



Then and Now

Memories from the Spaces in the Stillwater Community Center

August 1968 marks the establishment of the Class of 1974, when students from all Stillwater grade schools merge into 7th grade at the Junior High School.

The building is an important part of the heritage for the Class of 1974, and those before and after. Friendships and relationships were formed, memories made, and knowledge and experience were gained in the spaces within that building.

Transitioning from 6th grade to Junior High School was a rite of passage for 12-year-olds and a topic of conversation as we swam and socialized at Crystal Plunge in the summer of 1968. Tommy James and the Shondell's "Crystal Blue Persuasion" and Three Dog Night's "One is the Loneliest Number" blared through the speakers located around the Crystal Plunge pool as we compared stories about older sibling's previous experiences at the "Junior High."

Excitement and anxiety prevailed with a new dress code, changing classes, and remembering locker combinations. Girls could no longer wear slacks because the junior high dress code required dresses or skirts. A trip to the Specialty Shoppe to see Eunice Manning was necessary to supplement my wardrobe. Hose (not the panty hose kind, since they were not invented yet) became a new wardrobe addition.

My mother and I frequently made a mad dash in the 1964 Chevrolet Impala to TG&Y, often right before they closed for the day, to buy new pair of hose for the next day.

I have many special memories from that solid, brick, two-story landmark building where lasting friendships were formed in the gymnasium, hallways, stairwells, classroom, and lunchroom spaces. Drops, St. Christophers, and ID bracelets purchased from Leonard's or Shedrick's Jewelry stores were given and taken back, and hearts were broken, and mended in the spaces in that building.

The space that was probably the most significant to me was our PE teacher, Mrs. Esslinger's gymnasium with all the equipment and opportunities for learning new skills to include archery. Surely the Girls Recreation Association (GRA) donut sales did not fund all the new gymnastics equipment to include a huge woven surface trampoline, uneven parallel bars, balance beam, and mini trampoline!

Mrs. Esslinger had "the gift of persuasion" and provided opportunities for so many girls. We were surprised when she insisted that we purchase a gym suit in a size we could grow into even though it swallowed us at age 12. I avoided the recommended oversized gym suit with a hand-me-down from an older friend of



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The Stillwater Community Center Foundation and the Friends of Stillwater Community Center strive to provide supplemental resources for the Stillwater Community Center to ensure its accessibility, affordability and sustainability for its use by residents and visitors of Stillwater and surrounding area. Visit www.sccfriends.com for more information.

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the family. In the gymnasium space, we learned about competition and sportsmanship.

The auditorium space, which also seemed huge, held many activities including general assemblies, awards ceremonies, concerts, cheerleading tryouts, and pep rallies for the Toy Pioneers. Inattentive or disrespectful students in the audience were not tolerated. Mr. Saliwachter, our principal, did not hesitate to pull them out of the audience and discuss auditorium etiquette behind the partition in the back of the room. I know this to be true from personal experience. In the auditorium space, we learned about respect and we learned how to appreciate the talents of others.

Library Science held in the newly furnished library was where we learned the Dewey Decimal system and gained great respect for keeping new furniture "new" by not putting our "hooves" on the rungs of the chairs and spiral notebooks on the tops of the tables. Mrs. Jemison, the school librarian, had an endless job of teaching us these things. In the Library space, we learned about respecting property and how to navigate the bookshelves in any library.

The lunchroom, which was in a separate building, provided an opportunity for socializing across genders, and even across grades (7th and 8th) and a new freedom to select for lunch things like Bar-B-Q potato chips and Nutty Buddy ice cream cones. The art and home economics classrooms were in the same building as the lunchroom. All 7th grade girls were required to take "home ec" and were instructed by Mrs. Muler on how to sew a kerchief. My kerchief was made of navy blue kettle cloth, probably purchased from Frye's fabric shop on Main Street. In these spaces, we learned how to make friends and we learned how to master new skills.

The science classrooms were located on the second floor on the south side of the building. We got in trouble for turning our desks backwards in the 7th grade science class ... I wonder who thought to do that? Mr. Morrow, the science teacher, taught us about DNA and chromosomes in 8th grade. In the science

space, we learned how being obnoxious was disrespectful and about the building blocks of life.

Let me not forget the vocal music room, which was entered through an outside door off the northeast walkway. As my first class of the day in 8th grade, I was often late due to getting my 'hair-do" just right, after sleeping with curlers all night.

Appearance became much more important in junior high. My father, who drove me to school, was a patient man! I wasn't one of Mrs. Breedlove's favorite students, due either to frequent tardiness or lack of vocal skills. The textured ceiling in the vocal music room must have been an acoustical feature and a perfect texture for holding skillfully tossed pencils. In the vocal music space, we learned how to sing.

I can still envision specific classrooms and who of my classmates sat where. My 7th grade English class was on the second floor at the far northeast corner of the building. Our very young and pretty English teacher, Mrs. Wall, read Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" to us. The true story about the murder of a family in Kansas made quite an impression on me as I learned about the evils in the world. In this classroom space, we learned to appreciate reading and novels, and about the bad people in the world.

We had an opportunity to take classes beyond the core classes, including French, Spanish, Speech, and Art. In these spaces, we learned how to begin the process of figuring out who we were.

This Stillwater Community Center building, which is my "Junior High School," represents a very important part of my progression into adulthood and personal history. The importance placed on preserving historical buildings says a lot about the importance a community places on its history. I am thankful to Winfrey Houston and others for their efforts to preserve and repurpose this landmark building so it can continue to provide a space for individuals in the community to form friendships and relationships, to make memories, and to gain knowledge and experience.