

The 2022 Flatwater Tales in Oak Ridge, TN, is June 3–4, at the Historic Grove Theater

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of November 8, 2021)

As the COVID 19 pandemic continues to reduce its impact and almost all Oak Ridge Museums are open, visitors are coming our way in increasing numbers. In recent weeks, I have provided tours for tourist buses, family groups, travel writers, and individuals.

One tour was for the niece of Major General Nichols, who particularly wanted to see where Colonel Nichols lived while in Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project as he managed the entire project except for Los Alamos from right here in Oak Ridge. Another was the founder and director of the Japan Institute of Los Alamos who was connected to me by Clifton Truman Daniel, the grandson of President Truman.

And the most recent person for whom I was asked to provide a tour was a storyteller who is doing research for a tremendously important story. She is developing the story of the Oak Ridge 85 for the upcoming Flatwater Tales in Oak Ridge's Historic Grove Theater this coming June 3 and 4, 2022. Before telling you about the tour, let me have you read about the event where she will be featured. You don't want to miss this opportunity!

Emily Jernigan and the Flatwater Tales executive committee provided the following:

Nationally acclaimed storyteller [Shelia Arnold](#) will headline [Flatwater Tales](#) Storytelling Festival Friday night, June 3, 2022, when the Festival returns to the live stage at the Historic Grove Theater in Oak Ridge, TN. Ms. Arnold will tell the story of the Oak Ridge 85, those brave youngsters who were the first to desegregate a school district in the Southeast, a milestone event in 1955 that few people even knew about until just recently.

Storytellers [Bil Lepp](#) and [Kim Weitkamp](#) will reintroduce themselves to the Tales audience that evening, and all three tellers will perform on Saturday.

On Saturday, June 4, Flatwater Tales will present three shows: 10 a.m. to noon (family show), 2 to 5 p.m., and 7 to 10 p.m. Sheila, Bil and Kim will tell different stories at each show.

Our three tellers appear nationwide at storytelling festivals, including the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, TN. Their art brings people together as they share the magic of storytelling.

Sheila Arnold began performing stories when she was eight years old and has been a full-time professional storyteller since 2003. She travels around the country to present her stories and songs at festivals, churches, and for educators' professional development. Sheila manages and contracts new business for History's Alive!, which mentors and provides opportunities and guidance to performers. She was selected as a 2019-2020 Mt. Vernon Research Fellow (VA).

Sheila has spent two days in Oak Ridge as part of her research for her historical presentation incorporating the stories of and about the Oak Ridge 85 at Flatwater Tales. In 1955 these 85 teens were the first African Americans to desegregate public schools in the Southeast as they entered Robertsville Junior High and Oak Ridge High School. Charles Crowe, a member of the Tales executive committee, conceived the program for the Oak Ridge 85 and has developed it with Sheila. He served as her host while she was in Oak Ridge.

Sheila talked with Larry (LC) Gipson, a member of the Oak Ridge 85, John Spratling and Rose Weaver of the 65th Anniversary Celebration Committee, and Pat Postma, whose father was the principal of Oak Ridge High School when the desegregation occurred. She is contacting others, including more of the families and members of the 85, to help augment her understanding of this important story. Her recorded performance will be archived as part of Oak Ridge's history.

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From these interviews and her visit to Oak Ridge where Oak Ridge Historian, Ray Smith provided a history tour of Oak Ridge including the Oak Ridge History Museum and the Scarboro Community Center, she will draw out details to include in her featured storytelling event on Friday, June 3, 2022. Additionally, Oak Ridge Reference Librarian Mike Stallo gave her additional background information. Both Ray and Mike will continue to support her efforts as needed to help her get as much detail as possible.

Sheila had lunch with Tales Executive Committee members Emily Jernigan, Martha and David Hobson, Lydia Birk, Pat Postma, and Charles Crowe to get acquainted and to discuss the June 3 and 4 Festival. She told the group she has been accepted at the prestigious [MacDowell](#) artist residency program in Peterborough, NH. While there, Sheila will spend six weeks working on two projects, one of which is the Oak Ridge 85 story. She will draw on her recent experiences in Oak Ridge to help guide her. Sheila will present that story for the first time on Friday, June 3 at the Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival.

Sheila has a hardy laugh, a curious mind, a generous heart, and a passion for telling stories. The Oak Ridge 85 story will be an addition to her stories of the Little Rock 17 and the former Langston High School, Johnson City's African American school that opened in 1893 and closed due to desegregation in 1965.

Bil Lepp and Kim Weitkamp will join Sheila for Flatwater Tales on Friday, June 3 and Saturday, June 4 for a total of four shows. Tickets and other information will be coming soon at www.flatwatertales.com!

Thanks Emily Jernigan and the Flatwater Tales Executive Committee members for helping make Historically Speaking readers aware of this amazing opportunity to experience professional storytelling and to be a part of history when Sheila Arnold, an exceptional and delightful individual, will bring to life the story of the Oak Ridge 85. You do NOT want to miss this! Mark your calendar now for June 3 and 4, 2022!

Now for the rest of the story of my tour with Sheila Arnold: Charles Crowe contacted me and asked if I would do this special tour for him. He explained the tour was for Sheila Arnold, and she was a renowned storyteller that he had contacted to develop a story based on the 85 students who desegregated two Oak Ridge schools in 1955.

Well, that excited me even more. What a great opportunity! I am proud of what has been done in the past two years to recognize these 85 individuals. As a commissioner of the Tennessee Historical Commission, I was pleased to see us approve historical markers recognizing the 85 students.

My introduction to Sheila was most interesting. I was having breakfast in Burchfield's Restaurant with Gordon Fee and was telling him who I was touring later in the day. Unbeknownst to me, she overheard me (my voice carries well!) and told her breakfast companion, Charles Crowe, that she was going to go over and introduce herself to me. Charles said, he would introduce us, but she said, "No, let me do it."

She walked up and said, "I heard my name mentioned here and I wondered what was being said about me?" Well, that did it. We were immediately best friends. She is such an amazingly outgoing person with a glowing personality and invites you to like her and immediately be put at ease. I knew I was in for a treat touring her and showing her Oak Ridge, and I was certainly not wrong there!

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We met for lunch, along with Charles Crowe, at Dean's Restaurant in Jackson Square. The folks at Dean's know me well and always give me a special table knowing I am bringing guests for a tour of Oak Ridge. Of course, I told some Oak Ridge stories (imagine that...she is a professional storyteller and I tell stories!). We also toured the Oak Ridge History Museum and the Scarboro Community Center.

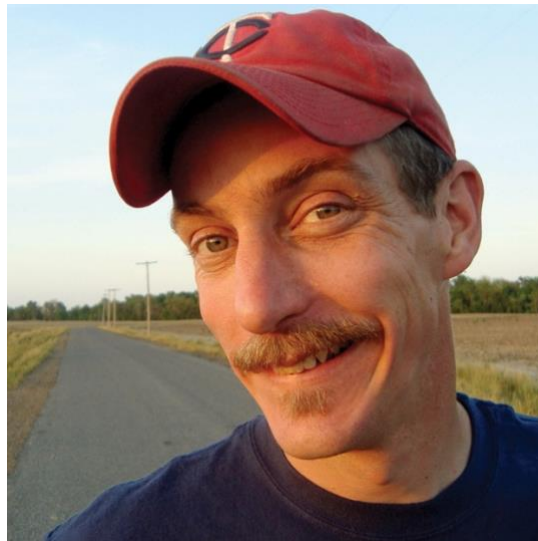
At both locations Sheila was absorbing details, taking photographs, and asking pertinent questions. She learned about Manhattan Project era segregation, to include Hal Williams skilled concrete work and Katie Strickland's innovative way to get to stay longer with her husband (her biscuit pan she used to provide biscuits for the guards, is on display at the K-25 History Center).

Sheila came to understand the importance of how the Atomic Energy Commission handled, in 1955, the implementation of Brown VS the Board of Education's decision to desegregate schools. She found the Scarboro School to be fascinating and quickly realized the significance of Arizona Officer, the principal there.

She amazed me with her observation, by looking at the famous Ed Westcott panoramic photograph of Oak Ridge from atop Pine Ridge on display at the Oak Ridge History Museum, that the hutments for the Black community, in what is now Woodland, was located away from the main white residential area. She also observed from the same panoramic photograph that the Gamble Valley location was located away from the main part of the city.

I made sure she understood where the Scarboro community got its name...from the Scarboro School which was moved from the original Scarboro Community to the Gamble Valley location and took the name of the school with the move. This later led to the entire community adopting the Scarboro name.

We are now friends and I look forward to continuing contact as desired to help Sheila Arnold prepare for a special creation to memorialize the Oak Ridge 85 in the most effective method of storytelling. She is exactly the right person to do this. Way to go Charles Crowe! You have done good!!!



Bil Lepp will tell stories on Saturday, June 4, 2022

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Kim Weitkamp will tell stories on Saturday, June 4, 2022



Sheila Arnold will tell the story of the Oak Ridge 85 at the Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival on Friday evening, June 3, 2022, as well as other stories on Saturday

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Sheila Arnold, Ray Smith and Charles Crowe enjoying lunch at Dean’s Restaurant