

Just by talking with Keith “Nickie” Robinson you get the impression that he is genuinely one of the happiest, joyous people.

Nickie, a native of Morris, Oklahoma, lived at the Tulsa Boys’ Home (TBH) from 1948 to 1955 when it was still located in downtown Tulsa. All the boys attended public school. Nickie had leadership talent and led the Tulsa Boys’ Home choir in singing at the Mayo Hotel when he was eight years old for a TBH benefit with 300 people in attendance! He also joined Boy Scout Troop 61, they were meeting at the First Presbyterian Church. Nickie enjoyed his time at TBH because, as he put it, the boys there were “all in the same boat”. They made him feel a part of something and he felt he had somewhere he belonged. He also had some stories to tell, like the following one. When Nickie was thirteen years old, there were two older “bad boys” who had bet on whether they could drive the Boys’ Home’s two and a half ton truck, and Nickie had tried to tag along but he was too little. He said that they went without him and got in so much trouble that it made him grateful he did not go with them.

The TBH boys often went to free plays and movies. Nickie even remembered several movie stars that came to TBH while he was there. The actor who played Goliath in the movie *David and Bathsheba*, Walter Talun, visited the Boys’ Home and pulled up in a convertible. Nickie said he was a giant man, and all the little boys just stood there looking straight up at him in awe. Nickie remembered that when the actor got out of the car, the whole car just lifted up after coming out from under his weight. Talun smiled and winked at them. Nickie said he was scared at first, then enthralled, and by the end of the visit they all just loved him.

On Sundays, the TBH boys went to the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Tulsa. There was an arcade nearby, however, so most of them skipped Sunday school to spend their dimes on

pinball. When Nickie was in the 9th grade, they attended the metal and wood working classes held at the Manual Arts Center. The custodian carried a large ring of keys and often lay them down and then just walk off. Nickie said one of his “genius” classmates caught the man at the right time, just after he’d sat the keys down and walked away. His friend made a copy of the master key, and one Sunday morning he and his friends snuck into the basement where they kept a statue of an Indian on a horse. The boys took dresses, cowboy hats, and cigars to dress the statue up. They meant no harm and just laughed at their own silliness.

Nickie actually did not know his real name was Keith until the 8th grade. His science teacher stubbornly called him Keith because that is what it said on the role sheet. Nickie got so frustrated with his teacher that he had to call his mom and freaked out when she told him his full name: “Keith Nichols Robinson”. What an identity crisis!

When Nickie went to see the movie *The Outsiders* in the 1980’s, at first he didn’t realize it was set in Tulsa until he went to see it, but he said he knew every single place in the movie. A testimony of how much the TBH boys interacted with the community.

Nickie credits his TBH success to visits with his family outside of TBH. He would visit his aunt and uncle in Okmulgee, and they would even pick him up and take him on trips. That would give him a breather and allowed him to rejuvenate. Nickie said, ultimately “it was either the Home or the street, and after looking at it like that, the Tulsa Boys’ Home didn’t seem that bad”.

After he finished the 9th grade while he was at TBH, his brother joined the air force, and his mom got remarried and she decided to take Nicki back. They moved into a duplex and he completed his schooling at Will Rogers High School in Tulsa, Ok. While going to school, Nickie worked at Brown Duncan’s Department Store in the toys’ department and at the Majestic Theater. Remembering this, a story came to Nickie’s mind about when the Elvis Presley movie

*Love Me Tender* came out. Elvis dies at the end of the movie, and he said you could hear a pen drop because the girls were in shock. Nickie and his buddy started clapping and cheering, and they were chased out of the theater!

After he graduated from Will Rogers High School in 1958, Nickie enlisted in the Oklahoma National Guard for three years, followed by three years in the US Army. When he got out of the service, he moved to Garland, Texas in 1963. The following year, Nickie was hired on to work for the Greyhound Bus Lines, which he did for 28 years. He said he did everything he could do for the company except drive because he had to be a certain height to drive and he was not tall enough. His next job was with ADP in Dallas (a payroll company) for 16 years. He worked there until he retired. When it came to his retirement, Nickie said, “That’s 50 years. That’s enough to work”.

In 1965 he married. They were together for 52 years and always loved to travel across the USA. Nickie is the proud father of four girls. His daughters are all very successful. They have a wonderful family, but not without their share of tragedies. Nickie’s eldest daughter died when she was 47 years old. One of his grandsons died from epilepsy when he was 8 years old. Nickie and his family help to raise money to fight the disease. Now that he is retired, Nickie spends time with his grandchildren and likes to keep up with everyone on Facebook.

Nickie said “It was a good life. You leave things behind, and that’s kind of sad. But I had *so* much fun, and it was a good life”. That much is evident in the way in which Nickie talked about himself, his experiences, and his family. And he credits TBH with a good start in life! Nickie said TBH taught him many lessons. He learned that he had to get things done, that it was his responsibility to take care of himself, to keep his things clean, to be a gentleman. TBH prepared him for what life was going to be like. He said that Tulsa Boys’ Home “helped, it really

did, because the conditions were good for growing up”. The boys had to mind their manners. Nickie said “yes sir” and “no sir” were absolutely required, and he thinks that helped him in learning discipline. Talking about the home, Nickie said, “I never got in trouble, they wouldn’t let me”.

(Interviewed by Cheyenne Green in 2017)