

Big Man On Campus



I have been reaching back through the centuries to draw out stories of old that are somehow related to my family tree. I find them fascinating. But the stories that resonate the most with me are the ones involving family members who are closest to me. And what son would I be if I didn't brag on my dad just a little bit... especially on Fathers' Day?

Edward John Ondrasik was quite the "Big Man on Campus" in his day. At Roanoke University, he was a star basketball player, nicknamed "The Big Scoop" for his skills under the basket. He was voted thrice to the All State team and earned a spot on the All Century Team. He was eventually inducted in Roanoke University's Hall of Fame.

His illustrious playing career was interrupted by a little disturbance most people knew as WWII. He left school to enlist in the Army Air Corps where he joined the 448th Bomb Group of

the Mighty Eighth Army Air Force. He originally wanted to be a pilot but on his test run got a little too close to some telegraph wires so he got relegated to the bombardier seat. He flew 24 missions over wartime Germany and thankfully made it back home safely. He later told his family that all 24 wartime missions over Germany had to be flown without the benefit of a parachute because at 6'3" he could not fit in his compartment with it on.

Upon his return to the states, he completed his education at Roanoke University and even played for another season where he racked up awards, accolades, and the attention of one Red Auerbach who invited him to come play for him. At the time, Red was coaching the Washington Capitols.

Unfortunately, once my dad graduated and was free to accept the offer, Red had no open positions so he returned to his family home in New Jersey and got picked up by the Paterson Crescents, a team in the American Basketball League. He only played a couple of seasons before he decided to shift his attention and talents elsewhere.

He became the Athletic Director for a Naval Base in Bainbridge MD, and then decided to embark on a career in public education. It was a career that carried him through to retirement age. And he left an indelible impression on scores of children who were fortunate enough to have had him as a coach or teacher.

I still remember walking down a city street as a child with my father at my side only to be continually interrupted by what appeared to me to be grown men shouting out, "Hey, Mr. O!" or "Hey Coach!" Even at my tender age, I could see the love and respect these men had for my father because he had provided them instruction and a role model to emulate when they, as much younger versions of themselves, were his students.

He left an unmistakable legacy... and enormous shoes to fill. I

can't imagine being the man he was. I can only hope to be a son of whom he would be proud.

Michael Ondrasik and Home Video Studio specialize in the preservation of family memories through the digitalization of film, videotapes, audio recordings, photos, negatives, and slides. For more information, call 352-735-8550 or visit our [website](#).