

Bellevue
Public
Schools



Alumni
Spotlight



Dr. Sherri Adams

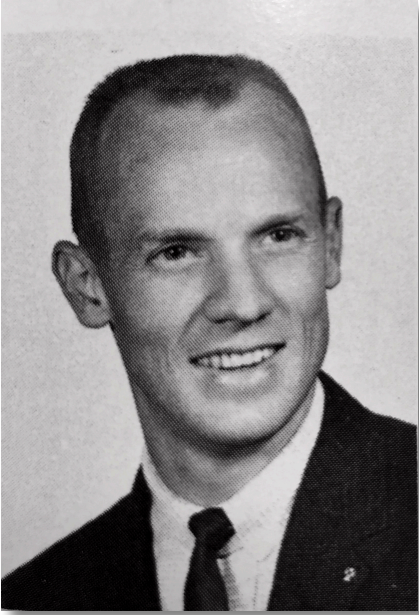
Bellevue High, 1964

Welcome to our Alumni Spotlight series where we shine a light on some of the amazing alumni that have graduated from Bellevue Public Schools!

Know someone that should be in a future spotlight? Send us their name along with a brief explanation of why they should be in the spotlight. eMail: bps.alumni@bpsne.net

Dr. Sherrill (Sherri) Adams is a 1964 graduate of Bellevue High. Her high school biology teacher sparked her interest in science. In college, despite some advice to the contrary, Sherri's interest grew and ended up turning into a lifelong career in science at the University of Pennsylvania - beginning at a time when very few women pursued careers in science.

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



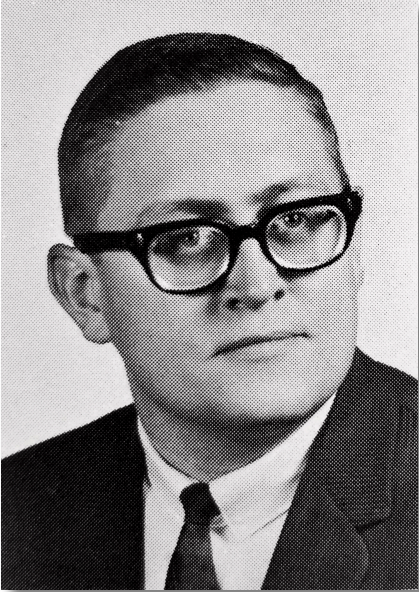
**Mr. Allen Barnard,
Bellevue High
Music Teacher**

What school did you attend in Bellevue and when did you graduate?

I attended Bellevue High School from 1960 until I graduated in 1964. I was fortunate to attend only a single high school, unlike my sisters and many of my classmates.

Could you name some of your favorite teachers and share why they were your favorite?

I had two favorite teachers, Mr. Barnard, the music teacher, and Mr. Steiner, who taught advanced biology my senior year. Mr. Barnard was an extraordinary music teacher. I was involved in chorus, and in what was originally a double octet which became the Belleaires. I also played small roles in the annual musicals like Oklahoma. Although I no longer sing, I still remember how he taught us to do things the right way. He was a perfectionist, I think, and that was useful in all areas of my life.



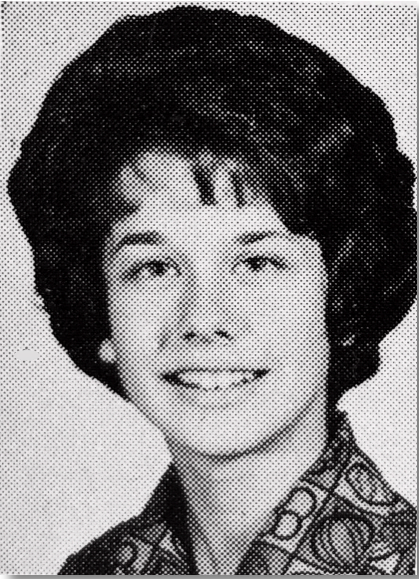
**Mr. Richard Steiner,
Bellevue High Advanced
Biology Teacher**

I had Mr. Steiner originally for a freshman science course, and he terrified me. But in advanced biology he introduced us to the structure of DNA, and I became enamored with the potential that structure represented for how genes were expressed, which became a lifelong passion.

I also learned a lot from Mr. Dredla and Mr. Kahldahl, English teachers my junior and senior year. They both provoked thoughtful analysis of literature, a habit that translates well to everyday life.

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

We often went to the teen club at Offutt. Other than that, between practicing for musicals, ballet classes, and a brief stint as a cheerleader, I didn't have much time. I also made most of my own clothes. Thus I often studied late at night.



Sherri during her sophomore year

Did you have other family that graduated from Bellevue Public Schools?

We moved to Tokyo right after I graduated, so neither of my younger sisters graduated from BPS.

Where did you attend college at, what was your major, and when did graduate?

I had a checkered college career! My freshman year I attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, along with many of my classmates. After my freshman year, I joined my family in Tokyo and decided to stay there for my sophomore year, attending Sophia University (Jochi Daigaku), where I could take classes in English. However, the science offerings were limited, so I took French, Japanese and other liberal arts classes. My junior year I returned to Nebraska, but things seemed pretty tame there after Tokyo, so when my father was transferred to the Pentagon, I transferred to George Washington University in DC and took all the science courses I needed for a BS in Biology. After transferring colleges every year, I graduated on time and didn't lose a credit! Still not sure how I did that.

What did you do after graduating?

After graduating, I immediately started graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I obtained a masters degree. Then I returned to GW for a PhD in genetics.

What factors inspired you to pursue your doctorate?

I felt that I couldn't work on the aspects of science that seemed most interesting to me without a PhD and a postdoctoral fellowship. My graduate and postdoc studies coincided with the beginning of the molecular biology revolution, giving us the ability to determine DNA sequences and to clone and amplify specific DNA fragments. These emerging technologies allowed me to do the kind of gene regulation studies I had been interested in since high school. I wanted to know how a cell, say a cartilage cell, knows to express the genes that make cartilage proteins and not muscle or bone proteins. Turns out to be pretty complicated, and we still don't have all the answers, but I made some contributions to our understanding of the process.



You worked at the University of Pennsylvania for much of your career. Please share with us what led you there, why you stayed for 36 years, and some of your experiences and achievements while at the University of Pennsylvania.

After earning my PhD I took a position as a postdoctoral fellow at the National Cancer Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, in Bethesda MD. I met my husband, Jim Alwine, there. He was also a fellow at NCI. When we started looking for faculty positions in 1979, there were no mechanisms in place for hiring a couple together. In fact

there still aren't many places where that works well. We ended up at Penn because it was the only place where we both got job offers. Fortunately, Penn is an excellent university and continued to get better while we were there, and we were successful there, so we stayed.

It sounds like you are a big advocate for Science and STEM - especially getting more women involved in Science/STEM careers. Why is this important to you and why is STEM education so important for our country?



The importance of STEM education for the country cannot be overstated. We are facing numerous potential crises which could be alleviated by improved science education. One current example is the outbreak of a new strain of corona virus infections in China. Controlling that disease will require new diagnostics, infection control measures, and ultimately a vaccine - and educating people about the importance of vaccines for controlling infectious diseases.

Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

I was a strong advocate for faculty at Penn. I developed a mentoring program for junior faculty and actively mentored many young faculty myself. In addition, with a few of my colleagues, we developed the Penn Forum for Women Faculty, a group designed to support women faculty with workshops and networking opportunities, as well as to provide feedback to the University administration regarding the concerns of women faculty.

Now that you are retired, do you have a bucket list of things you'd like to do?

The first item on my bucket list was to move someplace warmer than Pennsylvania. We did that almost immediately after retirement, moving to Tucson AZ. The second bucket list item was a trip to Africa, which we can now cross off. We had a spectacular trip to Kenya and Tanzania in September. We plan more travel in the future, but those plans will doubtless be affected by my answer to the question below.

Could you share with us a little bit about your family? Are you married? Do you have any children?

I am married to Jim Alwine, whom I met when we were both fellows at NIH. We have one daughter, Ally, who is senior manager for business development at Intrahealth International, which does health outreach in Africa. She is also expecting twins in the spring, so most of our travel in the near future is likely to be to North Carolina where Ally lives.

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

The path I chose, becoming a research scientist, was not an easy one at the time. I was actually discouraged by some university faculty from pursuing a career in science because they didn't think it was appropriate for a woman. And it was difficult for me and my husband to juggle two demanding scientific careers with raising a child. Nonetheless, we were successful on all fronts, and the excitement of making new discoveries has made the challenges worthwhile. So my message is that if you think something is important, stick with it, find a mentor who will help you find the right path, and help those coming after you.

Links

More information about on the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine:

<https://www.med.upenn.edu/>

More Information on the Penn Forum for Women Faculty, Co-Founded by Dr. Adams:

<https://provost.upenn.edu/pfwf>

<https://provost.upenn.edu/pfwf/about-pfwf-o>

About Us

The Alumni Spotlight is a recurring feature on the Alumni Association Facebook Page. If you know of a Bellevue graduate that we should shine the spotlight on, please reach out to us and they will be considered for a future column. Continue to invite your friends and family to Like and Follow our Alumni Association page: <https://www.facebook.com/BPSAlumni>

