

# ALUMNI CORNER

The Alumni Association recently received the following correspondence from former students at WRHS. It is a pleasure to feature Kathleen Danker Olson and Eugene Olson (better known as Kay and Gene) as our contributors to the "Alumni Corner" of Tiger Tales.

Gene was a member of the class of 1942 and I the class of 1945. I never saw the guy while in high school. I was a freshman in Wood when he was a senior in White River. I transferred to White River my sophomore year. As we reflected we concluded that our classes were victims of traumatic times. Our grade school years were hampered by the Great Depression-dirt storms, drought, grasshoppers, and migration of many families to other states. We remember vividly that everyone was poor.

High school years were brighter for a time as the economy improved but a paralyzing event occurred December 7, 1941. I remember I was packing my suitcase on Sunday night preparing for school in Wood on Monday. Suddenly the radio program was interrupted. President Roosevelt announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We were now at war! This event changed all of our lives.

The most popular recreation for students in the era was dancing. The White River American Legion had the reputation for booking the best bands. Westover and Wood were popular spots featuring local bands. But the war again changed things. The draft caused many popular dance bands to break up. Out of boredom a group of us kids took our band instruments to the Wood Depot and played dance music. Several heard us and booked us for a gig. We ended up adding some White River kids to our group and playing almost every weekend in South Dakota or Nebraska. The band was called Junior Baer & his cubs. The draft caught Junior in 1945. He reorganized after the war, changed the name to The Buddy Baer Band which existed until the collapse of the big band era.

Gene's most memorable and enjoyable activity in school was playing trumpet in the American Legion sponsored, statewide-known White River Marching Band. Gene was a member from the day of organization to the death of their beloved and fierce director AJ Beck. The 50 member band represented 10% of the White River population. The band was truly an effort of the entire town population. The white shirts and trousers were purchased at Holland's store but red and black capes and caps were mail ordered. Gene's mother, who had four children in the band, had to stay up late at night several times laundering muddy uniforms which had to be used the next day. She also had to make four clown suits for the band. We still have the suits in the family. I'm sure each band mom was proud to contribute to the success of this organization.

Our 1945 graduation night was rather somber. The guys all were facing the military. All of my male classmates from Wood and White River served their country. Eloise Patnoe and I got into the act also. We took a secretarial skills test (a navy recruiter came to White River school to recruit navy employees). We passed! We graduated on Friday night, went to a White River dance on Saturday night and left at midnight to catch a Murdo train for Washington, D.C. We were two country girls who had never ridden a bus, train, or plane and hardly been out of South Dakota. A very gifted White River typing and short-hand teacher Miss Henderson had us very well prepared to do our jobs.



Winner of the 11<sup>th</sup>  
annual Alumni  
Scholarship is  
Marisa Medicine Bear  
daughter of  
Evelyn Iyotte '89  
and the late  
Farrell Medicine Bear '83

Several months ago hundreds of WRHS alumni gathered to observe the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the WR School. It was a grand party and the visiting continued on throughout the historic August weekend. A big thank you to all those who attended and supported the Centennial Reunion and to the many alumni that worked to ensure a successful event. The alumni page on the WR School website has a link to sign up to Shutterfly. Many pictures taken at the reunion are uploaded. The all-school reunion honorees and their stories are also posted. Go to [www.whiteriver.k12.sd.us](http://www.whiteriver.k12.sd.us) and select Central Office. Scroll down and select WRHSAlumni next select share photos online. Select signup at top on Shutterfly page to create account -this is free. Type in info. Next click join now & "ask" to be accepted. Remember your password. After receiving confirmation in your email(time varies) go to <http://wrhsalumni.shutterfly.com> and click on share photos online. Sign in at top using the password you created. Next select share in menu bar and then select pictures and videos in menu bar. If you have difficulty following this path email to johnny.kruse @k12.sd.us for assistance.

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