

Irvin Grossman – Artist, Art Teacher and admired Dad
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 13, 2012)

As is often the case with *Historically Speaking*, I received a phone call on the day the column ran expressing appreciation for the stories being conveyed there. Rare is it that a column does not produce such phone calls or emails filled with positive feedback. I am delighted by the many supportive responses to *Historically Speaking*. As you may know, the column, titled *Historically Speaking*, is in its sixth year of publication in February, 2012.

As is also often the case, this caller indicated he was a long-time Oak Ridger. But what was unique about this caller is that he was also a long-time Art Teacher at Oak Ridge High School! He said he painted using mostly watercolors. That got my interest. I thought I would like to do an article on an Oak Ridge artist!

Almost at the same time, I was approached by Bobbie Martin suggesting Irvin Grossman would be a good subject for a *Historically Speaking* column. As I am always looking for subject matter for these weekly columns, I welcomed Bobbie's input.

She was excited to see my interest in what I have learned was one of her favorite teachers at Oak Ridge High School. I also soon learned that Bobbie credits "Mr. Grossman" as being a strong influence in her life that caused her to pursue art after she graduated from Oak Ridge High School. So, who is this "Mr. Grossman?"

Irvin Grossman moved, in 1949, to Oak Ridge from Boyertown, Pennsylvania, where he was born February 7, 1922, the 17th of 18 children. He is of German decent.

After High School in 1940, he worked for a year and then entered the United States Army Air Force during World War II and served from 1942 –1945 in the 64th Fighter Wing 582 Signal Air Warning Battalion. He landed in North Africa on May 10, 1943. He participated in campaigns in Southern and Northern France, Africa, Sicily, Italy, Belgium and Germany.

On the GI Bill, he attended college at Kutztown University where he received a Bachelor of Science in Art Education. Subsequently, he earned his Master's Degree in Fine Arts at Columbia University in New York City, New York.

The reason Irvin Grossman came to Oak Ridge in 1949 was to teach art at Oak Ridge High School. He had offers to teach high school art in Oak Ridge and in Pennsylvania. He chose Oak Ridge as it paid \$200 more per year. That is the history of the tradition of Oak Ridge Schools from the Manhattan Project days of General Groves and Alden Blankenship, paying more to get the best teachers. Irv (as he came to be known by his peers) remained in Oak Ridge doing what he loved until he retired in 1983.

He first moved into a dormitory. But that arrangement did not last long. In 1950 he and his new bride moved into an "E" Apartment, number 99 on Tabor Rd., behind Elm Grove School. Most of their shopping from 1950 to 1953 was at Elm Grove Food & Meat Market.

Irvin had met his bride, Margaret Virginia (Ginny) at a Valentine's Day dance in Oak Ridge. He married her on December 16, 1950. She was from Hendersonville, North Carolina and an Elementary and Primary School Teacher. They had three children: Karl, Kurt and Karoline. They all attended the old and new Linden School, Robertsville Jr. High School and graduated from Oak Ridge High School.

In his leisure time Irvin bowled on the Oak Ridge High School Teacher's Team until it dissolved, then took up bowling again with the Senior City Team after retiring. He was involved over the years with Boy's Club, Grace Lutheran Church and the Oak Ridge Art Center. He taught summer school for many years to elementary children.

Irwin has provided many water color paintings for the Art Center to use as rentals. He has contributed many hand painted posters for organizations. He could often be seen standing on the country roadside painting, wearing his German style green hat decorated with souvenir pins. He also enjoyed gardening growing both flowers and vegetables.

As the baby boom generation swelled, Grossman taught five art classes a day, some of which had 20 students per class. Some of his former students have gone on to become successful artists. He takes pride in their accomplishments.

Irvin paints unique personal mementos from note cards to anniversary announcements. However, his most

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intense interest keeps him immersed in a personally ambitious and long running project of painting watercolors of some of Oak Ridge's most memorable landmarks. He has painted several.

Chapel-on-the-Hill, the picturesque church where he and his wife married is done using the impressionistic style he prefers. Using old photographs that depict the way the original structures looked, he has also painted the Alexander Inn, the historic two-story structure where some of the most notable players of World War II's Manhattan Project lodged.

He has captured two of the old two-story guard towers at key entry points to the formerly secret city. He employed Sgraffito for the guard tower paintings, a technique of scratching through paint to reveal the lighter background beneath.

Irv has painted other, less-familiar sites in his passion to capture the original essence and history of Oak Ridge. He completed Cooper Auto Services, off Jefferson Avenue in one of the city's oldest buildings, as well as Jim Hair's Service Station before it was razed.

He has painted one of the city's oldest businesses still in existence - Downtown Hardware, as well as Jackson Square Pharmacy. Irvin continues to paint.

Karoline, Irv's daughter who describes herself as "Daddy's little girl" says of her dad, "My parent's wedding reception was held at the Alexander Guest House following their ceremony at the Chapel-on-the-Hill. My Dad's art classes were responsible for creating the figures for the nativity shows held on an annual basis at the high school.

"Some of my fondest memories of when I was a little girl, was riding down the halls of the old "C" building at ORHS in our red VW bug, holding onto the running board and drinking coca-cola out of a bottle! My brothers and I would help my Dad get set up for his art classes art shows.

"If I was lucky, I would be the chosen kid to accompany him on weekends to take the pottery out of the kiln and prep it for the glazing process. I also had my own little easel that I could set up next to my Dad's when he would venture off to sketch work off of Hardin Valley or in Oliver Springs or in town. It was a 'BIG DEAL' for me, 'Daddy's little girl.'

"My Dad participated in numerous sidewalk art shows not only in Oak Ridge, but in Gatlinburg. My Mom was his public relations staff and marketing director. She loved for him to share his work with the world. He was the artist with all of the emotions going into his paintings and she was the socialite.

"Several of his paintings grace the foyers and living rooms of Oak Ridgers. Many more are located in former students' homes and homes of relatives that are scattered throughout the country.

"He had a very large rental collection at the Oak Ridge Art Center during the 70's through the mid 90's. Several Oak Ridge dentists' and doctors' offices showcased his paintings in their waiting rooms. Our former dentist, Dr. Rogers, was one of them. Dad did a watercolor painting of Dr. Francis Reid's lake home.

"The launching of Grossman Gallery note cards took place in 2008. American Reprographics in Oak Ridge is responsible for the reproduction of the note cards. I sold them in Oak Ridge at The Ferrell Shop, The Pink Placebo Gift Shop at the Methodist Medical Center, and the gift shop at Greenfield Senior Living.

Karoline is now working on a new web site, The Grossman Gallery which will be launched soon. There you will be able to find art by Irvin Grossman, long-time Oak Ridge artist, retired Art Teacher and admired Dad!

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Watercolor of Alexander Inn



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Old Edgemoor Bridge



Irvin and Ginny Grossman in 1950

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Jackson Square

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Irvin Grossman and his trademark green hat with pins, holds one of his paintings



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Guardhouse



Chapel on the Hill



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Downtown Hardware