

People of
The Oaks



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The Oaks
ACADEMY

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In these pages, you will meet the People of The Oaks — the men and women who have chosen to become part of The Oaks Academy. For 18 years, The Oaks Academy has provided a rich, classical education to students of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, and witnessed the transformation of individuals, families, and whole communities. And the story isn't over yet. We invite you to read the stories of the faculty and staff of The Oaks who make this possible, and to find your place in The Oaks community.

What will *your* Oaks story be?



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Michelle Rausch *humanities and language arts teacher*

WHENEVER I WANTED SOMETHING of a material value, my mom would always tell me *'not in this house.'* And now I catch myself saying the same thing to my girls. It was her way of trying to protect us. She was saying that just because everyone else is doing something, doesn't mean you have to do it too. She wanted us to be leaders and not just follow the crowd.

THE OAKS is a phenomenal and joyful place. It is a place I can say my teaching career, my kids, relationships with other parents, my colleagues and my boss, all come together. And I get to go home and say this is *it*. What other place can you say that about?





Jeff Wise *latin teacher*

I LOVE MIDDLE SCHOOLERS, I love that vulnerability. They are growing and stretching, but still looking to someone for guidance. They're independent, but not really. They're still needing that guidance and *most* will listen.

I WAS A PASTOR'S KID. So that consisted of a lot of church in the 1970s. This was still when there was Sunday night church, Wednesday night high school and choir rehearsal. I was an only child for about 11 years. My sister is 11 years younger than me. So I was alone a lot — and I fell in love with reading. These days, whenever I have time to myself, I go on our deck or screened in porch and just read and relax.



April Fisher *music teacher*

I GREW UP east of Indy in a very small school district. I always wanted to sing and was able to join a national choir. We performed in Louisville. Choral music had such a special connection with me. I loved the sense of community. ... I was raised on a farm. I would go in the farrowing house, where the baby pigs were born. We thought it was funny to play in the barn and hang our legs really low to make the bull really mad. Our uncle yelled at us. That was on my mom's side but both grandparents were farmers.

I RELAX BY GETTING LOST WITH THE PIANO. I get so lost, that I forget what time it is. I've missed dinner before. The kids will say, *'are we going to eat?'* I say, *'If you can reach it, you can eat it!'* Meanwhile, I'm still thinking about chords that sound good together [plays]. Ooooh, that sounds good!

I HAD A STUDENT that didn't want to go to our schools' concerts. He always had an excuse. He would say, *'I'm going to have basketball that night'* or *'Umm, I think I'm going to be busy that night — I'm going to have to go to bed that night.'* There was always something. Finally, he made it through the entire concert and wrote me a thank you letter afterward. We showed him that he could have a successful experience. It allowed him to go from independence to community. It showed him that it's not all on him, that he's a part of something and that we are here to support him.

Mamadou Traore *security and maintenance*

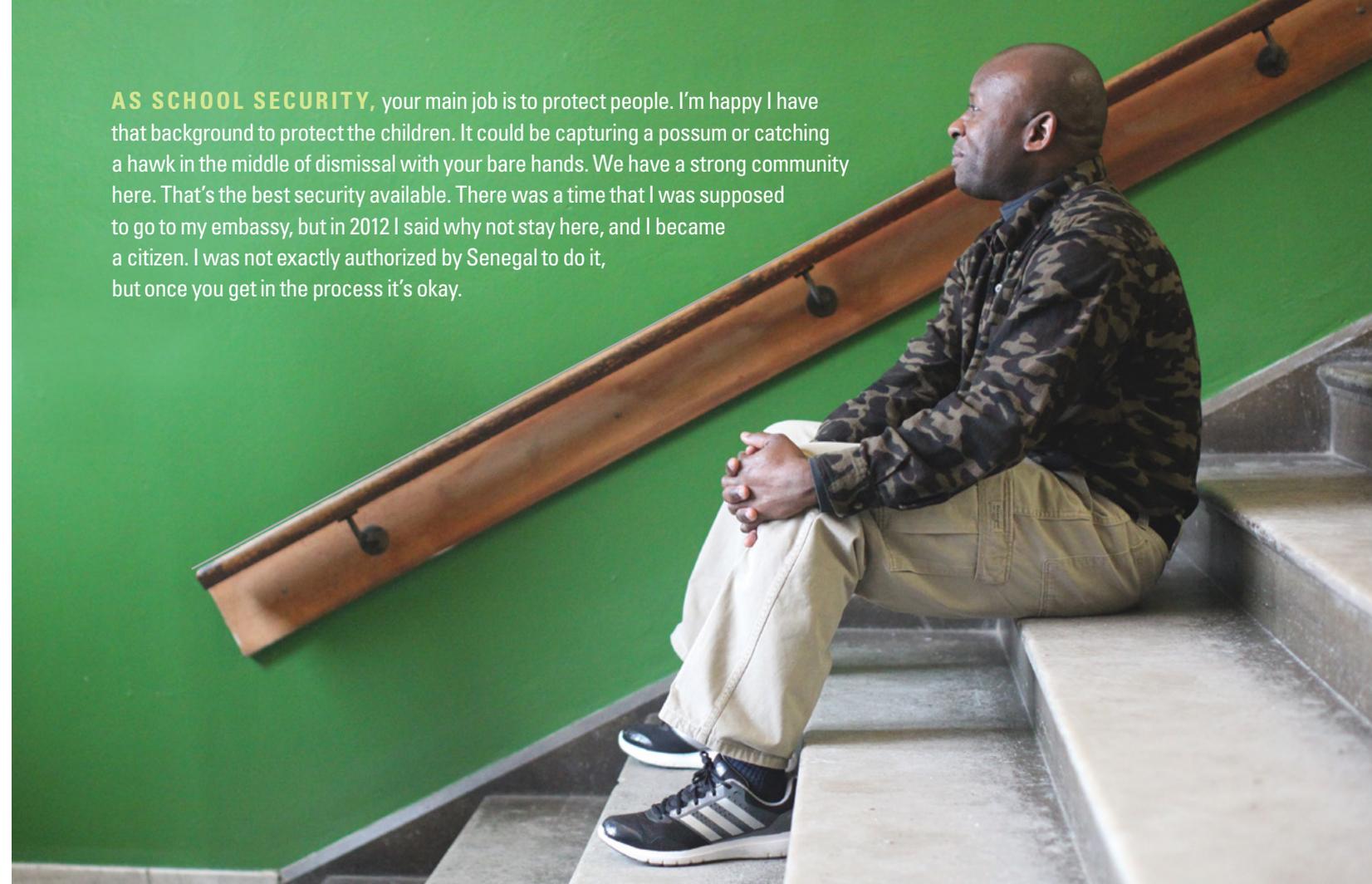


I WAS BORN TO A MOTHER that had a strong traditional culture in Senegal. She had to get married at age 12 and have her first child. But she could not raise her first child so I was raised by my grandmother. I was raised in East Sengal in a small village of about 500 people. My grandfather hunted a lot. If the animals he hunted weren't too large, I'd help him bring them back.

My dad was a French immigrant. He made me go to school. I started at age seven which was unusual for kids in my village. I was doing both — going to school and helping with agriculture. When I was done with school at age 12, my grandparents sent me to a city on the south side of Senegal. I finished secondary school there.

Then I went to military school. My uncle was a special ops officer. I challenged him and told him I was going to become an officer. They only have two openings per year. I spent five years at Saint Cyr then joined the French Foreign Legion. I trained in China, Russia, the United Kingdom and in the United States. I was trained in the army. Then in Special Forces. I was a combat engineer and trained in military strategy. The main focus was to be prepared to be dropped behind enemy lines.

AS SCHOOL SECURITY, your main job is to protect people. I'm happy I have that background to protect the children. It could be capturing a possum or catching a hawk in the middle of dismissal with your bare hands. We have a strong community here. That's the best security available. There was a time that I was supposed to go to my embassy, but in 2012 I said why not stay here, and I became a citizen. I was not exactly authorized by Senegal to do it, but once you get in the process it's okay.





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Tom Prible *humanities teacher*

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE with The Oaks was through volunteering. I was young. Really young. Like 20. It wasn't very organized at that point but that was part of the fun. I taught in Colorado, then came back and joined The Oaks around 2004. I still love it. It has changed. It's like a marriage. There certainly was an engagement and honeymoon phase. But as time has gone by, you learn more about it and grow to appreciate every aspect even more deeply. What I appreciate is that, as we have changed, we have never strayed from the mission. On a Sunday night when it's time to start getting ready for Monday, it's the thought of getting back to the kids that gets me going.

MY BROTHER ATTEMPTED SUICIDE RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME. I was with him in the hospital. He was there for some mental issues. A couple months after that, I suffered with anxiety and depression. I hate to say that it was beautiful, but it was. In the sense that I got to witness how near God was. My brother and I are closer because we had to discuss all of that — the mental instability and the rawness that comes with all of that.

MY MOM PLAYED THE PIANO. I just picked up the guitar and started playing. I just started playing songs I would hear. Sometimes I'm just 'the guy that knows how to play the guitar.' But at the same time, it's very spiritual for me. I've always been a guy that can't really express how I feel in words. So music has helped me to do that. It's been therapeutic and allowed me to minister to people.





Bruce Crawford *head of school*

I WAS A PAPERBOY. I was an honor kid. I delivered the Indianapolis News for five years — from seventh grade through junior year of high school. I just delivered in my neighborhood. Around Christmas I'd get little tips, money or candy. I remember the Blizzard of '78 vividly. It didn't stop me. I delivered anyway. I just laid down in the snow to create the pathway because the snow drifts were so high that I couldn't lift my legs. I think I learned determination. I had to meet the regional director each week and give him the money that I had collected. It taught me responsibility. It was all on me.

THE ACADEMICS WILL COME IF THE CONFIDENCE IS THERE. In my early years of teaching, there was one girl that had a pretty hard exterior. She was protecting herself and had learned she needed to be tough. I had short interactions with her at lunch and recess in her first year at The Oaks. Later, she ended up in my class, and she was as cold to me as anyone. But then, around Thanksgiving she started to warm up. Her demeanor softened and I think she became relaxed because she felt known and loved. She dropped her shoulders, relaxed and trusted people. I think being there and being consistent helped. I let her come around on her time, but she knew I wasn't going to waiver. She's a lot different now. Trusting. Engaging. Open to people. I won't take all the credit; this place does that to people.



Erica Gray *fifth grade teacher*

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I had a date with my dad every Friday. He would come and pick me up, he'd come to the door, and open my door and treat me well. He would tell me that when I was old enough to date, if the guy didn't do any of these things then I shouldn't go out with him. They say you look for traits of your parents in your mate. And my husband is very much like my dad.

I LOVE HOW POISED OUR STUDENTS ARE. One of the first things people will say to me when they meet our kids is, *'What school do they go to?'* We went to a sushi restaurant and there were paintings on the wall. My son looked and said, *'Mommy, that's the Great Wave'* and told me all about the painting, the artist, the history. He was six.



Tia Phillips *hospitality director*

I WAS A NAVY KID. I was born in California, lived in Virginia the longest; for eight years between the two times we lived there. We lived everywhere — Guam, Hawaii. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, my dad was always on a submarine somewhere, or a ship. I had an older brother. I was pretty average. Average student, average athlete, glasses since I was five. I was a Girl Scout for a year. I didn't like camping. I wanted to be a veterinarian, but realized I was allergic to everything. Over time, I knew I wanted to be a wife and a mom.

THE OAKS MEANS SO MUCH TO US. My family has grown up here. And now Thomas has graduated and that's really scary. They love my kids. They know their strengths and weaknesses, and what they excel in. Audrey is a lot more spiritual than I am, and I think The Oaks has nurtured that. Thomas' eighth grade papers really allowed him to reflect. Our best family friends and the most meaningful connections we have come from The Oaks Academy.



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Anthony Millen *security and maintenance*

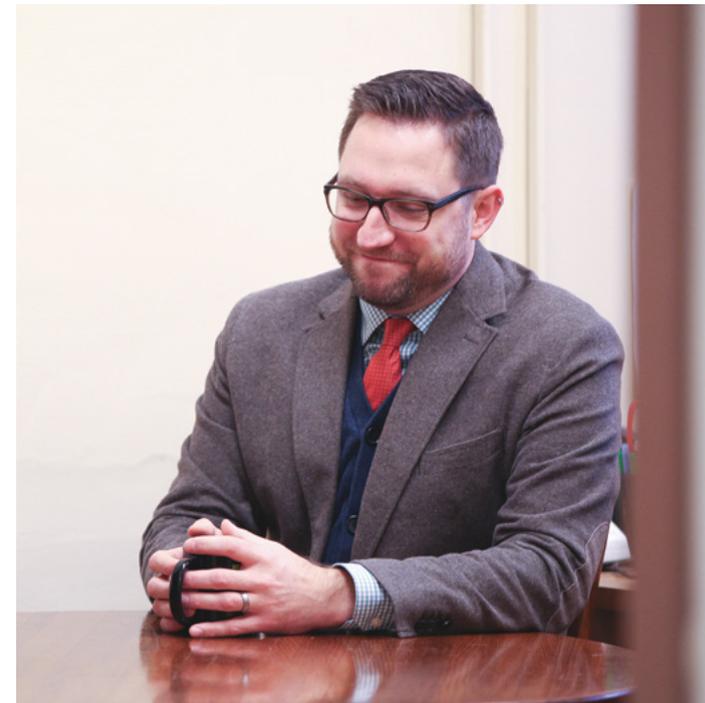
I GREW UP IN INDIANAPOLIS AROUND 34TH AND COLLEGE, and I went to Shortridge High School. I have an older brother and a younger sister. We were all close knit, but all very different. We went to different schools. I was a pretty good kid. I was very artistic. I drew a lot and did sculptures. Until I asked for a kiln and my dad told me I was crazy.

My dad worked for the warehouses that supplied things for the schools. I could get a lot of pencils and crayons. I had a lot of unfinished sculpture projects because there were no places where you could go fire them. So I quit and gave up. I wanted to be a fashion designer at one point. I could really draw and sew. I could create a jogging suit in two hours without a pattern. I'd wear it that evening.

Dennis Swender *network operations*

I DELIVERED ALL OF MY CHILDREN. With Edmund's birth, my son, everything was fine. And then all of a sudden, it wasn't. We found out that his umbilical cord was only a foot long. He had aspirated. We went to the hospital and thought that he wasn't going to make it. It was the scariest thing I've ever been a part of. They were encouraging us to turn off the machines. But then he made a movement with his fingers, slowly making a fist one finger at a time. It was enough to indicate there was brain activity. He's perfect today.

DOING A JOB WELL with perfect execution came from my dad. He earned a trading degree in HVAC right out of high school. He worked at a steel mill, and still works there. I'd go on calls with him and he'd offer to pay me a share of the earnings. People would call and say, *'My air conditioner isn't working.'* We would go and then, surprisingly, not get paid! He'd tell me it wasn't broken. It was just dirty — and he wasn't going to charge them for something so small or easy. Of course, as a kid, I was confused, thinking we'd get paid. He taught me that people come before profit.



Vicki Adams *hospitality director*



I BECAME A TEEN MOM and got married very young. I was a good mom. My grandmother helped me understand that my purpose in life was to be a good mother. She taught me that I could be a mother to many, to anybody. It was in my DNA. She knew my gift was to be a caregiver. So we baked, we sewed. She knew I'd be a homemaker. She always told me to take care of myself and love myself. She made sure that I had a clean home. And she put an emphasis on taking pride in your appearance. That stayed with me. I passed that on to my kids and grandkids. She told me to reward myself at the end of the month after you've paid all your bills and put food on your table — buy a bottle of nail polish or a tube of lipstick. To this day, I keep lipstick in my drawer.

MY BROTHER WAS LOOKING FOR A SCHOOL for his kids. He knew some of the founders. Then my daughter found The Oaks for my granddaughter. I started volunteering in the library, then taught in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten for six years. I'm now in my seventh year at the front office. I'll never leave. They'll have to kick me out of this place. Every year I look at the enrollment and say, *'Wow, I have over 400 grandkids this year!'* So I need to go to bed early, pray longer and keep vitamin B12 in my purse.

SOME KIDS NEED EXTRA LOVE because they've had a hard morning. I have kids that come in first thing and already need a Band-Aid. I ask them did they tell their parents, and they say, *'Yes, they told me to tell you.'* Some just need a toothbrush, to wash their face, or a pair of socks. Sometimes I have parents whose kids are in middle school that just come and need a hug.





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Deborah Rasdell *hospitality director*

I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 1970. High school was a little rough, you know the teenage years. I was popular, really active but quiet. There was a bit of segregation. I vividly remember running for homecoming queen, and I got no recognition at all. The votes went in. I won and was quietly crowned queen and everything was quickly and quietly over. In the past when Caucasian young ladies won, they were put in the parade and there was a lot of fanfare. But none of that happened. It didn't really upset me. You know, life goes on.

After high school, I went to the east coast. I attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan. I got my associates degree in fashion merchandising and buying. I stayed with Aunt Louise and Uncle Hoggy in Harlem. It was very busy and fun — always something happening on the bustling streets. You could see the Harlem River from the balcony. I'd sit out there for hours and just escape, dream and breathe.



Hannah Kelly

fourth grade teacher

I MOVED TO LOUISIANA AFTER COLLEGE and taught there. I moved away one month before Katrina. I remember thinking that five years from now, I'll be able to explain this move. It's been over five years and I still can't explain it. I remember people telling me I was lucky that I had moved. But I felt guilty when they said that. I felt that I was supposed to be there to support my friends and students through that awful time. I miss them terribly and try to keep in touch the best I can.

I AM THE OLDEST OF TEN. I was homeschooled. I loved to read. My mom would drop me off at the library and I would read all day. I would get cookbooks. My mom would have these food cravings and I would cook them for her. With ten kids, it was chaotic at home. I would often isolate myself. I liked to lean up against a door so that no one could come in the room, and I'd just read.



Paul Kortepeter

humanities teacher

YEARS AGO, I was in development for cable movies. We were trying to do 30 movies per year with a \$3 million budget for USA Networks. It was sort of an editing position. We had a short documentary that was nominated for an Academy Award. That was something really fun to be a part of. The documentary topic led to one of the scariest nights of my life. We followed two homeless guys that lived under a bridge in Los Angeles. We filmed over night — and lots of crazy and violent things happened around us. I went to the bridge about sixth months after the film just to see. They weren't there anymore. I often wonder what happened to them.

I WORRY ABOUT THE STRUGGLES that my students will have to navigate in high school cultures. That they will be able to keep their faith intact. I probably worry about that too much, and probably just need to trust God. I would love for them to be around a community where God's presence is evident. You don't want your kids to be crushed by a tidal wave or their faith to be eroded by an experience. I worry that high school can be that tidal wave.

David Crawshaw *fourth grade teacher*

I WAS REALLY DISRUPTIVE and a troublemaker as a kid. I got suspended a couple of times. My first male teacher was Mr. Hardwick. He expected a lot of me. He came from a military background. He liked history, my favorite subject, so we connected. When I got my first teaching job, I wrote him a letter to let him know how much he impacted me. It all came full circle. I'm thankful for him. I only hope I can impact children the way he did.

I WANT TO TAKE MY SON to every major league baseball stadium. I don't even know if my newborn son will like baseball — I hope so. I really do, and I want to share that bond with him.



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