergarten. His parents are Philip and Traci Roth.

These four amazing graduates have all taken rigorous courses of study. All have pursued Advanced Placement coursework across the academic disciplines.

Grant served as the president of the ORHS Philosophy Club and enjoyed participating in challenging debate topics such as gene modification and bioethics. He has also made time in his school day at JMS and ORHS to serve as an aide for special needs students in their classroom. He mentioned looking forward to a trip to the Special Olympics with ORHS students.

Elijah praised his sixth-grade teacher, Chris Layton, and his history lessons employing computer explorations with Minecraft which encouraged student creativity and hands-on participation. He said, "Math and history have been my favorite academic studies." He recognized many of his teachers across the grades along with his appreciation for his Oak Ridge Schools' educational program.

Audrianna talked about her transition to ORHS and the academic challenge. She expressed appreciation for the individualized teacher help she received while learning to use technology in her coursework. She also mentioned that, though ORHS classes were much larger than her private school background, it allowed her to experience a greater diversity of thought and interaction. Though she has yet to make her final college choice, she wants to pursue a degree in business with a specialty in accounting as well as a minor in history.

Caroline transitioned to ORHS from her third-through-eighth-grade program at St. Mary's School. Asked about the transition, she replied, "I came with many St. Mary's friends, and I found ORHS to be welcoming and accepting. Entering as freshmen, everyone was uncomfortable at the beginning, but we became family."

We talked about her senior solo for the spring ORHS Chorus concert. She chose to sing Nat King Cole's "Sentimental Reasons," saying she especially loved the old, "1940's feel of it." Caroline is enrolled at UTK where she will join the Exploratory Track, a program designed to help students identify their academic majors and minors. Caroline said, "My options are open."

I asked each student to comment on the experience of dealing with Covid-mandated educational changes in their sophomore and junior years.

Caroline said, "I set my alarm early to be sure I was up and online and keeping up. Once back at school I missed seeing smiles on my masked peers."

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Audrianna said, "Online learning asks a lot of you, it took more effort on my part. You must be self-motivated." And she added, "Don't take anything for granted. I wasn't thankful enough before Covid."

Grant observed, "Online learning made me realize that I could do a lot at home, yet in math, I needed my teachers."

Elijah said, "Both my parents worked at home, same as me. It was hard at times trying to find quiet. I really missed being in school and the extracurricular activities."

Finally, I asked these soon-to-be ORHS alumni if they had advice for future Wildcats.

Caroline advised, "Be yourself. It's OK not to know what your path is. Enjoy your time in high school—it goes quickly."

Audrianna answered, "Value the diversity of academic and extracurricular opportunities available."

Grant offered, "Find a program that fits you, there are so many options."

Elijah said, "The more involved you become in your classes the more you'll get out of it. Ask questions. The point of school is learning and mentally exchanging ideas. It makes for a great learning experience."

Obviously, the ORHS Class of 2022 is loaded with talent, resilience, and future promise. They make the Wildcat Nation proud as they join the ORHS alumni roster, now nearing 35,000 former graduates.

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Thanks to Benita and Jessica for insights into the ORHS Class of 2022. As you can see, they continue to collect memories each year to add to the ones collected when the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary book was published. Such a wonderful work to keep going. In years to come these memories will be even more insightful to future generations.

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Audrianna Williams (photo taken by friend, Sinclair Cunningham, on a beach trip during spring break)

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Caroline Elliott (senior yearbook photo)



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Elijah Roth (photo taken by Linda Ripley at UT Arboretum)

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Grant Walters (selfie taken during his senior year)