

Winchester's Golden Graduates From Classmate to Class Act!

By Pat Knasinski

Today, we present to you Fred Bales, graduate of Winchester High School, Class of 1958. Dr. Bales, a collegiate professor of Journalism, as well as a professional journalist and published author, relates his story in his own words. Fred Bales is a Winchester Golden Graduate who has gone from Classmate to Class Act!

Fred Bales

By Fred Bales

"Circumstances outside our control shape us from birth. For instance, we have no say in when we were born, or where we were born, or who are parents were. In my case those translate to July 5, 1940, in Winchester, Indiana, to John and Jean Bales

Yet if we were privileged to grow up in a secure place in a secure time, as I did in Winchester, we were provided with the wherewithal to make choices about our future. In my case, my choices set me on a circuitous career path.

Looking back, it may have been inevitable that I would end up working with words, first as a journalist and then as a teacher. At Central and Willard schools I took to my English classes and, yes, even some of the super-strict teachers of my time. Nora Ford leaps to mind. Later at Winchester High School, I was exposed to a flamboyant teacher in Joe Casey and a more conventional guide in my mother. Mother also influenced my reading habits at home where the mail brought a steady flow of Book of the Month Club selections. Meanwhile, my father was an avid reader of newspapers and magazines, a habit that has rubbed off on me.

After high school, I graduated with a B.A. from DePauw University and was headed to follow my father in the legal profession. But law school and I developed a mutual dislike, and I retreated to Winchester and part-time work at The Muncie Star and classes at Ball State. In quick succession I earned a master's degree at Indiana University, was married, spent two years in the Peace Corps in Chile, and landed my first real full-time job, at the Louisville Courier-Journal. By chance, my boss at the newspaper turned down an offer to teach a class at Indiana University-Southeast and nominated me for the job. I leaped at the opportunity and discovered that I preferred the classroom to the newsroom. After an idyllic year in Hawaii thanks to a Gannett Newspaper Fellowship, I buckled down to doctoral studies at the University of Texas in Austin, and three years later joined the faculty at the University of New Mexico. I can't help but note that during my early years there a colleague in the journalism department was the renowned mystery writer Tony Hillerman. My tenure at New Mexico included a department chairmanship, a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship in the Philippines, and the university's service award.

Because of a yearning to teach at a liberal arts school, I opted for early retirement at the University of New Mexico in 1997 and accepted a faculty spot at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. Xavier is a traditional black school, and my seven years there merit a book that I fear will never be written. It was a stimulating time, certainly, as was life in New Orleans where my wife and I lived one block away from the Mardi Gras parade route. One year as a visiting professor at the University of Texas at Brownsville rounded out my academic career in 2005 when I settled into retirement back in Albuquerque, the home of our two daughters and their families.

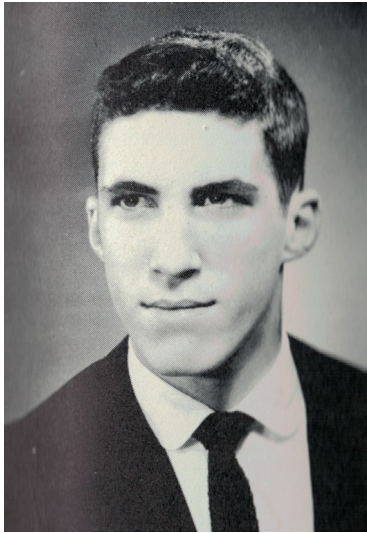
Thanks to sound advice and my own observations, I determined to keep busy in retirement by way of writing, traveling abroad, and community service. I volunteered at a men's shelter where I was named its volunteer of the year and where I gathered material for a memoir, published as *Our Sheltered Lives*. I also found time to write a novella, *Some Things Unsaid*, based upon an incident from my Winchester youth.

To this point I have struggled to contain the tooting of my own horn to a low decibel level. That is not false modesty because I am of a mind with the newspaper columnist David Brooks that our lives can be divided into two realms. Brooks suggests that within each of us are two selves: the one who counts success in terms of resume-building versus the one who seeks connections to others, based on our innate humanity. So it is that I have aspired to follow one sage's advice: "You are not where you work, and your work is not you." In that spirit, I have taken satisfaction with my role as an only child, husband, father, grandfather, teacher, friend, and community volunteer. Also, I have paid my bills on time and—with rare exception—tolerated the foibles of others.

What was the source of my two selves? The answer circles back to Winchester. Whatever I accomplished can be traced to the influences on my boyhood when my hometown offered a variety of outlets for growth. There were the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, a church youth group, school band, summer camp, Demolay, and varsity athletics, among others. The opportunities and mentors were abundant, and I consider myself beyond fortunate to have been born and raised—in the best sense of the word—in Winchester, Indiana. Also formative were early adventures with our own South Main Street "gang" comprised of Jim Nichols, Jack Henning, Daly and Sandra Walker, and me. Also influential were the older neighborhood "kids" who fulfilled the role of mentors. Among them were Bob and Jane Painter, Larry and Colleen Rinard, and Gary Keesling. We grew up together in a sheltered environment that I did not appreciate fully until I realized how many of my contemporaries were not as blessed.

Even though I have seen a good bit of the world since my Winchester childhood, I never have strayed mentally far from that county seat town that despite its relatively small population loomed disproportionately large in my development. I never escaped its hold on me, and I never cared to.

Fred Bales in 1958



Fred Bales today

