

Poweshiek History Preservation Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Judy Hunter

Narrator: Geoff Peak

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Persons present: Judy Hunter-I
Geoff Peak-S

Hunter: Let me see if I can make the recorder work. Yeah, okay, it's on. Excellent, shouldn't have to worry about that. This is Judy Hunter interviewing Geoff Peak. On Tuesday February 25, 2014. And um, so, Geoff why don't you start and talk about your early association with the school district in, school systems in Poweshiek County. You grew up here?

Peak: Yes. Yes, south-west of town about three and a half miles uh, four miles actually. Went to a one room school house just a half mile east of the home place. Grant Number Nine.

Hunter: Oh.

Peak: That's about a mile west of 146 at the intersection where the motels are located.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: So it's just north of Interstate 80.

Hunter: And did that building, does that building—

Peak: It's still there.

Hunter: It's still there?!

Peak: It is still there. It's a private residence now. It was empty for a while. After the schools consolidated then it was a church for years and years and now it's a private residence.

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: I think Robbie Jack lives there now. I think it's probably Robbie Shultz now.

Hunter: Okay. So you started there what year? Approximately?

Peak: Oh. I would, it would have had to have been about 1946.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: And then I would have been out of there in the spring of 1955.

Hunter: So that was, they didn't have kindergarten. Did they have kindergarten?

Peak: They did yes.

Hunter: They did! Shows what I know.

Peak: Yes.

Hunter: Sure sure.

Peak: Well, my sister and I were arguing about that [laughs] the other day. But I do remember going to school for half a day. And a matter of fact, I think when I started out my first grade year I came home after the half day and was informed I should go back. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs] So you had. It was a one room school house.

Peak: One room schoolhouse.

Hunter: And, I can't imagine being a teacher in a situation like that. How many kids?

Peak: Oh, it would vary, but thirteen or fourteen at a time. Huge, huge register in the middle of the room where all the boots and wet gloves went after recess and such. The furnace that the teacher would have to stock and fire down in the basement.

Hunter: Was it coal or wood?

Peak: It was coal.

Hunter: It was coal okay. Wow. And who were your teachers, was there just one teacher the whole time? Or—?

Peak: No, no as a matter of fact, teacher turnover of teachers was pretty frequent. I think kindergarten year was Ruth Denick. Ruth Pierce at that time because she graduated from high school and then her job was then to teach. So that was before all the educational requirements they have now. Roberta Mason who taught in this district for years was also one of my country school teachers. And Mrs. Ent. And there were others that I've forgotten.

Hunter: Okay. Do you, can you talk about what a day was like in that situation?

Peak: Yeah. We'd typically walk to school. It had to be pretty miserable before we'd get a ride although in the worst of weather we would. Then come to school, pledge the allegiance. Before there was an "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. [laughs]

Hunter: That's right! [laughs]

Peak: And uh, we'd have morning recess and an afternoon recess and uh. Which was almost always outside unless weather just didn't permit it. And break for lunch, one of the things I looked forward to very much in the day was I think right after lunch usually I suppose because it would be kind of the down time where the teacher would read a chapter or so out of a book.

Hunter: Ah.

Peak: The whole school really enjoyed that. And other than that, unless we were reciting, whether it be math or reading or whatever it was or that darn poem “The Wreck of the Hesperus”. [laughs] Uh, we would be studying at our desks but we also got to uh, to listen in on the lessons for the other students. So you actually had kind of a preview of what the other group—of what was coming at us from the upper grades.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: Their lessons.

Hunter: Okay, I’m imagining that they didn’t have workbooks back in that stage. What did you do while you were sitting in your seat?

Peak: Uh, yeah well, you know, I, I don’t remember workbooks but I do remember writing books with a double line.

Hunter: Oh. Okay, to practice your penmanship.

Peak: Yes, penmanship.

Hunter: Did you do the Palmer method?

Peak: I think that’s what it was called yes.

Hunter: So I did too. Yeah. Wow.

Peak: There were three people in my class: Thomas Comerferd, who lives in Florida now; and Barb Koger, cannot remember her maiden name, er, her married name, but uh, her dad was the director of the school for much of the time while I was there.

Hunter: Oh.

Peak: And so someone in the neighborhood would take the responsibility of making sure that there was coal available and general repairs.

Hunter: And so that was the director?

Peak: That was the director. Someone from the neighborhood who would do that for the year.

Hunter: And what was the other infrastructure? Was there a county superintendent?

Peak: Yeah there was a county superintendent yes.

Hunter: And what was—how often did such a person appear?

Peak: You know, I, I remember a strange person showing up once in a while but I really didn’t—

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: know who that was. But I assume it probably was the county superintendent showing up. I, I assume probably to, you know, observe and evaluate the teacher as well. But of course being a student I wasn't tuned in to that at all.

Hunter: So the, do you think, and you may not know the answer to this, was the, the teacher was hired by the superintendent not by the director.

Peak: No, the teacher was hired by the director.

Hunter: By the director?

Peak: That was my understanding yeah.

Hunter: Ah. Okay.

Peak: Now, whether that had to go through an approval process,

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: I'm guessing it probably did.

Hunter: Probably yeah. But real local control then.

Peak: Yeah it really was, yep.

Hunter: Alright. Do you remember any stories or, or—

Peak: Oh, yeah I do. I, kind of typical of my life. If it was a miserable rainy day we'd have to play downstairs in the basement and that involved basically some sort of activity in a big circle around the furnace. I mean, whether it was hide-and-seek, tag, or what. But the story started when I had to go to the outhouse one day. And this would have been late fall. And the grasshoppers were big and fat and slow because it was cool. And there was one of them sitting on the hardware cloth. It was across the basement window and it, it was, the hardware cloth was caved in toward the glass a little bit from all the kids and activity and this grasshopper is sitting there and I took a kick at that grasshopper and just broke that window right out. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: And I went ahead and came back and fessed up and about a week later, and it was rainy day and the standard procedure, this stair had a landing about halfway down and then cut back on itself and went the rest of the way down. So there was this opening, and there was a bench down there and it was typically for the whole school to come ripping down there trying to be first and to go off that landing onto the bench okay? Not being bright enough to figure out something was different; everybody today was going on down the stairs instead of jumping off the landing. Well

I saw that as my opportunity to get ahead. I jumped off the landing. I lit on the bench right on the brand new piece of glass that Burton Koger was going to put back in the window I broke.

[laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: Story of my life.

Hunter: [laughing] Oh, dear. Oh dear. That's funny.

Peak: I can remember driving by with my folks years and years later, long after I'd been gone from home and teaching in this district. I said, "Did you know..." then I shared the story with them and they did not know. Burton Koger never told them! [laughs]

Hunter: Aw, that's nice.

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: He really did. He handled that very well. I felt about that tall.

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: I'll never forget that.

Hunter: So where did you go from, in '55? From—

Peak: From country school to Grinnell High School.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: Which was just across the street?

Hunter: Oh the Community, what's now the --

Peak: It's now the—

Hunter: The Community Center.

Peak: Yeah it's now the Community center and the parking lot.

Hunter: Right. Right. There was more to it then, yeah. Okay. And, and uh,

Peak: That's where I started teaching by the way. Also.

Hunter: Really? So you, did you go straight from high school to college and back here to teach?

Peak: I did, yes.

Hunter: Okay. What, what inspired you to become a teacher?

Peak: Dumb luck. I ah, was going to be everything from a mathematician to a chemist, to, and everything I tried, I can remember sitting in college class and hearing the professor say two plus two is not always four. Well the reason I liked math was two plus two was four. [laughs] So I decided that wasn't for me and I'd always had an interest in ah, being a country boy, I always had an interest in biology and living things. I was pursuing that in college and I thought "well, maybe I should get ready to teach that." And it just worked out well. But pretty much by accident. [laughs]

Hunter: Okay. Well, okay. Did you, talk about going to the high school here. How big was it at that time? Was there, how many students?

Peak: Our class would have been... I think our class was a hundred six. I don't know if all a hundred six graduated but it would have been right around that one hundred mark and at that time the junior high was also here.

Hunter: Oh, right.

Peak: The junior high when I went to this school, the bottom floor and the second floor I believe were the junior high. In this new section then all three floors on the south end, the missing end, the part that's a parking lot now, and the top floor would have been high school.

Hunter: Oh, wow.

Peak: And there were huge fire doors that were rolled shut that closed the junior high off from the high school. And I don't know if it was true or not but we feared for our life if we ever tried to slip through those doors. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs] Were there separate principles, separate administrations for the two?

Peak: Yes, I think there were. Again, I'm not familiar with what the junior high, uh, was at that time but Mr. Owen would have been principle at the high school and his son was in my class as well.

Hunter: Ah. Did you, you, did you um, take science here? Who were your...

Peak: Oh. I took all the science I could here.

Hunter: Who was who were the teachers?

Peak: Um.

Hunter: Do you remember?

Peak: Yeah, um. Oh, and it's gone just like that. Um, gentleman that was blind in one eye taught chemistry and physics. Um, Ms. Rayden was here but she was teaching in the junior high at that time.

Hunter: Who?

Peak: Ms. Rayden. Lydia Rayden.

Hunter: Oh Lydia! Oh! And she taught science in the junior high. Okay. Okay. So this was right around when the state consolidated all the—

Peak: Yes. This—

Hunter: The districts.

Peak: This would have been, yep. Seems that my, you know and I think you, I think you're probably right on with the year because one of my good friends his dad, and that's Bill Sherman—

Hunter: Oh yeah.

Peak: Who was with ISCA for years and years now retired. He's authored a book or two. His dad was a, I don't know whether it'd be principle or superintendent at Newburg.

Hunter: Ah.

Peak: And so our senior year I'm pretty sure was the first year that Bill came to school down here. We ran around together that last year.

Hunter: Oh, okay alright. So it was about '58, '58?

Peak: Was I alone '58? Yeah.

Hunter: '58, '59. Okay. So where did to you go to college?

Peak: Grinnell.

Hunter: You did?

Peak: Mhm.

Hunter: I think I knew that at one point but I didn't... aww [laughs]

Peak: [laughs]

Hunter: Okay. And you were a biology major?

Peak: Yep.

Hunter: Now, who did you, who, who were your teachers there?

Peak: Oh, Mr. Grey, Dr. Graham, Dr. Christiansen, Dr. Fishman.

Hunter: Okay. Okay. Those were folks who were still around when we came.

Peak: Mhm.

Hunter: Yeah, so, cool. So then you went right from there into teaching in the Grinnell District.

Peak: Yes, mhm.

Hunter: Were there education classes? Was that part of—?

Peak: At Grinnell College?

Hunter: At Grinnell College?

Peak: Oh, yes. Yeah.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: So I came out certified to teach biology only and that's a pretty restricted certification and uh, once I started here they wanted me to teach other things. And they said well why don't you just reapply to the state because typically Grinnell College will only certify for what you are, your major in what you're really prepared for. But that doesn't mean you don't have enough other science classes to teach sciences so I think I got a general science endorsement then.

Hunter: Ah, okay.

Peak: And when I reapplied to the state then I went back in a couple years and got my Masters and got an all, an endorsement that's not available now, an all sciences endorsement.

Hunter: Wow. Wow. Wow. What year was that do you know? Sorry, I keep asking you that.

Peak: Ah, I think, I took a summer ah, class I think in '68. I think it was '69 and '70 when I got that endorsement.

Hunter: Got that endorsement.

Peak: Yep. Got one of the last academic year institutes that were available out of U and I where they paid you to go to school and uh.

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: Very good opportunity for me.

Hunter: Yeah. So you were hired and you were teaching at what's now the Community Center and who was your principle. Who hired you?

Peak: Actually I was interviewed by the superintendent at that time, which would have been Mr. Jones. Kyle C. Jones.

Hunter: Kyle Jones. Okay. Okay.

Peak: And uh, at that time, now they have Hidlebaugh I think it would have been—who was the principle of the high school before Dickson, before...

Hunter: Rickson? No.

Peak: Before Rickson.

Hunter: Before Rickson.

Peak: Ah, had, he had the insurance agency down here.

Hunter: Ramsey?

Peak: He had it with Ramsey.

Hunter: Weeks!

Peak: Yeah Bill Weeks.

Hunter: There we go!

Peak: We'll sort this out. Good thing you didn't wait to interview me another year! [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs] Okay, so he hired you?

Peak: He would have been the one involved in getting me hired.

Hunter: Okay. Do, who, do you remember other teachers who were teaching around that time?

Peak: Oh yeah. LeRoy Schneider. Uh, Lydia, of course then I was working with Lydia because I started teaching in the junior high.

Hunter: Oh you did?

Peak: And this, and then the building across the street when I started teaching was all junior high at that time.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: So I worked with Lydia. Oh, other people that weren't the science department: Jim Stayner, Mike Peterson, and Roger Peterson. Folks like that.

Hunter: Okay. What was, now you taught, for, you taught science for a long time there? What were the classrooms like? Or the classes like in, when you started?

Peak: Well, we...probably one of the reasons I was hired is because there was a real uptick in enrollment then. We had some pretty large classes.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: And uh, I remember [laughs] one day going down to, I think it was Ev Hidlebaugh who was the principle then and I said, "Ev, you know I'm willing to teach thirty-eight people in a class but not forty-three" [laughs]. And we had some large classes.

Hunter: Geez.

Peak: And in fact, there were more people assigned to that class than there were stations in the lab than seats for and they did, they got on it and whittled the class down towards they'd at least fit in the room [laughs].

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: So, as a matter of fact when I started teaching, as a matter of fact I took a trip out to Maine on time because at that time when I first started teaching you could put a pin in a map and if you wanted to go live there you could.

Hunter: Oh.

Peak: I mean, that's kind of what the condition of the shortage of teachers was like at that time in this country.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. So you went out to Maine...

Peak: Yep.

Hunter: To check out a job?

Peak: See if I liked the country and after I got out there I thought, "Boy, New Hampshire and upper New York state were really beautiful but this Maine is pretty flat and uneventful." So I came home. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs] Okay.

Peak: I did like their moose crossing signs though.

Hunter: Yes. Yes. Those are, those are cool. Um, so the middle school...were you here when they—you must have been here when they were doing double sessions.

Peak: Yes. I did get in on split-shifting. Sure wish we could have had the morning one you know.

Hunter: Oh, you had...

Peak: We were in the afternoon so...

Hunter: You, you being the junior high?

Peak: The junior high yeah. High school met in the morning and the junior high met in the afternoon and all I can remember is it was dark when we got out and got home. Or very shortly after.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: Don't remember what the hours were actually but it was after lunch to you know, much later than it would have normally been.

Hunter: So then...

Peak: Then we came back. [laughs]

Hunter: Came back to...?

Peak: Came back because while we were gone they were upgrading this to fire standards that we could at least attend here until—

Hunter: Oh!

Peak: And we were committed then and to the new junior high, er, new middle school.

Hunter: Middle school.

Peak: South of town.

Hunter: Okay. So you taught here then again a year 'til that was done.

Peak: Yeah, I—

Hunter: And that was like '79 or something?

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: Because we were here then. That's right, I should remember these. But, so, you went out and taught at the, at the middle school? How long were you out there?

Peak: Oh my goodness. From whatever time we left here to—

Hunter: That's '79.

Peak: I want to say early '90s. So I was out there a lot of years,

Hunter: Yeah, yeah, Okay.

Peak: These, this old junior high here downtown and the new middle school south of town is where I spent the bulk of my career.

Hunter: Okay. Okay.

Peak: I moved to the high school when the ninth grade became part of the high school.

Hunter: Ah, okay. Because I have you, I have you, my mental picture of you is at the high school. Okay. I didn't realize you taught all those years at the middle school. What did you, what did you think of the, the middle school concept? That was sort of new for Grinnell.

Peak: Well of course we did some interesting things out there. We had modular scheduling while we were out there which was an interesting experiment. I, you know, my, I think a lot of potential. It was a very difficult program to administer just from a scheduling standpoint.

Hunter: Yeah. Was that when—there was one year when there were only three classes out there right? Sixth, seventh, and eighth. And then they moved the fifth grade out there.

Peak: Yes. I don't remember, I don't remember whether—

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: I can't...yeah that could be.

Hunter: I remember reading that the building was designed for three grades and that—

Peak: Because I would, well yeah, there was, I know there was quite a concern in getting the building set up for fifth grade.

Hunter: Yes. Yeah.

Peak: Yeah, that was... But um, for the year there would have been three there I would have been at the high school that year.

Hunter: Ah. Ah. Okay. Okay. What, what caused you to move to the high school?

Peak: They just asked me to go with the ninth grade.

Hunter: Okay. Okay.

Peak: So I did.

Hunter: Alright. And you taught, um, what did you teach out at the high school?

Peak: I taught physical science.

Hunter: Okay.

Peak: And uh, taught that for quite a number of years. I then also picked up uh, an advanced chemistry course uh, which was an interesting experience. I had to go back to school to get ready for that.

Hunter: I can see that would have been—

Peak: Because it was uh, at that time, it was organic chemistry which is something I avoided. Religiously. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: At Grinnell College because I saw those poor kids stumbling back at midnight, one o'clock in the morning from an afternoon lab. [laughs]

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. Okay. So, then so you taught at the high school until when?

Peak: I think it was '96 or '97. That's my last year there. I moved to biology when Gene Fenske retired. I finally got to teach my major. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: For the last couple, three years before I retired.

Hunter: Okay and then when you retired you went to the...

Peak: Well, I retired for a while. I came back and filled in for, um, in Steve Kriegel's position after he passed away. That was a tough, tough time leading up to that and going through that.

Hunter: Wow. Yeah. Were you friends with Steve?

Peak: We worked in the same department. Yeah, yeah, neat guy. I can remember it was such a long tussle of figuring out what was wrong with him and not that it would have made any difference but by the time he was diagnosed it was...

Hunter: Yeah. And then he kept on teaching for a long time there.

Peak: Yep. Oh, and, and, uh, when I stepped in to fill in for him after he, you know, after he'd passed away and quit...and the curriculum had just undergone a revision and he had that thing laid out, ready to go. Just do as, as pleasant as it could be for somebody coming in and—

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: You know, you think about what he was dealing with during that time. He was truly amazing.

Hunter: Yeah. Wow. So, was that just one year that you...

Peak: Ah, I think that might even been just one semester before they had a replacement in for me.

Hunter: How did you get involved with the ah, alternative school?

Peak: I well, after I had finished my stint there Jim Jolly had worked at the alternative school and his wife took a leave of absence or sabbatical and they were in England and they invited me to come in and try. I was very apprehensive about that because I knew a lot of those kids and although I liked them I could never get them to do anything! [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: So I, you know, I was, was not looking forward to this and then it actually turned out to be one of the, one of my best experiences as a teacher.

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: I just—

Hunter: How come?

Peak: Because there was, there was never, sometimes in the regular school you wonder if you are doing any real good. If, if, if what you are doing is making any real difference. And boy, once you got to know those kids at the alternative school you know, you know, that this was a population that needed what I was doing.

Hunter: Mhm.

Peak: And they turned out to be—I always kind of liked those kind of kids. Even though a lot of them I couldn't get to do a thing I, I, I liked them personally.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: Because they're real. I mean, they are really real. And you generally know where you stand with them. But I found out they are just, neat, good people. They may have made some unwise choices, they may have made some high risk choices, they may be parents, they may be on drugs, but they want something better and at least some of them we were able to help them do that.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. That, that, that—quite an operation I think.

Peak: Oh yeah, and very much needed. I mean, even if you just want to look at it from a dollars and cents point of view. But it's so much more than that. I mean we, we had a graduate who went on to be an aid Mr. Vilsack, with Governor Vilsack. We had a couple of students who got full ride scholarships to Marshall Town Community College. There's, I have said that some of the brightest Grinnell students have been at that alternative school. And uh, I think a lot of those kids were kids who found out you know, nothing really bad happens to me if I decide not to go along with the game. And of course they pay the price for that too.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. Wow. How long were you, did you teach there then?

Peak: I think nine or ten years.

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: So I basically had another career after my career and it's, I'm supposed to go back out there to see if I can do some tutoring. But I've managed to put that off so far this year. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs] Yeah. I did a, I did a newspaper story about the new arrangement.

Peak: The new arrangement? Yeah I have not seen it yet.

Hunter: Yeah, it's a nice space. It's a very nice space.

Peak: Yes, I bet it is. It sounds like it is. And it sounds like the team they have together is, has gelled nicely.

Hunter: Yeah, that's great. And I hope it isn't a problem that it's at the school. I mean, I know at the beginning they were, the organizers were very keen on getting kids away from the environment that, where they'd struggled so much.

Peak: Mhm. I think a lot of, like a lot of things though it's gone full circle toward now for the best and the greatest services. It's best to have them there.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: That way if it's, especially if it's a program that as the program became more integrated with the regular programs. So if they wanted to take a class they can take class, well down here then you have to get transportation and I mean the school district did a very good job of doing that but it's just going to be so much easier out there.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah! It looked, just the few days I observed in there, I mean kids could come and go and be part of the, of the main stream but still have a respite.

Peak: Mhm. Yep.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah.

Peak: And if you have a, if you have a student and we had someone who absolutely do not want to go to that high school or be with those people they can, they can do their school work right there. And there are once in a while we will have someone like that. It's just that it's a bad experience through their own doing or with the help of people picking on them.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Do you, um, um, online education has become a big part of that. What's your, how do you feel about that?

Peak: I, I, I think it's good. Um, I'd like to know more about because that is, looks to me like it's changing yearly as to what's available online and how it's handled.

Hunter: Mhm-hm.

Peak: Um, I've wondered why textbooks, why the publishing companies don't make the programs available online. Um, you know, over the course of an adoption they could charge a relatively small fee that would still add up to the cost of a book or the program that that's used. I can remember looking at this huge book that we're going to teach from and you know, when the year was over we would teach from approximately half of it. Why not be able to get on and pull those bits and pieces?

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: And they were just starting to put that kind of stuff on discs when I retired but boy, online would...yep.

Hunter: Do you, um, okay I've got a couple of questions coming up here. Um, you've experienced this whole rise of emphasis on assessment that's happened in the school district.

Peak: Mhm-hm. Mhm-hm.

Hunter: What's your, what's your take on that. What do you...

Peak: Well, it's got to be done. You know, I think you, we have to evaluate what we are doing.

Hunter: Mhm-hm.

Peak: Um, when it's said and done the responsibility for getting it done—and I think that's the thing I liked about the alternative—I was there to help in any way I could. I mentored, tutor, let's figure this out together. But the responsibility was squarely in the lap of that student. And my feeling over the years is that more and more of the responsibility in public teaching was moving from the student to the teacher. And I'm not saying that focus on the teachers' responsibility isn't good, because I think teachers need to take a look at what they're doing and how they're doing it and is it affective? But, ultimately it's the student that has to accomplish the learning. And the

teacher cannot learn for the student. They can only provide the opportunity. And that's what they should be held responsible for is providing the opportunity.

Hunter: Yeah, yeah. It seems to me in some ways the assessment system treats students as if they were widgets and all—

Peak: Yeah, yeah.

Hunter: All the same.

Peak: Yes. Yes. Uh—

Hunter: To treat them as evaluated by the teacher.

Peak: Uh-huh and that just isn't true.

Hunter: Doesn't work. Yeah.

Peak: Yeah. I can remember a student I ah, I ran across, a problem that we were messing around with in physical science. And man, I wrestled with that and I'd looked at the solutions and everything and all so I couldn't do it. And I, I just said, I threw it up on the board and I said, "If there's anybody here who can sort this out get back to me would you." Ten minutes girls held up her hand, she had it. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: You know, just speaking of widgets. There, you know, sitting out there in that class was this little bright spot of intellect you know? And, yep.

Hunter: Figured it out. Yeah.

Peak: And that, that's got to be developed not put in a box somewhere.

Hunter: Yeah, yeah.

Peak: And frankly, one of the reasons I finally retired from public education at least, like the high schools, we were beginning to spend oh entire faculty meetings looking at numbers and and again, I—there either has to be a better way to report information so that it doesn't eat up, I really resented having my time taken away from developing lessons and doing things that pertain to teaching. Rather than statistical analysis. I also remember one time after ITEDs and we were looking through to see what the ITED analysis had to say about our science program and one of the things said, "Need to develop the analysis of scientific materials." "Need to develop the students' ability to analyze scientific materials" and I thought I've going to go back to the test because I couldn't remember a whole lot of questions on the test about that. And they did have all the questions classified and some of them tested for more than one thing. And I went back and ITED had three questions on analyzing science materials. Now you might get away with that

in some other department but you don't come up to a science person and tell them that you can come up with a concrete recommendation from three questions. And, and, and I see the need for standardized tests. I'm not saying throw them out. But, we need to be realistic about them.

Hunter: Recognize. Yeah. Recognize that they have limitations as well.

Peak: Yes. Exactly.

Hunter: Yeah. I worry about whether the test companies are driving all this and they're making a lot of money out of this and I guess that's my gripe with online education too. Is that, I really believe like that human interaction is such an important part.

Peak: That has to stay. Yeah. That has to stay and I notice now that there's an online school being advertised pretty heavily and I don't know the teacher directly but I know someone who knows the teacher and they are just, they're paid by the student. And as a result then, to make decent money they tend to take on a lot of students and the workload is just...

Hunter: They're not widgets! I just want everybody to recognize they're not widgets!

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: So, as a science teacher you've taught through some, a lot of sort of societal controversies about science. Has that effected your, your teaching?

Peak: I would say that I was pretty careful not to call evolution evolution when I was teaching it. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: It was selection of traits, gene frequency. [laughs] I think if I were doing it again and today, uh I think the world has changed enough I'd probably get myself into a little trouble now if I, that'd I'd be willingly getting myself in a little trouble.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. That's, do you see that—how, how is that going to change? How is that, how are we going to solve that problem?

Peak: I don't think it's solvable. I don't think that it necessarily needs to be. Uh, if somehow we could convince society there is no plot, there's no conspiracy. We have good people on one hand who are searching for the truth from the religious aspect of things and we have people in science searching from the truth from the science sense of things. And I feel it's perfectly possible that someday they're going to meet at the same point. So why waste all the time about things we don't know anything about and just continue to search because there is no one trying to sell anybody a delegate. Now that's not saying there are bad scientists, there are. Just like there are bad religious people. But overall, everybody's looking for the explanation. Let's just look and see if we don't meet.

Hunter: Cool. Cool.

Peak: It's a tremendous waste of time. The argument is a tremendous waste of time.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: You know, if Bill Nye wants to meet with somebody and get some publicity fine go for it but it's so unnecessary. I mean, let it go. Let it go. Let the waters calm.

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: But also don't tell, don't tell science teachers they can't teach evolution because that is part of science.

Hunter: Yeah. That, yeah. That's what makes me nervous.

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: Is that. Yeah. Yeah. Well, do you have favorite stories from any of your...

Peak: I, one of the things that impressed me about working in this district and in particular in this junior high is that we were trying some things years before they were popular. Whether it was team teaching or if you want to call that, I'm pretty sure it was some ninth grade class because that was what I was teaching where we integrated the teaching. Whereas if someone writes a science paper that would do as an English paper. If I came up with some equations or formulas that kids were struggling with I'd pass it off to the math department. And it was a lot of work. It would be so much easier now with computers because that was pre-computer.

Hunter: Right.

Peak: And you know, I think back that was just such a bright and shining spot. And it went away just because it was so labor intensive. But oh that was, it had so much potential and if you know, if we were to do that again, I think you could get away with it now.

Hunter: With the computers.

Peak: With the help of computers yes.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: Yeah. Wow.

Peak: I'd messed around uh, and again it, I think if I could have just put that off several years to where we had computers it was doable but I based grading on improvement. Kids took the test,

now I didn't tell them it was the test, now they soon figured that out. You know after a couple of times that hey, this pre-test is the test. You know.

Hunter: Yeah. [laughs]

Peak: It might be a slightly revised version you know, shuffled questions or something like that, shuffled answers. But. And then, I evaluate them based on their growth. Of how, after we did the unit and ah, it was again time and labor intensive when you're figuring grades with a calculator and deducting their pretest score and then finding out how much they improved over the pretest score compared to what they could have done. But, a real potential.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Because that would hit all the kids at their level where they were.

Peak: Yeah and, and anybody could get an A but it was based on what you did not just the scores.

Hunter: Yeah.

Peak: Yeah.

Hunter: Yeah. Wow. Cool. Did you feel supported by administrators during your career?

Peak: Oh yeah. Yes. As a matter of fact, while I was, while I was doing that with grades I had one parent get very upset with me because their student just wasn't getting the A's they always got because their student had always just rested on their native ability and their laurels and no, the administration, that problem never seeped into the classroom. It was, matter of fact, it had been handled, was over before I was aware of it. So yeah.

Hunter: Wow.

Peak: I've always felt well supported. I have seen situations where I feel staff wasn't supported by a particular administrator. A good dedicated teacher that you know, I think had the best interests of the student in mind and maybe wasn't totally diplomatic about how to handle that. That I felt got kind of abandoned by administration but oh well. I guess things like that happen.

Hunter: They do. Yeah. Yeah.

Peak: But no, I have nothing but accolades for the administrators that I've worked with in terms of how they've worked with their staff and supported me.

Hunter: Having you do your job. Letting you do your job.

Peak: And that makes such a big difference. It really does.

Hunter: It does. It does. So how would you stack, talking about assessments, stack Grinnell-Newburg against other schools in Iowa and other schools in the US?

Peak: Well, I think as I think back, I think the reason that we were able to undertake some of the experiments and some of the things we've tried that I've just mentioned is it was done at a time when we were free to do that. We were not federally and state mandated. And I think one of the things that we're losing is some of the natural creativity and initiative that occurs within school and building staffs that, that in terms of evaluating what we are doing, in terms of looking at standard test results it has become such a top down and outside in pressure to perform that is kind of squelching that. Because it's kind of squelching that creativity because if you stop and think what we did that one year in terms of trying to coordinate all the different subject areas. Look at the risk. If it didn't work...

Hunter: It's all gone.

Peak: Yeah. Yeah.

Hunter: Everything fails.

Peak: Yeah. Yes. And I think we're so focused on standards, and I'm not saying standards in and of themselves are wrong, and we're so focused on testing and test results that I think we're losing something in the process. And I don't think that's just Grinnell. I think that's education in general.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. I agree. I agree.

Peak: I can't speak for the schools now but because I've, you know I've been away from these schools for a long time now. I know hardly anyone anymore. Um, but the comradery among the staff, the willingness to work together. You know, you might have an isolated individual that wanted nothing to do with this or that but for the most part the ability to work together, it's just, it's been great. And that, that was typical; I can't say I've ever been in a situation where I felt that team spirit wasn't there. As I say, that, at least up until I retired that was there.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. That's, that's a, that's a thing that I think is important to attracting and retaining good teachers.

Peak: Mhm-hm. The one thing that I do like that I've heard a little about and but don't know a lot about is the mentor system for new teachers coming into the district. Boy, that's something I wish had been in place when I came in. I tell you, my first year was a learning experience.

Hunter: Yeah. I think every teacher's first year is like that. If there could be a yearlong mentorship or apprenticeship or something like that. Yeah. I know the college, the education department, they're talking, trying to do some things like that.

Peak: And I know the, I know the schools are, or have, I don't know what the status of it is now. And also they have um, I don't know if Teacher In Need Of Assistance is it, or not but I've seen through my career several times where if a teacher who is struggling had just had someone to

partner with probably would have either kept them in the profession or at least made their experience a whole lot, much better if not only for them but for their students as well. Yeah.

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah. Well cool, anything else you want to say for posterity? For [laughs] about your experience in the Grinnell-Newburg schools?

Peak: I have never, I'm not saying that there have been moments when I've said, "What if?" you know/ what if I'd gone into biological research. But, I have never regretted the choice I made as accidental as it may have been in the beginning. I have always known that what I am doing is important. I may not get paid much for it but I wasn't miserable either. And then I think some people don't understand just how much work is involved in being a teacher.

Hunter: I think you're right. Yeah. Yeah.

Peak: It's a nine month piece of cake for a lot of people. [laughs]

Hunter: [laughs]

Peak: They think.

Hunter: Yeah they think. [laughs] Well, thank you Geoff. I really—

Peak: Thank you for—

[End]