

Beryl Wellborn Interview

H: This is Judy Hunter interviewing Beryl Wellborn. September 24th, 2015, at the bistro at the Mayflower. And Beryl I wanted to talk to you because you've been involved with education in Poweshiek County and elsewhere for many, many years. I'd like to get your perspective on it.

W: Okay.

H: So can you start by talking about how you got into education and--?

W: Even as—before I even started school I used to play school with myself. As long as I can remember I wanted to learn so school was important. Following my graduating high school in 1942, I went to Parsons College to take their Normal Training Program (summer session). I earned a Second class teaching certificate which allowed me to teach in a rural school.

H: Ah.

W: I had signed a contract to teach at a country school in Valley #5 Van Buren County. The County Superintendent wasn't going to let me teach but member os the school board told her to “bug off” and leave me alone. I didn't get paid until October after I was 18.

H: [laughs] So you were teaching what grades? All?

W: All grades in the country school. I had two first graders, a third, and a fourth, and a fifth grader. And three eighth graders I believe. Something like that.

H: Wow.

W: I believe that was the breakdown.

H: Wow.

W: I taught that school year (1942-43). In May '43 I became 1A in the draft; went to the army and was discharged in January of 1946.

When I got back to civilian life I enrolled at UNI. The superintendent who I had in my high school days convinced me that I should come and teach 7th and 8th Grades for him in Central City, IA. So I did. I taught for two years then returned to school. I to Northeast Mo. St. Teachers College at Kirksville, Mo. I completed the BA Degree.

My next significant teaching experience was that of teaching Mentally Retarded children, as we referred to them then, in Mount Vernon Public Schools. I completed my MA Degree in Elementary School Curriculum & Administration at the University of Iowa.

H: Yeah.

W: Then I became principal at what is now Linn-Mar.

H: Oh!

W: And came to Grinnell College on June 13th, which was a Friday to be interviewed for a job in the department in Education and went home with a job. And came to Grinnell in August of 1958.

H: Wow. Wow. So you, can you talk about, like, being principal at Linn-Mar.

W: Yes.

H: What kind of students, what kind of building? [laughs]

W: Well we had at that time was known as Marion Rural. It was a consolidated district of many one room country schools.

H: Ah.

W: There were I think 707 students in grades kindergarten through grade eight.

H: Wow.

W: We had all day kindergarten and all the kids were bused because it was in the country at that time which it isn't any more.

H: Yeah.

W: But it was then. And um, my job was to work on the curriculum and help teachers which I found very rewarding and really lots of fun as I think back on it. Well, it was a great experience, that's all I can say about it.

H: So that was right in the period when lots of consolidation was happening?

W: Yes it was.

H: In Iowa.

W: Yes that's right. And Marion City and Marion Rural, I don't know how many times they voted and it was always voted down in Marion Rural but not in Marion City. It was kind of like Mount Vernon and Lisbon. When I think of Mount Vernon, the handicap kids. Mount Vernon and Lisbon would vote to reorganize into one district. And it never passed in Lisbon but it passed in Mount Vernon.

H: [laughs]

W: So they stayed even to this day as is true in Linn-Mar and Marion— two separate districts.

H: Separate? Wow.

W: But the city limits in Marion and Cedar Rapids there are areas that have an address in Cedar Rapids or Marion but are in the Linn-Mar school district.

H: Really? Wow. Wow. Okay, so, you had a master's at this time when you came to Grinnell?

W: Yes. Well, yes. Yes.

H: And talk about the education department at that point. Teaching in that...

W: [laughs] Well when I told the Dean in Iowa City, the Dean of Education, he said, "you've lost your mind". Told him I had a job and I said, "Why?" And he said, "don't you know? They don't like teacher education at Grinnell. And they just voted to eliminate the elementary education degree."

H: Gee, that sounds very familiar doesn't it? [laughs]

W: Yeah. And I said, "I'm never been to Grinnell, I don't know a thing about it but I'm going." And he laughed and said, "good luck". So I came on a Friday, the 13th of June, my wife and I. And I was interviewed by then Dean Homer Norton who was from the History department.

H: Okay.

W: Fine, fine gentleman. I was interest and we were visiting other professors kept coming in and I thought, "This is kind of rude." But they started asking questions and one professor who was the president of the National Council for Basic Education disliked teacher education immensely and informed me that he was a teacher and he had no training in teaching and I in my naive smart mouth said, "Just think how much better you would be if you had taken the training."

H: [laughs]

W: I thought the Dean and a couple of other fellows there were just going to die laughing. In fact, I learned later that they thought that Homer had put me up to this.

H: Really? [laughs]

W: I didn't know. Well, anyway. [laughs]

H: Was there a program at the college before you came? That you were coming into?

W: Yes, they offered major in education.

H: Ah, okay.

W: But this was the last—that fall, was the last class that would graduate with that degree, or that major.

H: Okay:

W: After that the students had to major in an academic area and then earn the certification in addition as they made their way through their degree programs.

H: Okay.

W: Well, it wasn't easy. I decided I would keep my nose out of campus politics and do my job and if it wasn't good enough: okay. And anyway, I did survive.

H:Mhm.

W: I did leave for a couple years and I won't go into the reason why but it was a disagreement between,--well the President had gone to Iowa City or was going to the University of Iowa and this president and the political power of professors and I didn't agree. So anyway. Then when Glenn Leggett became president he called and wanted to know if I would come back. And I said, "well I would if I could come back as a full professor." He said, "no problem". So I came back as a full professor.

H: Well, right.

W: And it still wasn't easy. I don't imagine it's too easy now. But I don't know that because I'm not in touch.

H: I think you're right. I think there's a problem with education being recognized as a legitimate discipline.

W: Yeah. I know one time the discussion was the school, the college, shouldn't offer how to programs. I counted 44 how to programs in the catalog not in the Department of Education. And that made me popular of course. [laughs]

H: I'm sure. [laughs]

W: But I was very strongly supported by President Leggett, President Drake, and President Ferguson. President, who came after Leggett?

H: Oh, the six-year one.

W: Turner.

H: Turner, right? Not so much, huh?

W: Well, he didn't bother me. He just, you know. That's a strange one. [laughs]

H: It was he, we came in his second year.

W: Yes, because I remember interviewing Chris.

H: Do you?

W: I was on the council when he was being interviewed.

H: Oh, wow. That's cool.

H: How big was the department? Who were your colleagues? How many students did you have?

W: Well, I think there were fourteen student teachers that year.

H: Wow.

W: In the elementary program. And—

H: The year you came?

W: Yeah.

H: Okay

W: Maybe it was fourteen all together and there were five or six in secondary. And a new person came in secondary by the name of John Nelson. And he stayed a couple, three, years and went to Purdue from Grinnell. Ah, we had, I remember one person in the department never showed up for class. Got rid of him.

H: Ah. [laughs]

W: But then, we were allowed to increase the department as the numbers grew and there was—I hired Roberta Atwell.

H: Well, good choice. [laughs]

W: A very good choice. And there was a young man, Richard Van Scotter. And he was here two to three years. And then they started reducing faculty and of course education was one of the departments that was trimmed back.

H: Do you feel as though there was particular hostility against education here? Or was it a reflection of sort of national trends?

W: Well, I would say there was probably quite a bit of dissatisfaction with the elementary teaching program. And I think one of the reasons was with regard to elementary preparation programs was that people viewed those programs as not very demanding. One of the points I used to make with teachers, or students, was that you had to know more than you were ever going to teach. And that meant that you needed to broaden academic background. I believe though that wasn't the general attitude. There were still a lot of schools that gave majors in elementary education. And ah, I guess the feeling was that the elementary schools, you know

they severed a little bit from John Dewey to say the least because people didn't understand what he was saying. And I find it so interesting today that people are saying today, that you should train people in high school and college to do something. Well, that's what John Dewey was saying all along. But people and teachers who thought they were teaching under his influence did some very stupid things. I mean, just common sense would tell you differently. You were supposed to love the children and not make them feel uncomfortable. And he didn't say that at all.

H: Okay so.

W: Yeah.

H: Back to your being at Grinnell. And you hired Roberta and you—

W: We had a good strong department and we had wonderful students for the most part. Uh, I think probably the track record of those that taught is as good as any university for undergraduate students.

H: I bet you're right.

W: And the Department of Public Education increased the requirements of, to be certified. Grinnell was able to do that with a ninth semester which was Roberta's idea and Dr. Drake seconded it. I thought that was wonderful.

H: That is a very special...

W: Program.

H: Program. Yeah.

W: It is.

H: Do you want to talk a little about what it is?

W: Well, it's the student, the student does, or at least while I was there, they did the general education course which was called History and Philosophy of Education. They did a major in an academic area and then they came back the ninth semester and took the Methods courses and did their student teaching. They could do the Methods, part of the Methods course before the ninth semester. Because the student teaching number of hours has increased—

H: Yeah.

W: I forgot what the hours are now but that gave them all day in the classroom every day. They didn't have to run back to campus.

H: Yeah. And, it was free right?

W: Yeah.

H: That's one of the amazing things about it is that they could do it for free.

W: Oh yeah. Let them do it for free, yeah. They had to maintain a 3.3 grade point average, I think it was the average although it may have been higher. But that was not a problem.

H: Yeah. And I think now there may be a few more courses they have to take before they get to that point.

W: That could well be true.

H: Like Psych and things like that.

W: Yeah, well they had to do that then too.

H: Okay.

W: But yeah, that was a great, is a great program.

H: So that began like, in the '80s? '90s?

W: That would be before the '90s. Let's see. When did George become President? I'd have to look but you may have been right. It may have been.

H: It probably was the '80s.

W: Yeah, the '80s, late '80s. But that's been very successful. Very successful.

H: Yeah. Yeah. And still is.

W: It made for very good teachers. Of course you start out with pretty good students to begin with. [laughs]

H: That helps but there's value added as they say. [laughs] Can you—

W: Oh, I must tell you one other thing about the students which just, I gloated about this. The Governor had an assistant who was checking out teacher education programs and she called one day and wanted to meet to talk with her about the grade point average of our people in Education compared with the rest of the student body. And I said, "I can give you that very quickly" because that was one of the things I kept track of.

H: Yeah.

W: So the grade point average of the people in Education was a tenth of a point higher than that of the student body. And she said, "oh, well you've got good students anyway."

H: So she must have been looking for evidence— [laughs]

W: Oh, she was very disappointed. [laughs]

H: Oh. [laughs]

W: But it was... I got a big charge out of that. That'll teach you. Make up your mind before you have the evidence. Because you could tell that she was very hopeful. Again, I don't know how many schools she called but... [laughs] You were going to ask something else.

H: I was going to ask if you had favorite stories about supervising student teachers.

W: Well, one story I had, my daughter was in second grade and we had a young lady who happened to be Black who happened to be our first African-American in elementary and when she was doing her student teaching I was curious about how the parents and the students would view this unusual situation. Unusual then, it wouldn't be now. I asked my daughter everything I could think of about the new student teacher hoping that, or wondering if she was going to say, "well Dad, you know, she's Black." And she never did. And I asked her little friend, same thing, never indicated she was aware, if they even knew it, I don't know. The other things that I don't remember specifically but, I was always pleased when the student teacher and often they did something unique and inspired the kids to do, you know, some project that the supervisee teacher hadn't thought of or didn't have time to do. But uh, I don't, I can only think of one or two that we had to counsel out of the program.

H: Out of the program.

W: Well, they got canceled out of the college too.

H: Yeah. That happens.

W: That happens. But all in all, I think it did wonderfully well. Well you know, Mr. Abar was awarded. He was a student of mine.

H: Was he?

W: Jim Gilbert. He was a student of mine.

H: He's now a principal in Newton.

W: Or, Director of Curriculum I think.

H: Is he a director now?

W: I think so. He was a principal and then he moved up. I know he has something to do with, I'm sure it's Director of the elementary school curriculum.

H: Wow. And David got an honorary degree here at Grinnell. He, his first year of teaching he had my daughter.

W: Did he?

H: Yeah. So he had both my kids and he's still going strong.

W: He did well, does well. I was trying to think of...I can't think of any others. Just the three. I think one or two have become super famous. And uh, I used to encourage them and say, "now you're not going to teach" because many in the Intro course just took the course and liked it. I told them I wanted them to be sure to get on a school board in their. And two or three of them did. I'd see their name in the paper. In fact, one was the youngest school board members in Northern Iowa.

H: Wow.

W: Somewhere in the northern part of the state. So some took the advice in a way.

H: How did you come to get involved with the Iowa Valley?

W: Well I had been on the school board here for about 12 years.

H: Oh really? Okay.

W: And I was tired. [laughs]

H: Can't say I blame you. [laughs]

W; So I decided I would give up my seat on the school board here, which I did. And about a year later, Bill Weeks, who had represented Grinnell, or this area, on the Iowa Valley board, asked me if I would consider running for his seat.

H: Ah.

W: And I thought, "well, that's a good way for me to learn about community colleges." And I said, "sure." And I did. And I served on that board 20 years. 12 of which I was Chair.

H: President, yeah.

W: I take credit. Although of course, it's not all my doing but I was the ramrod, so to speak, for the building here. We had a program going in the non-credit courses. And that, you know, would just meet wherever they could.

H: Uh-huh.

W: Sometimes the high school was available. Sometimes downtown, some storefront. And I said to the board, "what do you know, Grinnell is the second-largest center in the district." We had

several single mothers, particularly who would want to continue their education but they can't afford to drive to Marshalltown because that means a car and babysitter. And I said, "I'm not going to support bricks and mortar for MCC. And I will oppose until there's something done in Grinnell." And so, I had brought the President, three different Presidents to Grinnell to try to locate the facility.

H: Presidents of Marshalltown Community College?

W: Well, Presidents of Iowa Valley.

H: Or Iowa Valley? Iowa Valley, okay.

W: The first one I brought couldn't care less you know. The next one was kind of, "well, okay." You know, "I'll come down." The third one was, at least if he was not interested, he held his attitude a little better. [laughs]

H: [laughs]

W: So the building where we are, or where it is, was available. And it had 26,000 square feet. It had been a—

H: Grocery store right?

W: Yeah, grocery store and so there were no interior walls. The parking lot was there. It was accessible for the handicap. So I said, "well, how much do you want for it?" Well, they wanted \$250,000 and it needed lots and lots of work. And I said, "well, we can't afford that." Well the next week it became available for \$133,000. So I said to the President, I was on a vacation in the East. And he called and said it's available for \$133,000. I said "write a check". Which I had no authority to do.

H: [laughs]

W: He did, and we bought the building and passed the bond issue. \$133,000 and three million later we had a facility.

H: Three million to renovate?

W: Yeah, that's what the bond issue was. I think it was, there was, some of the money was for something else. But basically, it was all spent up here. It's been a very successful investment.

H: Oh, my goodness, oh my goodness, yeah. I'm always sort of amazed at the number of people that I know, you know, who have gotten college courses there or the training program, some of the training programs for local industry.

W: Right. It was interesting; again, not naming any names but, the then-President of the Chamber of Commerce just chewed me out for a while because we took that off taxes. Grinnell was going to move, grow west. Of course, Hy-Vee was already moved. [laughs]

H: South, yeah. [laughs]

W: Anyway, on the day of Dedication to formally open it, who was there to cut the ribbon? Which was fine. I thought, “better to have you on our side than against us.”

H: Exactly. Exactly.

W: But it just struck me as being very interesting that he was so opposed to it and then...saw the light. [laughs]

H: Well, it's interesting. Community colleges' relationship with other educational institutions. That's why I think you are so interesting because you've spanned all of these. All of these types of education.

W: [laughs] Well, when they were called Junior Colleges, it was kind of like teacher education. Their reputation was not very good.

H: Yeah. Yeah.

W: And so, we had to live and learn I guess.

H: Yeah.

W: And prove that. I call that my field of dreams.

H: The building here?

W: Yeah, the building and the program yeah, because it has helped so many people. And I've had students who I don't know, never saw them before, stop me and say, because my picture happens to be in the Welborn lounge. They'll stop me and say “Aren't you Mr. Welborn?”, “yes.” “I want to thank you for making it possible to get a two-year degree” or “retrain for a job” or whatever the case may be.

H: Or get the courses and then go to another, you know—

W: Oh, yeah, they can go! And I went out when Sally Mason, then president of the University, came. And we signed an agreement that students in some areas can do all four years at the community college.

H: Really?

W: Or transfer two years or whatever.

H: Okay. Yeah, the courses are equivalent now.

W: Yeah, and each of the universities, of the public universities have that agreement now with the community colleges. Yup. But yeah, it wasn't easy. Presidents of various community colleges really had to work at convincing the universities the programs should be transferable for students.

H: Yeah. I know that just before I retired, which is about 2012, I guess, President Kington, at Grinnell College was talking about getting the admissions process so that we got more community college graduates to come to Grinnell. Which I think is, kind of revolutionary, I think for Grinnell. I don't know if it's, you know, happened there much.

W: Well, I can only remember two students at Grinnell College when I was still working that came to Grinnell from community college. Now, there well could have been more. But there were two that took my intro course.

H: Ah.

W: That had come from community colleges.

H: Okay.

W: Well, Grinnell College wasn't overflowing with transfers from community colleges.

H: No. No.

W: So.

H: But I think it's...Well its...I've participated a little in the Prison Program and that's an interesting development.

W: Oh yeah.

H: Because, you know, here we are giving Grinnell College credit to incarcerated students and I know that a couple, at least one that I know of, has applied to the college. You know, gotten out of prison and applied to the college. But I don't think he came. I don't know why. I don't know what the story was but.

W: Well, it's been a great asset to the community, I know. So, anyway.

H: So. So what would you say in terms of the public school system in Grinnell. Would you...you've seen kind of a lot of...[laughs] How would you rate it compared to other public school systems nationally? That's probably an unfair question.

W: No. Well, I've been in a lot of...you know, I've been actively involved, twenty years almost now. I always thought that the school system was very strong. All the way through. I never heard

of too many students who tried to go to college and didn't make it. I think that's one test. The other test is those who wanted to work found jobs and were, you know, they did their job well. I didn't, I'm sure like all public schools, and probably more so today than before, well no, that wouldn't be...Is keeping up, making sure that the curriculum meets the needs of the students. And as you know, the colleges, four year colleges and universities, indirectly control the curriculum.

H: Yeah. I think-

W: I mean, we don't say that out loud very often but it's true. I mean, if you want to go to University of Iowa, you learn what you have to, what your transcript should say in order to make it. If you want to go to Harvard it's the same thing. So, the schools have to meet those requirements and sometimes its very difficult, through no fault of their own that they can or cannot do that. I think the other thing that the public school has to deal with more and more is diversity. When we were, when Iowa was number one in high school graduates, let's face it, diversity was not evident at all.

H: Right

W: There was no need. Well, there may have been but it was ignored basically.

H: Right.

W: And so, the population was very homogenous and when the school said you took X, Y, Z, that's what you did. Regardless of what you were going to do. Because there were so many small schools...you know at one time we had three thousand plus districts.

H: Yes.

W: And you know, I graduated from a high school that had 98, total enrollment. And we didn't have electives. We took four years of English, four years of math, four years of science, Bingo! That was it. [laughs]

H: Yeah.

W: You know. And... So I think I do think that we need state leadership, local leadership that focuses on curricular matters and there ought to be somebody in every building that is on top of it and making sure that there are things. One of my students, who was a curriculum director told me that he had a grant and they, for a teachers' workshop before school started. He had seventy-some teachers there and he said one of the things that I told them is something you told us. And that was if a student has learned you haven't taught. And I thought, "well, basically that's true." Now, it doesn't mean that you all learn at the same time or the same way but at the end of the day...

H: At the end of the day yeah.

W: They should learn whatever is, you know, is essential. The other thing is, I'm not sure that we do a very good job individualizing and maximizing kids' talents. I remember a couple of years here in Grinnell I advocated that the so-called "normal kid" average that the teachers find something they are particularly interested in and push them to develop that interest even if they had to miss out on some routine the teacher thought was invaluable you know? [laughs]

H: Mhm.

W: Well that sort of worked. But you can't do it if you've got twenty-five kids and one teacher.

H: Yeah.

W: If I'd had my way, in first grade we'd have no more than eight.

H: Wow.

W: Second grade, we'd have no more than eight. Third grade we might get up to ten, and then maybe twelve in fourth grade but not go beyond that. I used to say, well look at the coaches. They have to have a line coach, a kicking coach, a defensive coach—

H: Quarterback coach. [laughs]

W: Fourteen coach for ten kids. [laughs] Why wouldn't you expect the same need in the classroom?

H: Yeah. Yup.

W: Not to be...when I really get critical I think we talk a good game about the importance of education but we don't really care.

H: I think that's more and more true. Yeah.

W: Unfortunately.

H: Yeah.

W: Well, I think the only answer is to cut down on the number of students-teach ratio. Longer school days, fewer...we don't need a 7B basketball team. Either that or, well, maybe we could have that if we had a longer school year.

H: Yeah, yeah, but I know what you're saying.

W: I used to listen to the radio and at quarter to seven and hear the schedule by two'oclock there wouldn't be anybody in school. Maybe one or two.

H: Yeah. Yeah. It was good for the self-esteem.

W: Yeah, and if we really—Frankly, educating people is the only thing that's going to save us.

H: I was, am amazed when people start talking about home schooling or you know all the charter schools and all these other things. And I go, wait a minute, public education is part of the bedrock of democracy remember? You know, and we've just forgotten that part of it.

W: Yeah. I was just reading some notes I made some time ago and it was true when I went to a country school and true when I taught at a country school. And true actually until, I'd say in the middle fifties. We started the day, pledge of allegiance. We even had prayer. After pledge of allegiance we sang patriotic music. We valued the democratic, or democracy.

H: System.

W: Our land is free. But today, they'd drive you out of the building probably.

H: Yeah. Interesting.

W: I don't think that's right.

H: Yeah, yeah. We need to be reminded that we're in this together.

W: Well we are and we need to be reminded that freedom costs a lot of money and a lot of hard work and attention. And we're gonna—

H: Not used to education for paying for that. I was at a school board meeting last night and they were talking about the possibility of an International Baccalaureate program at Grinnell. Are you familiar with that at all? What do you think about that idea?

W: Well, what are we going to do for the one's that don't make it?

H: Well, there's a good question. I mean, that's the idea, what they presented last night was that it's for everybody. It's for all kids. You're not...you're looking suspicious. [laughs]

W: Prove it.

H: Okay. I have no evidence.

W: Well that's, I mean. If it is and it would work fine. But what are you going to do, you know, we spend so much time with the ones at the lower end. Actually mainstreaming for me has been the biggest, indeed, the biggest detriment to education.

H: Really?

W: Well, I base that on the very biased I suppose point of view but when I taught retarded children. I had kids from age about six to twelve or fourteen and if they could succeed in something they were delighted. They were not discipline problems. They wanted to learn more

and do more things. If they had been mainstream frankly, they would never have succeeded in anything.

H: Ah. Ah.

W: Because, well, the teacher is just one person and cannot handle that many different problems. I mean, when you have a range of kids that are able to do no better than third grade work and they're in eighth grade, they get your time. The other kids don't get much of anything except left on their own. Whose going to contribute to society? I'm not saying you should punish these lower kids in any way. But you should provide for them at their level and at their interest. But you can't do that if you have twenty-five kids and you've got fifteen in the middle and two or three at the very top. You can't do justice, particularly to the middle group.

H: Yeah.

W: One time I suggested that when I was on the school board, because the first graders were kind of big, or I thought they were, we put in some extra rooms and you know, lowered the population per grade. "Oh, we couldn't afford it". I said, "well then lets higher two teachers for each of the first grades and second grades". "Well we can't do that. What if they don't get along?" Fire them then find two that could.

H: Find two that do!

W: I thought very simple, but as usual that didn't happen.

H: They've been cutting. I mean, I was alarmed when I was on the school board. My last year was like '90...no it was 2001 and I was alarmed at the cuts that were happening then. And we've done nothing but cut since then. You know, and it's just continuing. It's extremely alarming I think.

H: Yes. Yes.[laughs]

W: But, what you—you know, for example I asked him. I said, "now what programs in the elementary school you would have in the new building that you can't have in the three buildings that we have". He didn't know. I said, "if you want my yes vote you have to tell me that".

H: Yeah. Yeah. I'm afraid they, that one—

W: They bought up all that land. Squandered a million dollars.

H: Yeah.

W: And then that telephone building. Well I blame the board in part for that.

H: Oh, it was definitely their fault. And I think Barbara says that aloud. They didn't do their job right. But you know, it's hard being on the school board.

W: It is! It is! It isn't easy. And one of the other things that just drove me crazy was you have this part of the budget and you can't move the money from here over to here. That's just ridiculous.

H: Yeah.

W: But that's the state legislator for you.

H: Yeah. They want to have local control but not over money. [laughs]

W: Actually they don't want to have local control over anything. [laughs]

H: I know.

W: But you're right. Especially money.

H: They can talk a good game and then cut the money. Make it immovable, you know?

W: If I had kids school age today, I would have to think twice about sending them to public school. I'd put them online.

H: Really?

W: Well, I would certainly look into it. Now, I don't—it's hard for me to say because I've always felt that the community school was the best cultural organization that we have.

H: Yeah.

W: You know.

H: Yeah.

W: Church is... they could go fly as far as I'm concerned... and I would...if my child was artistic or musical or liked athletics I'd hate to deprive them of that pleasure. Because they do learn some positive things.

H: And some negative things.

W: Yeah. A few negative things, I think. But I've...I'd really be hard put unless the public school had some of their instruction had some of their instruction online. See, to me, that is a golden opportunity to help the advanced kids.

H: Yeah. They do a lot of that. I mean, not a lot of that. They do some of that through the School within a school. What used to be the alternative thing. Then it combined with the School Within a School. Now, it the Center for something or other at the high school. But they do, they supervise, among other things, they supervise a lot of online courses that anybody can take.

W: Well, I would want that to be available even first grade.

H: Yeah. We don't currently, well...Interesting. Do you worry about the digital divide between you know, people who can afford electronics at home and those who can't?

W: Well. There ought to be some way of making those available. The school doesn't have to shut it's doors at three-thirty.

H: That's true. And they're now giving computers to all the students, what? fifth grade and up I think. Okay, one last question Beryl. If I gave you a million dollars and said, okay what do you want to do to the local public school system with this million dollars what would you do?

W: Well, I would first have a teachers' meeting in every building, or, either that or by grade level. And I'd say, "what do you need that you don't have? Write it down. Make a list". That would be the first, my first obligation. And then, I would say to them, "alright, you write a plan. We'll get you what you need, you write a plan how you're going to do it. Name what you want your kids to be able to do the last day of school."

H: That's very teacher centric plan.

W: Oh, sure! They're the ones, unless you help them do what they want to do and let's face it: 99.9 percent do it. There'd be one or two that feel they aren't obligated. Ignorance is spread by the teachers. But that's what I'd do. And then when we got that taken care of I'd say the next year, "make a list of what you need. What you didn't have". I mean, I'd put the responsibility on them.

H: Okay.

W: And if a building principal wasn't able to monitor and see it was taken care of we get a new one.

H: Sounds like a plan. [laughs]

W: And if the superintendent couldn't live with it we'd get now one! [laughs] I do think, I'd also hope that, that in the plans they would include parents' input. Although, I'm not overly excited by parental participation.

H: I know.

W: I mean, it's kind of a two-edged sword.

H: It is.

W: But, we could try it and if it didn't work I'd find some way to ease it out or that sort of thing. But I used to, we, when I was principal at Marion Rural and I had the teachers call each parent,

the parent of each kid in his or her room. Just so, I said, “I don’t care what you talk about or what you say but when they call you or when you call them you’ll have a face to remember.”

H: Visualize.

W: And I said, “call them up and tell them how well Johnny did. Don’t just call when Johnny doesn’t do well.”

H: Yeah.

W: [laughs] One day, I had this young girl, she was in first grade I think, and very retarded, very slow. So I said, I’ll tell the parent. I called the dad and he said come. I don’t know why his wife didn’t come. He came and he stopped off at the bar on the way. He was almost drunk. You know. First thing he said, “well she’s just like I am”. And I thought ‘how am I going to say, well you know she’s retarded’. But I said, he’s too drunk to realize what he had said and what I said. I just said she needs a special program that will provide for her but don’t expect her to be doing first grade work. You know? But it made it easier because I knew; I mean I had met him. You know. And the teacher had met, one or the other of the parents so it worked out. But that’s what I’d do. I’d also expect the teachers to somehow; I suppose they’d have to take more than one meeting to explain to the parents what is expected by each grade level. By the end of the year, grade five, here are the things in math that they should be able to do. I’d also have the kids keep track of things that they knew. I think if they kept a notebook or a chart, check off things that they could appreciate that some of those things they could do on their own.

H: Yeah.

W: I remember in Grinnell. And you would laugh if I told you. I’ll probably tell you. [laughs]

H: [laughs]

W: The teacher had I think for two or three years I them like in fourth grade, one teacher teach the science and social studies, or language arts and the other teach the math. And they both taught reading.

H: Yeah.

W: One didn’t have to make seven preparations a day every day.

H: Right.

W: Anyway, one social studies teacher, fourth grade, Fairview, had the kids read newspaper magazines, keep up with what was going on in the world and things that they were interested in and put them in a notebook. Cut them out and put them in a notebook. Well, I got this call, mother wanted to have a conference with me. Fine. “What’s it, what do we want to talk about.” “Well, it’s just a waste of time to keep that notebook.” I said, “really? How so?” “Well it’s just

kind of busy work.” “Well, is your son learning anything?” “Oh, yes he is. He finds articles about science and things that he wouldn’t otherwise, read. And things about social studies, geography, history.”

H: [laughs]

W: I said, “sounds to me like he’s learning things that wouldn’t happen in the regular routine in class.” Well, she guessed that was okay but she still thought it was busy work.

H: [laughs]

W: Then one time in junior high the seventh grade read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Mother calls, “I’ve got to talk to you about this book. *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” So I said, well my son was in the class, so I said, “here’s what we’ll do: you go home and quiz your son and I’ll go home and quiz my son and we’ll get back together tomorrow”. We did. And I said to my son, “tell me about the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” He said “well it’s about race relationships.” And I said, “is that all?” I said, “is there something about rape?” “Oh, yeah but we don’t spend any time on that. That’s not the main idea”. So, I said, “that’s interesting. Do you like the book?” “Oh yeah. It’s okay.” So I called the mother and I said, “well, what did your son say?” Oh, he didn’t have much to say.” Didn’t bother him. I said, “why don’t you talk to your priest about it?” She did. He said, “I supposed it’d be a good book if it wasn’t on the banned list”. So it was alright. [laughs]

H: Interesting.

W: Hiring teacher and working with them and with parents were interesting responsibilities of my work with public schools. Being a part of the community college and helping it bring needed educational programs for adults to be trained and retrained was exciting for me. Seeing young teachers bringing new ideas to their classrooms was a joy. I am grateful for these opportunities.

H: Wow.

W: But things are funny.

H: They are. Well, thank you Beryl.

W: Well I hope that helps.

H: It really does. It really does.

[End]