



Alton High's tallest and shortest man had lasting friendship, Crivello and Perica also had strong memories

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - One of Robert Wadlow's closest friends in high school was Thomas Griesbaum.

Thomas was the shortest person at that time at Alton High School at 4-foot-10 inches and Robert towered over him at 8-foot-plus tall.

Griesbaum's favorite story about Robert Wadlow involved sitting by his buddy in English class. He said they were studying the work of William Tell.

"Robert had a translated version of William Tell in his hand," Griesbaum said. "His hand was so big, both of us could see it. The teacher was standing 10 foot away but didn't see it. I had no intention of cheating. We were both what some would call freaks. I was 4-10 and he was 8-foot-plus, but we were good friends."

"Everyone respected Robert just as he did everyone else," Griesbaum added. "When he was in public, he didn't mind, because he was observing human behavior more than they were observing him. We were both living in a world built for average people."

Another friend, Nick Perica of Alton, loved to walk behind Robert in school.

"After lunch, I waited for Robert to open everything up and sure enough, he did," Perica said. "Bob reminded me of a tank."

One of Gene Crivello's favorite stories of Robert was playing basketball with him.

Crivello said Robert Wadlow was called "a dropper" on the basketball court because he couldn't get up and down the floor.

"He would stand at one end of the basketball court and we would throw the ball to him," Crivello said. "He was so tall, he would just drop it into the basket."