

The Oak Ridger's First Papergirl

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of March 4, 2024)

Joseph "Bick" Marshall wrote me an email after he read the Jack Case series in *Historically Speaking*.

Bick said, "As a 21-year-old, I started work at Y-12 in 1970 in the 'Dispatching Department' doing what was basically entry level production control work, and Jack was, of course, Superintendent. I didn't see him often, but I was in awe when I did see him. He had an aura of leadership that was evident. The management was very good to me during the 4 1/2 years I was there, promoting me and moving me to around different places for experience and knowledge (my last position was in a Container Engineering group with access to plant locations and production drawings in the plant), and I was allowed to work straight days so I could attend classes at UT when shift work was the norm.

Bick continued, "I was anonymously recommended (never knew how or who and still wonder) for a position at the Purchasing Division in 1974 which I accepted. I will always be extremely appreciative and grateful for the opportunities I was given. It was an eye-popping experience for a very young man, and a great training experience which prepared me more than I realized. I have no doubt that the leadership and influence of Jack Case had a huge impact on me and my, as well as thousands of others, career, although I had no idea at the time."

Bick, who is named for his father and grandfather, grew up on Olney Lane in Oak Ridge and is a 1966 Oak Ridge High School graduate. Bick said, "I have met you twice...once at a speaking engagement you had at the Heritage Center in Townsend, and last May at the East Tennessee Historical Society's annual member meeting. I spoke to you briefly on both occasions, but you dropped a bomb on me at the Townsend event after I told you that I grew up on Olney Lane in Oak Ridge, and you replied, "Oh, you grew up on Snob Knob". I was stunned at first, but after reflecting on many of the people who lived on Olney and their position in the community, etc., it made more sense."

Bick has agreed to write a future story for *Historically Speaking* about the families who grew up on Olney Lane. The second and more important reason Bick contacted me was he wondered if I would be interested in a story about his sister, Pamela, who was the first "papergirl" for The Oak Ridger. Of course, I said "Yes!" knowing Donna Smith would like that. Lol.

But never did I imagine the story Bick would send me. It is an inspiring story of his family and a tragic story about a wonderful lively young girl who was struck by a debilitating disease at the early age of 20 and died at age 27. You will be drawn into the Marshall family and experience the joy of this young girl and learn something of the trauma the family endured.

Enjoy Bick Marshall's story about the first papergirl for The Oak Ridger.

Pamela Jane Marshall was born in Oak Ridge to Becky and Joe Marshall on May 25, 1955. She was the delight of her family and an overachiever from the beginning. Her inherent enthusiasm, joyful spirit, insuppressible optimism and determined attitude were clearly demonstrated with seemingly no bounds during her relatively short life.

In her early years she was especially cute, and when we were in public areas, it was not uncommon for us to be stopped by people wanting to get a closer look and give complimentary comments about her. I believe it was in 1958, when Pam was about three years old, Mom entered her into some kind of "cute contest" for children up to five years old sponsored by the Downtown Association and conducted in the breezeway downtown.

Dressed in a frilly and lace white dress and white patent leather shoes and her beautiful blond hair curled to perfection, Pam was runner-up, but being the older brother, I still believe the winner must have been the shopping center owner's daughter (ha-ha).

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A few years later, about 1963, when she was about eight, Pam organized some of the neighborhood girls to produce a few outdoor summer plays which were conducted on a patio behind a neighbor's house. Carefully handcrafted tickets were made and sold by these creative entrepreneurs. Who could possibly say "no" to that group? It was classic Oak Ridge and everyone who participated or attended had a good time.

Pam flourished at Cedar Hill Elementary under the leadership of Oak Ridge's first principle, Herbert Dodd and the incredible staff he personally hired from all parts of the country. As was often the case for many children during that time, she enjoyed walking the approximate 1/2 mile with her neighborhood friends to and from school on fair weather days. The school offered many different types of activities for students in which she enthusiastically participated, especially the school plays and frequently checked out books from the school library. Growing up in the 1960's was a happy time in Oak Ridge.

As an upcoming seventh grader in 1967 at age 12, Pam convinced our parents to allow her to become a delivery route "Papergirl" for **The Oak Ridger** newspaper. There were customary formal and informal processes in place to become a certified route carrier, and with parental help, she identified the necessary requirements and corresponding actions, quickly securing the neighborhood route being vacated, so that her name was officially entered as the carrier.

This coincidentally occurred at almost the same time as Tom Hill was named as publisher. During discussions between Becky and Joe and the circulation manager, they learned that Pam would be the first-ever **Oak Ridger** delivery girl. Her route included Olney Lane where our family lived and continued west on Outer Drive encompassing Oneida Lane and Ontario Lane and including all the houses on Outer Drive stopping just short of Orange Lane, a total of about 56 customers.

Pam recruited, or maybe conscripted, younger sisters Donna (about age six) and Laura (about age four) to help, and the trio quickly became the darlings of delivery route number 54. I felt the sting of their success (as I had previously delivered the same route circa 1960-63) during their first Christmas delivery season. I was always happy to receive holiday tips in the range of \$16 to \$18, but they received over \$54! Other notable exceptions included offerings of seasonal beverages and snacks for the three, especially in the hot or cold months, and suddenly, wet, or late newspapers didn't seem to mean as much to customers.

The ensuing years didn't show any lessening of Pam's bold approach to things which many times included Donna and Laura. As an example, in 1970 when Pam was 15, our parents were involved with a large group of friends in square dancing which was very popular at the time. There were regular square dances throughout the area, and occasionally weekend events at places such as Fontana Village, which was a hub of square-dancing activity.

On a few occasions, Becky, and Joe, with the support of Oak Ridge family and friends, felt Pam was old enough to watch over and take care of Donna and Laura for a couple of nights. I had been on my own and out of the house for several years but still residing in Oak Ridge. When Becky and Joe departed is when Pam (unknownst to anyone) would fire up the second family vehicle, a '59 Ford station wagon, and take the girls on clandestine excursions!

I was driving east on Outer Drive near Cedar Hill one day, probably on my way to check on the girls when our parents were out of town and shocked to see, coming toward me in the opposite direction, the old station wagon with Pam driving and all three of them with such beaming smiles. You might have thought they were on their way to Disney World.

I never said a word to anyone, but Donna and Laura (ages nine and seven at the time) recently told me that Pam bribed them to not divulge any of their excursion activity by letting them wear their Sunday best

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shoes on the trips and taking them to McDonald's for French fries. Donna said that on one excursion they ran out of gas, "but some nice man went and got them some".

Our beloved sister, Pam, was stricken with an instantly debilitating, progressive and lengthy illness in 1976, but not before she accomplished numerous impressive things for the time. She always had at least one paying job and many times two. While attending Oak Ridge High School she bought her own car, an old Ford, and paid for her own insurance, gas, and maintenance.

With the help and support of Oak Ridge High School educator, the incredible Mrs. Rita Speas, who taught Pam in business lab programs and initiated the Cooperative Office Education Program, Pam became the first participant of the Program that allowed qualified students to attend school one-half of the day and work one-half day. After graduation from ORHS in 1973, using money she had saved, Pam treated herself to a graduation trip to Europe, traveling with an ORHS sponsor and group of about 20 other students from the high school.

Our parents are deceased, and Donna, Laura and I cannot remember the details of the trip, and we are not aware of any surviving pictures, but we do know it was an enjoyable highlight for her. She brought back souvenirs for the family.

Pam did and achieved many more things and was a bright and cheerful light for all those who knew her. Now, 57 years since she delivered her first **Oak Ridger** newspaper and 41 years since we lost her, we are still fondly remembering her and missing that wonderful first "Papergirl".

Thanks, Bick, for a wonderful tribute to your sister, Pam. When I asked Bick to describe the illness Pam had, he told me the following, "My parents called me the day she collapsed, and I went straight over to Pam's house, but we were lost. I called a physician friend, and he came, but no one could ever have imagined the magnitude of what we were facing. We must have seen every kind of physician known and took her over a two-year period to five or six different institutions and couldn't get a diagnosis until Duke University did a brain scan which they said indicated she had a 'degenerative brain disorder' and showed us scans, saying the brain matter was deteriorating." I know you are like me and find this trauma the Marshall family faced as just awful.

You may know of a family who bravely face similar long-term illness, or you may have such in your own family. If you are in either situation you can appreciate the desire of Bick to tell the story but also the pain associated with recalling the extremely difficult period when a family member has a brain disorder where they lose cognitive function. The caregivers have a difficult time of it too, as Pam's mother did. She died soon after Pam at age 57.

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A carved wooden memento Pam purchased for herself and brought home from the trip to Europe



Pam Marshall, the first official papergirl for The Oak Ridger

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Joseph Bicknell "Bick" Marshall, III (named for his grandfather who was named for a family doctor, Dr. Bicknell, when born in 1882)