

***Poweshiek History Preservation Project***

**Interview Transcript**

**Interviewer:** Judy Hunter

**Speaker:** Doug Cameron

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October 8, 2013

Persons present:     Judy Hunter-I  
                              Doug Cameron-S

Hunter: This is Judy Hunter interviewing Doug Cameron at Drake Library on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013. And what, I've got some questions for you. But basically, I'd just like you to talk about your experience with education in Grinnell, and I know you weren't born here right?

Cameron: No, Denver Colorado.

Hunter: Okay, how did you come to be in Grinnell? And how did you get into teaching?

Cameron: Okay, well I went into teaching through the back door. Um, I was one of these people; I went to Cornell College in Mount Vernon and uh, majored in sociology. So I was one of these people that graduated in 1970 with a degree in sociology. No clue what I was going to do with this degree in sociology so I cast about and thought what do I like? You know, and I taught swimming lessons and I thought, "Well, I like teaching, I could do that." So I went to Colorado College and got a Master of Arts in Teaching and uh, then basically I had a contract signed, sealed, and delivered, in Leadville Colorado which I don't know if you know where that is. But it's miles up in the mountains and had I been planning to be single I would have taken that job and I did take it for a while with the understanding that if something better opened up, this job in Grinnell came up and Ginny's from Minneapolis .

Hunter: So you were already together with Ginny at this point?

Cameron: We were engaged.

Hunter: You were engaged. Okay.

Cameron: So it was kind of a no brainer. And we came for three years. And stayed for forty-two. I always tell people that because neither one of us thought that we could survive in this little town. You know. And we've enjoyed it.

Hunter: Really. So what was your first job in Grinnell?

Cameron: Teaching sixth grade at Bailey Park School. Jerry Hagen hired me. This is a whole 'nother story if you want me tell it?

Hunter: Yeah go ahead.

Cameron: He called me in Colorado Springs where Colorado College is and said, asked me to come for an interview. And I slammed the door and said "No, I have a job in Leadville." Then I

got to thinking about it. I called him at eleven o'clock at night, because I was afraid he was going to fill it, and I said, "If you still want me to come for that interview I will." And so we set it up. Then I got to the airport in Des Moines thinking I could rent a car. Well, I was twenty-one years old and I couldn't rent a car so I had to take the bus and was late for my interview. So.

Hunter: [laughs]

Cameron: So it didn't start well, but they hired me anyways.

Hunter: Alright. Alright. So the sixth grade at that point was at Bailey Park?

Cameron: Baily Park School.

Hunter: Was it K-6?

Cameron: K-6 and he came to me the first day of school and apologized for my large class which was twenty-eight kids. And I thought it was a small class because my class where I student-taught and did my internship in Colorado Springs was like thirty-five. So you know it was all kind of relative. He thought it was large, I thought it was small, so it all worked out. [laughs]

Hunter: Did you teach everything then? Or were you social studies?

Cameron: No. There was another teacher there so there were two of us. Our first year teaching.

Hunter: Oh wow. What year was this?

Cameron: 1971. And her name of uh, Kay Hunter. She was a wise-man from Gilman. But we got along great. And I taught math, reading, and science. And she picked up the social studies. Which was kind of the way the previous people had done it so we just continued that.

Hunter: Okay.

Cameron: And the funny thing is, and this is an interesting story too. Now you have to go through an, practically an act of Congress to adopt a curriculum. First day of In-service, Kyle Jones came around and said, "Here's your math books. I ordered them this summer." That was it. superintendent ordered the curriculum and you just did it. He decided and that was the way it was.

Hunter: So pretty much he decided on all the —

Cameron: Yeah, he decided all that stuff.

Hunter: And talk about the administration at that time. There was the superintendent and—

Cameron: There was a business manager. Don Waterson.

Hunter: Oh, okay.

Cameron: And a curriculum coordinator believe it or not. Ben Davis was his name. And uh, Kyle, and then there were, there was a principle at Fair View, that was Avis Tone. And Jerry Hagen was at Bailey Park. And, and, and Newburg and,

Hunter: Oh, he did both schools.

Cameron: And Larry Bakerink, I don't know if you ever knew him, he and Davis.

Hunter: Okay.

Cameron: And uh, Avis had Cooper which is an open, where the parking lot is at the college and Fairview. 'Cause Fairview at that time was only four to six because there was no big addition.

Hunter: Oh.

Cameron: So they, the K3 kids, maybe it was K6 but the K2 kids went to Cooper. So uh.

Hunter: There was another one, Parker right?

Cameron: Parker. That was torn down; when I came for my interview in May it was still there. When I came back in August it was gone. So it was torn down in 1971. So uh. So uh.

Hunter: Wow. So twenty-eight kids and talk about what the classroom was like and what the interaction was like.

Cameron: Oh.

Hunter: Just sort of interested in how it's changed.

Cameron: Maybe it was because it was my first class. That was a fantastic class. And uh, it's changed a lot in terms of how you teach. There were no centers, there were no, it was purely workbooks and desks were in rows. They were these old metal desks with the lift tops and uh, and uh, but I think the kids learned a lot. I hope they did, you know. And uh, I still keep up with some of those people today. Some of them actually still live in town, but uh, Nivea Peterson, I don't know if you know her.

Hunter: Yeah.

Cameron: Um, it's kind of an interesting story she uh, moved to Denver Colorado and I ran into her out there, 'cause my mom still lives there. And I ran into her in a shopping center about twenty-five, thirty years after we uh, she left Grinnell and after we were done, and she uh, we go out to breakfast sometimes when I go out there to visit.

Hunter: So she's still in Denver.

Cameron: Yeah, she's an architect.

Hunter: Okay. Alright. So how long were you at Bailey? I know you went to Newburg.

Cameron: Three years.

Hunter: Okay so.

Cameron: And then they reorganized and we, in 1974 and 5 was our first year at the sixth grade, we were all in Newburg. They moved every sixth grader in Grinnell out to Newburg.

Hunter: So that would be, before that, any sixth graders at Bailey and Fairview and Davis.

Cameron: And Newburg.

Hunter: And Newburg?

Cameron: There was group out there. Kind of from the Newburg area. You know and then they uh—

Hunter: So why was that move made? To move all the sixth graders out there?

Cameron: I think honestly, it was done because uh, let's see, how did that work? I think we were overcrowded in town and then they didn't have very many kids at Newburg at that time. And they were busing some kids from town in all the grades. So they just figured they'd bus everybody. And from uh, teaching standpoint those were great years. I mean, every kid was the same age, except they had one section again for the Newburg kids. And uh, and for planning 'cause they bus them out from town, we had a half hour at the beginning of every day and a half hour at the end of every day to plan and to get together with our colleagues and sometimes our surround? But it was great.

Hunter: You've talked about it. I've heard you talk about it. It just sounds like it was an idealistic situation.

Cameron: And I mean we all got along. Every teacher forms some kind of a bond or friendship. And we still get together once a month for coffee, those of us who are still around.

Hunter: So who was there?

Cameron: The first year it was Anne Lanom, who was Ann Stokely back then. She moved out from Bailey with me. Pat Lisle, who I'm not sure what her husband did. Um, Dorothy Peterson, Frank Schults, Larry Niswander, Phillis Meredith came a little later, but not too much. A woman by the name of Louise Erskin, who lived on a farm out in the country and uh, Jane Tiedemann whose husband was with the college. And uh, there were twelve of us. I'm trying to think who the other ones were. Martha Stark was out there teaching kindergarten.

Hunter: Oh really?

Cameron: And uh, oh! Mabel Watson. You know and so. Yeah Louise and Mabel were the oldest.

Hunter: How many years was that situation—

Cameron: And I knew you were going to ask.

Hunter: Yeah.

Cameron: I think it's about 1980. Well I moved out, about 1982. The gym burned but it was a separate kind of a, one of those cooser-style gyms with the big dome.

Hunter: Out at Newburg.

Cameron: Yeah. And the stage was at one end. You know, just like you'd see in the movie and it burned down. And we ended up having to bus all the kids in for PE, they'd either stay late in the morning or go out, go back early in the afternoon and it just wasn't a very good situation. So we closed down. They closed it in about '82 then we went to the middle school. And I didn't like the middle school atmosphere at that time 'cause they uh, they didn't run it as a separate entity to speak of. You had to have a pass to step in the hallway. You had to, you know, there were too many rules so I moved to third grade at Davis after that.

Hunter: Okay, so you taught sixth grade at middle school for—

Cameron: For probably three years then I moved to Davis.

Hunter: Okay and you taught third grade there for, how long?

Cameron: Until I became a principle, I don't know how long. [laughs]

Hunter: Okay. When did you become a principle? That's one of my questions.

Cameron: I applied, I had the endorsement since 1976, 'cause Frank Schults and I would write back and forth to the University of Iowa together. And I got my other master's degree down there. And I didn't use it and I thought well, either I'm going to have to use this or, or it was a waste. So when Red Rickson retired I decided I can probably do this. And uh—

Hunter: Red Rickson was the principle of--?

Cameron: He was the principle at Davis at the time.

Hunter: Davis? Okay.

Cameron: Yeah he was at the high school and then they did a big switcheroo and he was absolutely great but he thought he was, he told me later, if I had to live my life all over again, I'd

have been an elementary principle not a high school principle so. We uh, then I became principle and I want to say it was, well it was Mike was in first grade, so uh, and he's thirty—

Hunter: He was born in '79. So he would have been in first grade about '85.

Cameron: Yeah.

Hunter: 'Cause he and Michael were born the same year.

Cameron: Yeah, about then. I think I taught three years or four of third grade and then I held a variety of jobs at the same time I was a principle. They made me a title one math teacher half time, which was kind of a disaster because I had to drop what I was doing some times and do the principle stuff. Then Dave Stoakes, no Glen, I did adult ed. which was—

Hunter: Oh, okay. Wait a minute but—

Cameron: That's like a whole 'nother half time job basically.

Hunter: Right. Right. So this was when they were trying to sort of reduce—

Cameron: Find something for me to do, yeah.

Hunter: Well, it was sort of like you had Davis and they had one principle for Bailey Park and Fairview so—

Cameron: It was a way to try to get a principle in every building you know.

Hunter: Yeah, yeah.

Cameron: And by doing the Title One and the adult ed. they paid me out of different money so it was a money savings for the general fund is what it was. And I don't fault them for that. I mean, frankly the adult ed. was a learning experience. I met a lot of people. Would I want to do it again? No. It was, it took me out every evening practically to sign in people and do. And then I had to line up classes and it was, without going into too much detail, even if you taught a class one night for ten dollars I still had to have all the paper work for the W4 person and all that stuff. It was just ah, and I'm not a paper guy. It just drove me insane.

Hunter: I can understand that, yeah. Well, talk about being the principle at Davis. I felt like you were very special.

Cameron: It was a wonderful experience. And what made it wonderful were the kids. I mean, the kids of Davis for many years got a bad rep. I felt, you know, because they were, people thought they were tough, they were low-income, which they were. And you know, low-income doesn't necessarily equate to being a bad kid. And the other thing that made it wonderful was the staff. And I'm not bragging because I didn't hire all of them. But the ones I did hire, I did to keep that staff—

Hunter: Cohesive?

Cameron: Cohesive and good, I think. And you know what? It started, I mean, it was red staffed to start with Marsha Buck and then Ludea Met, and Lenita Aalbers, well they all left and I still managed to replace them with good people. For the most part. And it just was great over the years. It continued to be a great staff to work with.

Hunter: So if you were giving a young principle advice about how to create that,

Cameron: I don't know how I would do that.

Hunter: What did you call it?

Cameron: I think you just have to, well my son brought it up over the weekend, believe it or not. He said, "You were a kind of a teacher's principle". And I said, "Yeah, if by that you mean I advocated for them and I stood behind them". Sometimes even when they were wrong I did and then I'd tell them later, "Hey, look, I stood behind you on this but don't let it happen again". And I think that the other thing that is key to it is you need to let teachers take risks and speak their mind without hammering down on them if they're wrong. I mean, for example, I hope this doesn't go public necessarily but, Lorielle, and she'll admit this, when she came in from Bailey Park she was sort of a wallflower, you know, and there was lot of potential there for leadership and now she, she's the leader and no question. You just have to, the key is to let them take the risks, let them speak their mind without jamming them for it.

Hunter: It seemed to me you were also an advocate for, this was a little bit later on when we were talking about school reorganization again, and you were very much an advocate for grade level schools.

Cameron: I was.

Hunter: Could you talk about that a little bit?

Cameron: And the reason for that was after my experience at Davis and my own kids growing up saying the same things at the kids at Davis that I was trying to stop. I realized that hey, we have a little problem here in terms of, not a little problem, a big problem in terms of stereotyping you know, by socio-economic condition. And so I advocated to put all the kids together at an early age. It didn't totally work like I'd planned because I wanted a total separation and Glen, compromised. And I felt he compromised at a cost because what ended up happening was the least empowered group in town lost their neighborhood school. And that's, that is what it is. You know, and it, I think it worked, I really do. I mean I still think there's some stereotyping takes place. But you can't help it in some regards but I think it got a whole lot better. And would I do it again? Yes. I think we created too many transitions but that's hind sight. You know, and I honestly think the parents, without being too critical, or I think kids adapted to those transitions better than those parents. I mean, and if you don't make a big deal about the fact that your



second grader, soon-to-be third grader is going to go to Davis, it's not a big deal. But some parents make it a bigger deal than it needs to be. See, there was a lot of controversy, Judy, because of busing. And I couldn't believe how upset people were to bus a mile at most. I'm thinking, I grew up in Denver, this is not busing. This is like one big neighborhood. And I still feel that way after forty-two years. Grinnell is just kind of one big neighborhood.

Hunter: I do too.

Cameron: And now we're fighting the same thing again over where to build a school. Because people don't want one school anywhere. And you know, a lot of people want the neighborhood. Well, you know we don't have neighborhood schools now.

Hunter: It's so interesting how it comes back.

Cameron: It does. And I dare say there's some people that probably like the arrangement now that didn't like it before. And I will say I don't think we could have pulled that off if it weren't for the fact that we passed that bond issue to remodel Davis. Because Davis was a pit before that remodeling, I mean. And it—

Hunter: Can you specify? Define what you mean by "pit".

Cameron: It was not in terms of the staff. But it was a pit in terms of the, and not in terms of the rooms necessarily upstairs. But for, in the gym for example, there were those old radiators and the absolute dump of the restrooms. I mean, oh goodness, one would think that we didn't clean them at all. And we did, but it was just rusty and filthy. And there was the library that was just really bad. It was a classroom. I mean, no library. It was, we just put books in a classroom and that was the library at Davis school until we refilled in that gym and did all that work. But, in the old days they had those big tall ceilings and wooden floors. And you could absolutely hear a, if you dropped a nickel on that floor it would just reverberate. So, that's what I mean by a pit.

Hunter: Yeah, that was...

Cameron: And it had the old sunken gym where you walk down the stair and into, a pit basically.

Hunter: Yeah, I remember because I was involved with the bond issue and the school board at that point and I remember that we suggested tearing the building down.

Cameron: I wanted to do that.

Hunter: I know. I did too.

Cameron: And we had fifty-six percent on that first vote and then there was that group that got, I think they thought we were pulling something over on them, but we really weren't. It was pretty obvious we were going to have a bond issue. When they got involved it went down to forty-something percent and I still to this day would have liked to see it torn down because it's not

conducive to good teaming with teachers and, you know, it's a beautiful building but you couldn't, people were trying to make the case for its historic value. It has no historical value. It has local history but you know.

Hunter: And it's not very good handicap accessible. I mean—

Cameron: It is now.

Hunter: I mean it is now. It's got the—

Cameron: It has the elevator.

Hunter: Yeah it's got the elevator but it's still wasn't—

Cameron: It's still not that good. And I can remember carrying Melissa Yearian in after she had her foot amputated; maybe it was when she had a broken... Anyway she had surgery, maybe it wasn't amputated 'til later but she'd had surgery and we, I offered the choice. You could go to Fairview or you can stay here at Davis but you're going to be on an upper floor and it's kind of dangerous. Well they opted for the upper floor and we carried her up and down the steps you know. And uh so.

Hunter: I didn't know that story. Any other stories about that community discussion?

Cameron: Oh, I can remember how upset people were and uh, and they were accusing us of all kinds of things. They didn't want their kids going to school with high school students. And Dave Stoakes told me later, "our high school students are more respectful of your fourth graders, your third and fourth graders, " 'cause they had to go to school out there during the remodeling and, " then they are themselves". And it was ah, really there were no problems with our kids out at the high school.

Hunter: How long did that last? I didn't even remember that.

Cameron: A year while they were building the, they were remodeling the school.

Hunter: And where did they go?

Cameron: We had a K2, our own K1, no K1 kids were at Davis and that lower wing. And then the second graders got farmed out all over town and then the third and fourth graders were in the portables at the high school.

Hunter: Oh the portable. That's right.

Cameron: And it worked out well. I mean, as well as it could. But I can remember, oh we were called all kinds of things. You know, and uh,

Hunter: Fights about schools get ugly.

Cameron: And well, we were pretty careful. Anybody who fussed, who requested to go somewhere else, we sent two or three kids over to Bailey that year because the parents were really opposed. They thought they were going to get into drugs and alcohol and all kinds of stuff at the high school. And I'm not saying that stuff doesn't go on at the high school. But it doesn't go on in front of our kids.

Hunter: Yeah, so you must have been all over the place that year.

Cameron: I traveled all over that year and uh, probably not as much as I should have. But it was hard, you know, and uh, then we had our office in the little teachers' lounge. Which was about as big as this conference room at Davis. Deb Neff and I were in there together. And the people going to school at the construction site. If I had to do it again, we wouldn't have done it.

Hunter: Yeah, that's hairy.

Cameron: 'Cause if for no other reason, the workers being construction workers, they would let rip with some good ones every now and then and I'd have to go out and talk to the foreman and say "Hey look we've got kids in here". So.

Hunter: Did you feed them there?

Cameron: The ones that were there. They brought in food in tubes.

Hunter: Okay. Let me see where I am in my list of questions here. Okay. Okay so, just about, I was supposed to ask you this about being a teacher. I want to know what your favorite and least favorite parts are about being a teacher. And I want to know what your favorite and least favorite parts are about being an administrator.

Cameron: Administrator is a no-brainer. I detest paperwork and as the time went along, setting aside the doll-ed job, cause that was truly a separate job, as time went along, the paper requirements with, from the state and the feds got to be just more and more and more. Not to say it was a bad thing, cause I think it increased accountability but uh, but, you know all of that stuff was just something I really didn't like. I much preferred just working with the kids and the parents and the teachers. And for the most part the parents were cooperative. I mean, you know, the best thing about being a teacher was just watching the kids grow during the year. And frankly, I liked, not that I had favorites, but I liked the boys that had little edge to them. And uh, not a big edge, but just enough to make life interesting. And uh, most of them have grown up, gone on to be pretty successful. Those guys and you know, the worst part was the, and again it was kind of forced on you as time went along. But as paperwork increased with the principle, the paperwork increased with the teachers in terms of that kind of stuff. And I really didn't like to hammer too hard on the discipline. But you have to.

Hunter: Discipline with kids you mean?

Cameron: Yeah. And uh, what I noticed over time is that parents became a little more hovering and not as supportive.

Hunter: Yeah, I think that's happening at all levels.

Cameron: Yeah, it is. And just to give you an example, and she's still alive so I'm not going to mention any names but, I had three boys, this is when I was principle. I had three boys that stole a teacher's wallet together. You know, they clearly had done it together. And uh, and I had to call each of their parents to tell them what they'd done and the one mother got on the phone and said, "Well who did you call first?" And I said, "Well you." And she said, "Well yeah, you're always picking on my son. You called me first." And I said, "Well I can't call you all at the same time. So somebody's got to be first, somebody's going to be last, but I guarantee you that within a half hour here everybody's getting a call." But that's just an example. And it's an extreme example. And since then, that woman and I are friends. But you know. It was just a defensive mode she got into. And uh, so. And that's one of the things I try to tell myself, that people bring other baggage to the things and you just have to remind yourself of that sometimes.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Um, can you talk a little about the effect of the No Child Left Behind and Grinnell schools.

Cameron: Yeah, and I think it gets a bad rap sometimes. I mean, there's a lot of things about it that are somewhat arbitrary you might say. For example, the whole proficiency thing. Somebody just picks a forty percent number out of the blue in Iowa and says that's your proficiency rate with no thought to how to get there or anything. But I think it's forced teachers to be more accountable. I mean, we used to give those, well just the Iowa assessments. Old Iowa tests the basic skills and uh, you'd get the results back, you'd talk about them a little bit at a staff meeting, you'd send home the results with parents, and then you'd tuck them away with no thought as to, you know, how, no formal plan on, "okay what can we do to change this and make things better". And so I think it forced more accountability. It also forced us to take a look at what we were teaching because a lot of what we were testing was not what we were teaching. And uh, we've got this new test, well it's not new anymore, but it's covered the measures of academic progress, the acronym is MAP and it's all done on computers and it tests more about the needs of individual students. What they know, what they don't know and then you can, there's all kinds of information you can mine and get data, so I think it's forced teachers to look at data more. Um, I don't know where it's going to lead because I think every school in Iowa practically is going to be a school in need of assistance before too long and I don't know what we're going to do about that. And again, it's sort of an arbitrary thing that's kind of out there. You know, and it's a scary thing but at the same time, you know, in a society, you're never going to have everybody proficient, that's, it's a worthy goal but it's not going to happen.

Hunter: It's like Garrison Keillor and all the children being above average. [laughs]

Cameron: Yeah, I mean, you just can't.

Hunter: How do you answer the critics that say Nicklebee has made the schools too dependent on test makers and non-educational bureaucrats?

Cameron: I would answer it by saying that the teachers are the ones who are implementing the, I mean, granted, the test makers make the test but the teachers are the ones who are actually doing the teaching and they're looking at their data better. I mean, I think every teacher in Grinnell would admit to that. And looking at data I now know my children better and how they learn. And how they teach. For years, I think we just, myself included, "Okay, here's our curriculum, we're going to teach it the same way every year" and I would answer it by saying, "no, now it's forced us to change, we have a different population every year so therefore we're going to change how we teach some of those kids" and you know, that's how I'd answer it.

Hunter: Okay. That's a good answer. What motivated you to doing this group work? And when did that happen?

Cameron: I, it happened right after I retired and I had a number of people who were pretty disgruntled frankly with the way things were going at that time and they may still be. But ah, so I ran because I had enough people say "Hey, you can change things" and I'll be honest with you, I ran because Barbra Brown ran. I mean, she came to me in my office and we talked one day and she said "So if I run for school board how do you see my role?" And I was honest with her and I said, "I see you being able to ask the tough questions and me being a backup." Because it was difficult, because Edie at that time had been my boss, and then I was, you know. And she said, "well, I've decided I'll run if you run." And I said, "Well I've decided the same thing". So we ran.

Hunter: Ah. I didn't know it was like that.

Cameron: Yeah. And I have a lot of respect for her. I just think she's wonderful. I really do.

Hunter: And always asking the tough questions.

Cameron: She does. And, and over the years as a parent we didn't always see eye-to-eye but what I admired about her was she always brought in a solution you could discuss. Maybe not one you could agree with, but one you could at least discuss instead of just complaining about the problem. She had brain-stormed a solution and I respected that. So that's why. And the other motivation, but I discovered something getting back to that. I think the teachers expected, perhaps more than I was able to deliver and I don't say that in a negative way but, frankly, I think I had more power as a principle than I did as a school board member because, well, you've been there.

Hunter: I've been there.

Cameron: As a principle you can go in there and advocate by yourself for your teachers and your kids and perhaps get somewhere. As a school board member, number one, you're going to be

accused of micro-managing if you do too much. And number two, to make a big change you've got to get three other people to go along with you. And you're not allowed to have too many discussions outside of the board room, so you know, that was, it wasn't an eye-opener but it sort of was. And you know, I thought maybe I could have changed more things but I discovered in a hurry, no this isn't going to happen in this way you know. And I'll be honest, one of my main functions was, and I don't know how far this is going but Edie was so ineffectual that I thought we needed a change. Now, maybe we went too far the other way in terms of decision making but, [laughs] you know, that's what it is.

Hunter: You get people and they are what they are yeah. We can, as we said we can get the transcription and we can edit.

Cameron: But I don't think there's any teacher in Grinnell that would disagree with the fact that she was ineffective, especially at the end. And so.

Hunter: Yeah. I was on the hiring committee and I remember thinking, up to that point I'd sort of trusted my instincts about hiring people. And then I started to doubt myself and say, "What made you think that you could"—well anyway.

Cameron: I think there are doubting themselves now, since we're going to edit this, 'cause we had a big huge meeting at the library about when we hired Todd, and I mean it was long too, it went on for like four or five hours of the board. And I think there's people that are regretting that at this point. But it is what is. And he's done some nice things.

Hunter: Exactly, that's the thing. People do what they can and sometimes it's right and sometimes it's not. I was thinking about the fact that you had four kids go through the school district and how did that effect your view of the education system?

Cameron: Oh I thought, well number one, I hired a great teacher because of my youngest daughters who hated most every teacher she ever had. But when Stella Mann applied to transfer to Davis after Martha Stalaruk and Marsha Fitzgerald resigned I asked her, I said, "what are you think of this person?" Because she taught seventh grade. And she said, "oh, she's really nice." And I thought, "Okay, that's enough of a sales pitch for me" but I think what it did, my kids were always pretty good at not divulging too much information 'cause they knew certain things that were going to get back if they did. And so from that stand point but I had to bite my tongue a few times about what was being taught and how it was being taught. And uh, for the most part, my kids had a great experience in Grinnell. I mean they really did. And I think having children forces you to look at things a little bit differently and I mean in terms of "okay, it's easy to complain but here's what I know is really happening in that classroom". It's a little different from what I'd been told. And I didn't, I think they would all agree that they got along well at Grinnell. I mean, having said that I think there's a, Grinnell's a probably a good size in some ways but I think, and your kids went here but I think there's a certain narrow range of what's acceptable and anybody who falls outside of those boundaries has a tendency to get waylaid a

little bit or whatever. Mostly by other kids, I mean not the staff but you know, if you're a little different or whatever. And I don't know that that happens in larger high schools because there's more to choose from, more diversity, more, maybe it does, I'm just not aware of it. But uh, you know, anybody who, and it always struck me, especially with boys. Anybody who is not some sort of an athlete or in some sort of "cool" extracurricular they're going to get, they get kind of put down.

Hunter: Yeah. Wow.

Cameron: But my kids loved it. They really did. Kim didn't, but she was one of those that did in fact fall out of the, beyond what was

Hunter: That narrow range.

Cameron: What was considered acceptable I guess by other kids.

Hunter: You feel like she got a good education anyway?

Cameron: Yeah, I do. I really do. And what she didn't get was her own fault, not the fault of the teacher. She fought things tooth and nail a lot of the times you know. And just, again, but the things that are coming out of her mouth now, 'cause she has a step-son that's in fifth grade, and like the other day she said, "Dad, do they still have planners at the middle school?" I said, "No. They have the one-to-one computers and their planner is on their computer." And she said, "Well I think they should have those written planners." And I said, "You never wrote in yours!" [laughs] I said, "Times change" and she's parenting back some things that you know, so uh. So. But uh, no I think they had a great education and they went on, they all went on to some kind of post-secondary stuff. You know, Kim went to dog grooming school, the other three went to college and so.

Hunter: Alright. Alright. That was, my last question was going to be, compare Grinnell-Newburg schools with schools nationally. And I don't know if you've answered that. Do you?

Cameron: I would put them up against any school nationally.

Hunter: Really?

Cameron: I really would, I think, there are obvious certain advantage to bigger places or more choices to be made but I think for getting along with other kids we offer, maybe not as much as we should but as much as we can and you know, like when I came here in 1971 we had well, if you consider Latin a language, we had four languages. I mean, you know, we had German, French, Spanish, and Latin. Now we're down to one. And that's too bad. But I still think we've got a ways to go in terms of getting everybody to follow Iowa Core, the basic things that we need to teach. And getting it all articulated.

Hunter: And getting the teachers to teach those things. You're a fan of the Iowa Core?

Cameron: Um, I'm a fan of what it stands for, I just hope it doesn't take away the autonomy of teaching and maybe –

Hunter: What does it stand for?

Cameron: I'm a fan of the standards that are being taught. It's how you teach them, I hope it doesn't impact that every teacher has to teach this standard the same way. Just so you're teaching the standard. That's probably okay, you know? But if you're forced to be on page thirty-two on day sixty of the school year or whatever you know that's not good I don't think.

Hunter: I hear some complaints about the new reading program in that regard.

Cameron: Yeah. You're going to, although I think most people seem to like it,

Hunter: I mean really? The complaints I heard were last year, before it was implemented.

Cameron: Go to them this year and see what they say because I think they've discovered it's not what they thought it was going to be, it's better.

Hunter: I think the worry was that it was scripted so it was you had to be on page thirty-two.

Cameron: Right and I think they've discovered that it's different than that. But I have another story about, and this is a true story, and this is how I model, I tried to model myself as a principle because I learned from this: Kyle Jones, was a superintendent when I came here and when I started teaching I didn't have a teaching certificate, I mean, Colorado College has to meet every October and approve their graduates from the previous summer. And so, for the first month I was without a teaching certificate because they hadn't approved my degree. Well, about the third week into school, and I kept getting memos and I talked to Jerry Hagen and finally one day he came in and he said, "Doug, Mr. Jones wants to see you in his office after school." And you never, did you know Kyle?

Hunter: No.

Cameron: He's a very stern looking man and he didn't smile much and uh, that's just the way he was. So I went down there with great fear, thinking, "this was it, I'm not going to have a job". He said, "Just one question, are you going to get this teaching certificate pretty soon?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm going to get it as soon as they meet and approve my diploma." And he said, "You're not lying to me are you?" And I said, "No, I wouldn't do that. I'm not lying to you. It's coming," "Well here's what we're going to do", he said, and this wouldn't happen in this day and age, "I got friend down in the department, we'll get you fixed up with a temporary but in the meantime, you just got married didn't you?" And I said, "yeah, two days before teaching here I got married." "Well, I can't pay until you get the permanent certificate until you get the certificate. You probably are running out of money. Do you need a loan?" and uh, he was going to give me a personal loan to me, out of his own pocket, and luckily we had some money, and I



said “no.” and I thought, “here I went down expecting I was going to be terminated and this guy was compassionate and offered to give me a loan”. And we became good friends after that. Matter of fact, his wife Ulla used to work here at the library and it was because of her that Ginny started working at the library. She would , she did kind of a nice thing, it was kind of sexist but it was okay. She would go around and meet the new teachers’ wives as the superintendent’s wife which was kind of a nice, thing, because Ginny didn’t know anybody and she found out was looking for a job and set her up with a paid job at the store library and then things took off from there. She went to graduate school and you know. So.

Hunter: So she hadn’t, I didn’t know if she was a librarian already.

Cameron: No, she had no clue, as a matter of fact, she interviewed out of Grinnell Implement and they said, “Well, you seem a little too nice to be working out here where our guys swear and stuff.” It was just hilarious, you know. And there were all kinds of sexist things back then that just went on.

Hunter: Yeah.

Cameron: We had service girls at Bailey Park. You ever heard of service girls?

Hunter: Nope.

Cameron: Well these were people and you can thank Harriet O’Danellberg for the fact we don’t have them anymore. These were girls, only girls, that would go around and clean the lunch tables after lunch and get extra dessert for doing it. You didn’t have service boys, you had service girls. And frankly, I didn’t think anything of it. You just don’t think of that kind of stuff. Well when Danielle made it to and it was only sixth graders, or fifth graders or something. Anyway, when Danielle got to be a service girl that’s when it ended.

Hunter: So it just, the practice just ended. They didn’t bring boys in.

Cameron: No, Harriet raised enough of a stink that, and rightfully, that there were no more service anything. It was actually pretty funny. And thinking back on it did you think, did I really agree to this? Yeah, I guess I did.

Hunter: [laughing] You don’t think of it.

Cameron: You just don’t. You really just don’t think of it.

Hunter: Interesting. Interesting. There wasn’t much racial diversity here.

Cameron: Never was. Never has been. There’s probably more than there ever has been because we’ve got some Hispanics, we’ve got some Asian kids, and you know. I can remember, oh his dad was at the college. I think he was with the college. How quickly time flies. But for years I only had one African-American student you know. No, there never has been much diversity and

a matter of fact, when we took Michael one time on vacation, he was probably three. And he looked at this, we were in a restaurant, and he looked at the guy and he said, "That guy's black!" And luckily it was a guy with a sense of humor because he, I just looked at him, I said, "Grinnell Iowa, ninety-nine percent white, what can I say?" He laughed. But you know. No, there never has been.

Hunter: Interesting.

Cameron: And I thought we would get more with the chicken farm out here, the egg farm.

Hunter: Not a high density employment situation there. Is that true?

Cameron: Well, yeah, that's true. And I think a lot of them go to EGM. We had a number of Asians. Probably more than we have now when the, right after the war ended. Vietnam. Lot of those people immigrated down to Iowa. Remember that, operation? What was it? It had a name.

Hunter: It did. Brenstead. It was the first. I remember it was, 'because our church adopted some Cambodian family.

Cameron: Ours did too. And ours is still around, Sole Paul Brim, do you know, Chi is a success story. And she still will call, I see her frequently but she'll still call, probably once every three or four years for some kind of little intervention that she needs on something.

Hunter: What does she do?

Cameron: Works at the hospital.

Hunter: Okay.

Cameron: And like, uh, maintance or something. She was, I remember though to this day, I took a whole bunch of them to ELO classes with Sue Ramsey actually. And she was the only one, the rest of them would sit in my back seat and chitter chatter in Cambodian, she made sure she got in the front seat and all the way home and all the way to class she'd say, "How you say this? How you say this? What's that?" and you know, she quickly learned whereas the rest of them really didn't. But she was more motivated.

Hunter: I can't imagine coming to Grinnell after being in war in Cambodia.

Cameron: No. Do you know, Lim Prim at all?

Hunter: A little bit.

Cameron: He went to high school here but he's moved to California but he would tell this story of running. 'Cause I had him in third grade and he would talk about how he remembered running and people being shot and a monkey landed on his back and all this stuff. Anyway. What do you need? Do you need any more else?

Hunter: Do you have any more stories? I love the stories. This is.

Cameron: Oh, I could probably come up with a lot of them. But, well there's a young man in town, he's an old man now, in his fifties that was in my first class. Runs a heating and air conditioning business and he came in the first day of school and he announced rather loudly that he didn't bring any pencils or anything because we never do anything the first day anyway and I just made sure I worked his tail off. And Tracy Gennson. And he had a lot of, a little too much edge but he's been very successful, he really has. And in that class of mine I'm telling you there was lot of talent there. And even the ones I didn't know would be successful were and so.

Hunter: Fantastic.

Cameron: And I learned a valuable lesson from Peter Neelson, Carol's son. I had him for a whole year in sixth year. A whole year. This is how we've changed in education because a teacher would have picked up on this long before I did. And I tutored, she asked me to tutor him in math over the summer. Well I quickly discovered after about three days that Peter knew a whole lot more than I'd given him credit for for an entire year and uh, I said, "Peter," I said, "I didn't know you could do this stuff. Why haven't you shown me this?" and he said, "I didn't want my friends to know how smart I was". Pretty good lesson there.

Hunter: He knew that. That's pretty insightful. Wow.

Cameron: Yeah. Then doctor Ferguson's son, I think it was Carlos, he wanted to be, when he got into sixth grade he wanted to be in the high math group. And, again, I learned a valuable lesson because I tutored him and I quickly discovered from him that there was no reason he couldn't be in the high math group. I said, "You've apparently been dogging this thing all the way through fifth grade. What's the deal?" I said, "You don't need this tutoring" and he said, "Why would I do more work just to have more problems shoved at me?" Fifth grader. I mean, he figured it out in a hurry if he did more work, then he would just be given more work. And it was meaningless work, he didn't want any more work sheets. And again, I think we've changed that. Not as much maybe as we should but I think that's changed quite a little bit. And again, valuable lesson learned, I mean some teacher should have been listening to that because you know. So.

Hunter: Interesting. Okay.

Cameron: Alrightly Judy.

Hunter: Thank you so much for coming.

[End]