

# CHS – Bio



1955

## John Evans Best & Brightest

Current



During the early years of WWII, my father was a civilian instructor for the Army Air Corp in Oklahoma City. For those of you that remember the movie *The Great Waldo Pepper*, you know something of what my Dad was like. My mother was frightened of flying and eventually got Dad to give up teaching young recruits to fly and to switch to commercial flying for Continental Airlines out of Denver until the end of WWII. One of my earliest memories as a very small child in about '42 or '43 was going flying with Dad in an old two-seater biplane. Needless to say, I grew up thinking that my life would be one of building and flying airplanes and hence my advanced physical science class project at CHS, which was to build a wind tunnel for demonstrating basic aeronautics. I started out in Aeronautical Engineering in college, but soon learned that I really did not have much of an aptitude for building things, particularly airplanes, at which point I switched to majoring in physics at OU. What a profound influence Brutus Beall, Catherine Smith, and A. H. Schlenker had on me at CHS of which I was not that aware. I will always be indebted to Catherine Smith for her patience and long suffering. Robert Andrews, Bill Tiederman and I were in Dr. Smith's advance physical science course our senior year. On the last day of class, she was still grading our course projects in order to return them to us that day. Thus she asked the class to sit quietly and read some the science magazines she had in the classroom. While I was turning around having picked up a new magazine, Robert Andrews threw a blackboard mop across the room at me. I swung the magazine like a bat at the mop and hit it so that it fell right in the middle of Dr. Smith's desk generating a mushroom cloud of chalk dust that settled out on her, the project papers, and her desk. Why that blessed saint did not flunk me is beyond me, I would have in

a flash. She simply glared at me while wiping the chalk dust from her face and glasses and telling us to get out of the room. The debt we owe those who suffered our education and maturation can never be repaid only passed along.

The real story of my life is a long, steamy love affair with Susan Freeman, better known to her dear CHS friends as "Free," if for reasons other than the obvious they never shared them with me. I will skip the details of this romance in order not to offend anyone's delicate sensibilities. Susan was in our CHS class starting in the sophomore year, but decided to graduate in two years so that she skipped our junior year and was officially listed as graduating with the class of 1955. However, in heart and spirit, Susan was always one of us. She and I began going "steady" in the spring of our sophomore



**Susan Freeman  
Then and Now**



year, a status which continued until August of 1959 when we finally got married. Susan was a nursing major at the OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City, while I worked on my degree in physics on the Norman campus. The summer after my freshman year I spent in Europe roaming around with a cousin. After my sophomore year, I worked for the summer for Marquardt Aircraft Company in Van Nuys, California, and after the junior year, I worked for Martin Aircraft in Denver, Colorado, for the summer. Susan and I graduated at the same time in 1960. By the time of the reunion, she and I will have been married for 47 years, have 3 sons, 19 grandchildren, and 1 great grandchild. As you can see, it was not all books and diligent study. Our marriage has been like that noted by Billy Graham for he and his wife, they never considered divorce, but they did contemplate murder on a couple of occasions.

Our three sons were all born during our graduate school days, the first one in Troy, NY, the second one in Williams Bay, WI, and the last one in Ann Arbor, MI, home towns which none have ever visited. All three of our sons have pointed out to us on numerous occasions that when asked about where they were born, they feel slightly inadequate since they know nothing about either the community or the state in which they were born. We tell them that “feeling slightly inadequate to the task” is something that human beings do best and therefore they should feel perfectly normal. When Susan and I are asked the secret of the longevity of our marriage, we give them Robert Mitchem’s answer for the longevity of his marriage, which was “a total lack of imagination as to other possibilities.” The real secret, as most of you know, is that God has been far more gracious to us than we could ever deserve.

After OU and marriage, Susan and I departed for a summer’s work at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Silver Spring, Maryland, before starting in the fall a master’s degree in mathematics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, the first institution in the US and the world devoted entirely to science and engineering. Early in the fall, we decided to spend a few days in New York City, where of all people we ran into Robert Andrews walking along Broadway. After our year at Rensselaer, where our eldest son Scot was born, we went back to Silver Spring, Maryland, for a second summer at The Applied Physics Laboratory. Having my bachelor’s degree in physics and master’s in mathematics, our family moved to Williams Bay, Wisconsin, where I discovered astrophysics and worked at the Yerkes Observatory of the University of Chicago. Our second son Mark was born during that year in Williams Bay. The winter of 1962 had to be one of worst for snowfall at least as far as Susan and I had experienced. We rented a small, drafty cottage by Lake Geneva and by the end of the winter the snow piled on either side of the front walk was over my head. Susan with a two-year old and a new born was suffering from what is sometimes referred to as “splinters in the windmills of her mind.” When spring finally arrived, I didn’t think I was ever going to get her back inside the house. We made the decision to go on for the doctorate and decided to do the doctoral program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. By the summer of 1966, I had finished a second masters in astrophysics and a doctorate in astrophysics. Ann Arbor was the birthplace of our third son Rod. During those four years in Ann Arbor, we again experienced several winters of heavy snowfall, but this time Susan was stuck inside with three small boys. She cast at least ten votes in our family discussions about life after graduate school for leaving the snow country of

New York, Wisconsin, and Michigan as far behind as we possibly could. I can't say that I found the snow all that enticing either and thus cast my one vote for moving south if possible.

Before graduation from Michigan, I had not planned to make teaching in higher education a career. At the time of graduation I had several job offers, but the two we were most interested in were a research position at Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico and an assistant professorship in the Physics Department at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. Los Alamos was interested in me since I had concentrated in my doctoral work on the structure and evolution of stars with emphasis on the transfer of radiation through turbulent and magnetic plasmas. Many of the physical processes that occur immediately after the detonation of a nuclear device are similar to what takes place in stars. The primary differences are the time scales with the nuclear device being very short term and the star being very long term. However, in the end we opted for the faculty position probably as much because we had just spent ten years getting an education in universities and that was the primary way of life we knew. Susan and I enjoyed our ten years at KSU immensely. During our four years at OU, Susan had become a dedicated and sometimes rabid OU football fan and still is. At K State, our season football tickets were in the middle of the faculty section and immediately behind the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, my dean in other words. When OU came to town, Susan would dress up in her red and white outfit and scream in the dean's ear for OU to bury K State, which they generally did. Being the good boy that I am, I showed appropriate loyalty to my paycheck and came wearing purple and white. However, the dean and rest of our faculty neighbors got their revenge one year when K State tacked on OU its worst loss ever, something like 67 to 10. Susan was as sad a young lady as I have ever seen and the dean much to his credit said nothing to her, but did turn around and smile every time K State scored which was often and in every way conceivable. My years at K State were typical of most faculty in that I taught, did externally funded research, and published articles in scientific journals and books. I even published an introductory textbook in astronomy that saw five editions and was quite popular in the college market for many years. For a number of years I was the graduate coordinator for the department advising some fifty to sixty students. In that regard, I supervised the thesis work for several doctoral and masters students among whom several have gone on to some fairly prominent positions in scientific research. One even became a division director at The Applied Physics Laboratory of Johns Hopkins University. As a family, we loved Manhattan, Kansas, and those ten years were among the most satisfying in our married life. During summers and falls, I helped coach little league baseball and flag football. I coached with one of most delightful human beings I have had the privilege to know, Jesse Baker. Jesse played for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro League for a number of years, and although he was not one of great names remembered today, such as Buck Owens or Josh Gibson, he was nevertheless an outstanding ball player and loved little boys as much as any person I ever met. God made a very special person in Jesse.

However, we decided after ten years at K State that we might like to come back to the east coast, possibly as a university dean. I had been working summers for the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, when a graduate dean's position

opened at George Mason University, which is part of the state public university system and is located in the Northern Virginia suburbs of the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. We came east in the fall of 1976 to Fairfax, Virginia, where I was the Graduate Dean for awhile at George Mason helping the University make its entrance into doctoral work. I did not stay a dean for long finding that I lacked the smooth gracious personality required to make the academic environment seem absolutely rosy when in reality everything is going down in flames. Most of my years at GMU have been spent in graduate teaching and research in the Physics and Astronomy Department, which is now about 30 faculty. For most of my thirty years at GMU, I have been the graduate coordinator for our department and, although I do teach general education and undergraduate major's courses, my first love has been graduate education. When I reached sixty-five, the department was venturing into a new doctoral program and asked me to stay on for several years past retirement age to direct the new program. I still have one more year at George Mason starting this fall. In recent years I have taken a deep interest in cosmology as do most aging astronomers and I will teach an undergraduate course in the subject rather than my graduate level course. If anyone finds cosmology interesting since we are living in what can be truly called a golden age in cosmological research, you may find my course web site of some interest (<http://physics.gmu.edu/~jevans/astr228/astr228.html>). If you go to the page called *Course Notes* and look at item 14 under *Course Software*, you will find instructions on how to download an Excel spreadsheet program that I did several years ago that solves the Friedmann-Lemaitre Equations for calculating cosmological models based on specification of three parameters: the Hubble constant for the expansion rate of spacetime (capital h subzero), the density of matter in units of the critical density (omega subzero), and the density of dark energy in units of the critical density (omega sublambd). The opening values are those currently thought to represent our universe so copy them down for future reference. By specifying values for these three parameters one can calculate all kinds of cosmological models and see the age of the universe in the yellow box in billions of years. You can even create models that do not start with a big bang. The program calculates 2400 points in the future and 2400 points in the past. In 1987, this program took about one hundred hours of supercomputer time to execute, while today it can be done in MS Excel and will calculate as fast as you can load in the three parameters. My how the world of technology does change. If you have any questions, please email them to me.

After the boys left home, Susan went back to school to get her masters degree in nursing, but instead of going back to work in the medical field she joined Sprint Corporation becoming eventually a supervisor in their electronic messaging division. I was surprised at her choice in as much as she went back to nursing in Manhattan after the youngest boy started school and had continue her career in surgical nursing after we moved to Fairfax up to the time of her decision to go back to school. I must admit that I was impressed with her courage to leave medicine and take up a new career in communications using computers in as much as I am not sure I would have the courage to undertake such a dramatic change in my career. Our three sons graduated from high school here in Fairfax, where we live a short distance from their high school and the university. Our two oldest sons, Scot and Mark, wanted to go to college in Oklahoma after graduating from high school. Our guess is that they probably thought that a half-a-

continent was a save distance between themselves and their parents. Rod, our youngest son, tried on and off to get a college degree, but finally decided that he was not academically oriented to which I think most of his professors seconded the notion. Rod did spend three years in the military and was stationed in Germany for the majority of the time. Scot now lives in the Houston area where he works in geographic information systems for oil and pipeline companies. Mark works for the University of South Carolina in their Environmental Science Institute and lives in Ridgeway, South Carolina. Our third son, Rod, has his own business and lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Two of our sons have been married more than once and so some of those we number among our nineteen grandchildren are adopted and some know Susan and I as grandparents even though it is not a blood relationship. One ex-wife lives a couple of blocks from us and her later children are going to have a future quandary as to why they have three sets of grandparents. We consider ourselves richly blessed by God for these wonderful children. Our only loss was our seventeen year old grandson's death last January. As I mentioned earlier, one of our granddaughters presented us with a great grandson last April, which seems to me makes us absolutely ancient. I took up genealogy as a hobby about fifteen years ago and find that most great grandparents are no longer with us, so we must be getting old.

Back in 1992, we built a summer cottage on Lake Anna in central Virginia for our family use. We had thought for many years that we would sell our place in Fairfax after Susan and I retired and move to the lake cottage, which we call Evanshire. However, within the last year, we have decided to retire in South Carolina, which will be our winter quarters and retain the lake cottage for summers. We are looking at a new development that is a distant suburb of Charlotte, North Carolina. That move also has the advantage of putting us close to the two east coast sons and their families, but we could find no way to incorporate our son in Houston in this grand design. Susan and I have been very active in our local church, Truro Episcopal Church, including a three-year term on the Vestry (governing board) for me and head of the altar guild for Susan. As of this summer, we both have cut back our commitment to the church. Finally, we have been to Israel several times and hope to spend some extended periods volunteering in Israel after retirement.

**See Ya at the 50<sup>th</sup> Susan and John!**