

Bellevue
Public
Schools



Alumni
Spotlight



Kym Clark (Akers)

Bellevue High*, 1978

***In our interview, Kym explained that she was part of a group of seniors that opted to stay put in 1978 and were allowed to graduate from Bellevue High**

Two time Emmy award winner Kym Clark graduated from Bellevue in 1978. For the last 30 years, she has worked as a news anchor for WMC Action News 5 in Memphis. She has interviewed everyone from President Bill Clinton to Oprah to Ellen, all while maintaining her genuine personality.

Kym recently took some time to answer a few of our questions.

What school(s) did you attend in Bellevue and what year did you graduate?



Kym Getting Ready to Cheer

I attended a number of elementary schools in Bellevue ... the names of some fail me now, but I do recall attending Peter Sarpy, Belleaire, LeMay and Wake Robin Elementary Schools. I attended Mission Junior High, as well, and graduated from what was then Bellevue High School ... the last senior class to graduate before the split into Bellevue East and West.

Who were some of your favorite teachers?

Some of my favorite teachers were Ms. Tuttle in elementary school, I actually had her two times at two different schools ... I think it was Belleaire and LeMay ... but my memory is foggy ... it was a LONG time ago!

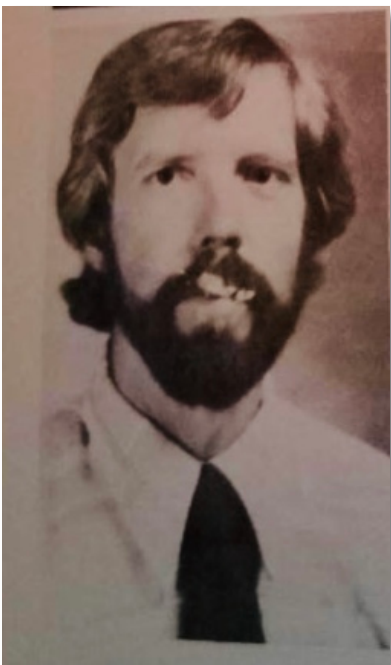
I also loved Mrs. Haggman who taught 7th grade English. She was so hard and you can only imagine the names some of us used for her. But, she just really cared whether or not you learned. Her daughter's family ended up being a host family for my brothers when they went to West Point Military Academy in New York and because of that relationship, I got the opportunity to get to know Mrs. Haggman in a non-school atmosphere, too.

My favorite teachers in high school were Ms. French who taught English or American Lit but I just remember she was so on "our" (the students) level and really enjoyed what she was teaching.

Also, Mr. Hanon, the drama teacher at BHS. I was in a lot of musicals at the school and I really enjoyed his drama classes, too.

What is a good memory you could share from your time in school?

My favorite memories center mostly around cheerleading. I was a cheerleader from Junior through High School, and was co-captain of the squad my senior year. I was so into school spirit and cheering on any team we had ... even the Swim Team! I remember all the times we'd sit at the edges of the wrestling matches ... cheering on the wrestlers, even. But, the



Drama Teacher, Mr. Hanon

biggest surprise for me was being crowned homecoming queen. I worked really hard with the Student Council to coordinate everything for the big football game and dance, that it really didn't register to me, that I would actually win. And when my name was announced ... I was FLOORED ... and so honored.

Did you have a favorite place to hang out - either at school or in town?

When I was a kid, my favorite hang out was some woods not too far from where I lived on Madison Avenue. I was a terrible tomboy and loved climbing trees and building forts with my buddies in the summer. When I got older, I really didn't do much hanging out, other than cheer practice at school because I was also very much involved with a singing group called "Shades of Brown." While in high school, I remember running off the field or court following a football or basketball games on Friday nights, changing my clothes in the car as my Mom drove so that I could get to where a singing engagement in Omaha later that night.



Kym (center) and the Shades of Brown

What did you want to be when you grew up?

When I was a kid, I wanted to be veterinarian or a clothing designer and as I got older, a teacher or college professor. Even when I grew up and was about to graduate college, a career in Television Journalism never entered my mind.

Did you have other family that graduated from BPS?

I have two older brothers who graduated from BPS ... My Brother Edward D. Clark, Jr. graduated from BHS in 1973 and Michell C. Clark graduated in 1974.

Do you still have family in the area?

I do not still have family in the Bellevue area. After my father retired from the Air Force, we eventually moved to Georgia in 1981.

Where did you attend college, what was your degree in, and what went into your decision to go to college there?

I began college at Bellevue Community College -- I had a softball scholarship and was still singing with “Shades of Brown” and making pretty good money so the decision to stay in Bellevue was easy. But, eventually I moved with my parents to Georgia so that I could attend the University of Georgia at Athens. I graduated with a BSA in Communications.

You were the first African-American Miss University of Georgia, correct? Could you share a little about that experience?



Yes, I was the first African-American Miss University of Georgia, which was/is actually a part of the Miss American Scholarship Pageant system. The year that I won, there was a push to get more African American participation in the Miss University of Memphis pageant, so several historically African American clubs and fraternities at the school picked a young lady to participate (paying for her fees, etc) to sort of represent that particular organization. The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity chapter at University chose me ... to this day I do not know why because I was in no way affiliated with the group, other than I had a few friends in the fraternity. I entered, figured out a talent – playing the piano while singing “The Rose.” I had NO idea what I was doing ... I think it was the interview portion that really won over the judges. And then, the fact that I could actually sing a bit didn’t hurt, either, I guess. Anyway, lo and behold ... I WON! And I got the pageant bug: I went on to represent UGA in the Miss Georgia competition, which I didn’t win ... but came in the Top Ten and won quite a bit of scholarship money in the process. After that I won the Miss Peachtree City and again got into the Top Ten for Miss Georgia. Although I never won the Miss Georgia crown, I did earn enough scholarship money from the system to pay for a good portion of my college tuition.

What did you do after graduating and before starting your career in Memphis?



Kym's Senior Picture

After graduating from UGA, I first worked for a law firm ... writing press releases and such for the firm. I did that for about 6 months until landing my first broadcasting job at an AM radio station in Athens, GA. I started out as a disc jockey but was quickly moved into the news department ... where I WAS the news team! And, because of that I worked long hours ... early mornings, afternoons and evenings to cover city council and county commission meetings, etc. I was TERRIBLE because I really had no idea what I was doing since I didn't major in journalism and there was NO ONE else in the department to give me any guidance. But, I began to get better after a few awful on air mistakes. About a year into that job, I landed my first TV job in Macon, GA at WMGT TV as a morning anchor/reporter.

You have been at WMC5 in Memphis for 3 decades as a news anchor. What have been some of the decided factors to stay put all these years?

When I first landed a job at WMC Action News 5 in Memphis, TN ... I thought I would only be here a year or two, at most. It really wasn't a conscious decision on my part to stay here at first ... it just sort of developed. I so enjoy working at this TV station ... it was a lot like a family away from home for me when I first started working here. And then, advancement opportunities kept coming ... that one day I looked up and realized I'd been here 15 years. I did land another TV news job in Seattle, but turned it down because, by that time, I had so much time off accrued here that I would lose if I moved, and I just love this city and the people. Plus, a move to Seattle would have put me an even greater distance away from my mother and father who lived in Georgia.

Who are some of the more well known people you have interviewed over the years?

I've interviewed Ellen DeGeneres at her studio in Burbank, Oprah in Chicago when she still had Harpo studios, then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton, entertainer Al Jarreau, Barry White and Issac Hayes, former supermodel (and my

big time idol) Beverly Johnson, Actors Ben Affleck and Matt Damon at the Golden Globes and my personal favorite, Maya Angelou ... and those are just a few.



Kym with Jay Leno

Could you share a little bit about some of these interviews?

I went to Burbank, California for the Ellen interview as a special piece to go along with Ellen's talk show joining our programming line-up. I was so much fun! They treated me and the videographer like we were honored guests ... putting us in a guest room in her studio with my name on the door and then allowing me to interview her in front of her studio audience, sitting in the chairs she uses for guests. I was almost overwhelmed!

The Oprah interview was for a series of reports ... again because her talk show aired on our television station. She was so personable and fun, I managed to get 8 stories out of that one 20 minute interview!

What would you say is the most important interview you have done?

The most important interview I think I've ever done was one with a family that was practically wiped out by a fire in their trailer. Their power was out and the mom and dad lit some candles in the living room and fell asleep. Somehow, fire broke out in the trailer ... and the mother and two of their little babies were killed. The only survivors were the father, who ran into another room to try to save one of their daughters and that daughter. Everyone else perished. I went to the scene the next day, really just to get some video of the aftermath and talk to neighbors and the father was there with his daughter (about 6 years old) ... and he WANTED to talk. I tried to be gentle and to let them know that people cared about them. Viewers saw the story and wanted to help the survivors. Money, clothing and furniture were all gathered for them. Years later, I got a call from that daughter. She told me that she always remembered me and how kind I was and how I made her and her father feel like somebody cared. She said my story and the way I seemed to understand the pain they were going through, made it easier for both of them to grieve their lost family and then, move forward. I treasure that memory and her phone call to this day.

Could you share a bit about the experience you had winning an Emmy Award?



Kym Clark covering presidential hopeful Bill Clinton in the early 1990s.

I won both Emmy's for (ironically) our coverage of two different newscasts that both dealt with Ice Storms in our area. The first one was in 1999 and the second one in 2000. The first storm was one that actually materialized and it was the news team's job to make sure our audience got the information they needed about outages, closings, and road conditions. The storm actually hit in the early morning hours and I was then the Morning News Anchor. I really don't remember much about the newscast because it was so hectic. The second storm was one that actually didn't amount to much but a day off for school kids. I was again the early Morning News Anchor ... and this one was more about the fun we had outside in what little snow had actually accumulated.

Although you probably don't get embarrassed - could you mention something that happened over those 30 years that you might be seen as an embarrassing or funny news moment?



Kym on the set of WMC Action News 5

Oh ... I most CERTAINLY do still get embarrassed ... although, fortunately, not quite as frequently as when I first got here. One of the embarrassing moments was when I went to cover a SWAT team drill and I was too close to where one of the police choppers was landing ... I had on a beautiful white skirt! That chopper landed and, the down draft from the blades blew dirt and debris so forcefully, I was COVERED in dirt. My hair, eyebrows and eyelashes looked like they were blonde, the dirt so coated my hair! And my beautiful white skirt ... once I shook out as much dirt as I could ... was khaki colored ... and I still had to make an on-air appearance. Needless to say, I had to go home and start over, after that. I was SO embarrassed that I didn't know better than to get WAAAAAAY out of the way of that downdraft, not to mention how CRAZY I looked. To this day I am OVERLY cautious around helicopters and SWAT team drills. And let's not even talk about mispronunciations ... please!

Which of your accomplishments in life are you most proud of?

I am most proud of my daughter. I never really even thought much about getting married and having children growing up ... so when it happened to me ...it was a complete surprise at the love and joy I felt when my daughter was born. It was also a complete surprise that I could actually have a child at my advanced age of 45 ... but I did! Best thing I have EVER or WILL ever accomplish.

What is something you haven't done yet that you'd like to?

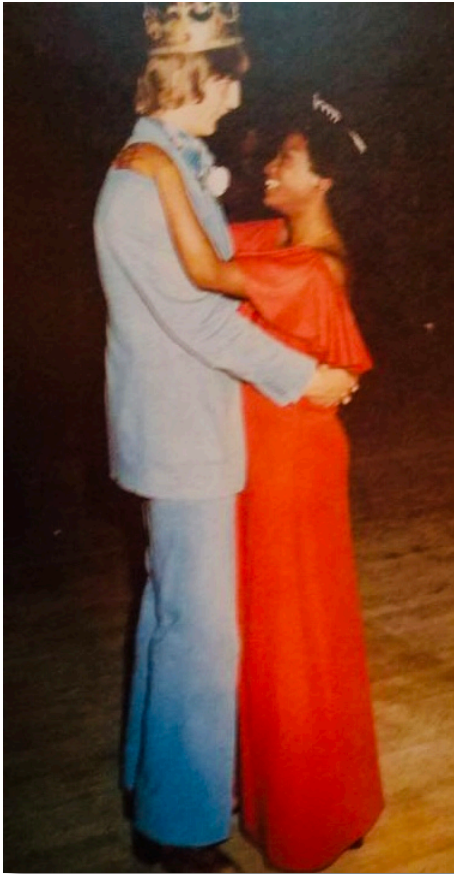
There's a LOT I haven't done yet that I hope to do one day ... but biggest on my bucket list ... winning the Mega Millions Lottery! It's up to a billion dollars at this writing! But, really, then I truly COULD do whatever I want, when I want. But, since my chances of THAT happening are something like 303,000 to one ... I'll settle for winning another Emmy, this time for one of the stories that I've investigated.

What message would you like to give to current students in Bellevue Public Schools?

Be open to possibilities and experiences, be prepared, and don't be afraid to work long and hard ... there are rewards and, most importantly personal satisfaction that cannot be bought or mimicked.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about your life or your memories of Bellevue?

I could surely go on ... I had such a blessed and nourishing childhood growing up in Bellevue.



Homecoming Queen Kym Clark
dancing with Scott Holtmeyer, the
Homecoming King

Links:

Kym singing with the Memphis Jazz Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tnynu4Org58>

Story about Kym celebrating 30 years at WMC5

<http://www.wmcactionnews5.com/story/38558975/kym-clark-celebrates-30-years-at-wmc/>

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Kym after her interview with Oprah Winfrey