

Last Call!

Friday, 02 January 2009

Fort Hunt Federals of ALL CLASSES are invited to gather one more time this Holiday Season at The Village Wharf in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center
Saturday, January 3rd – 7:30 to close

Joe Gililand, '73, offers his take on what Mr. Barr might have to say about the subject:
“If I don’t see you at The Wharf, then I’ll see you in the Principal’s Office!!”
- Mr. Timothy Barr, Assistant Principal & Full-time Disciplinarian, FHHS ‘73

And speaking of disciplinarians, a while back, our classmate Tim Harris sent an interesting link to an online interview with the former principal, Mr. Rodney B. Taylor. In this very candid interview, Mr. Taylor spills some juicy tidbits about what a challenge the new school was, how he dealt with the peak student population of the day, with racial integration, with a sorority of cheerleaders and teachers and other pressing problems. A couple of fascinating items are the fact that Mr. Taylor was the principal for Groveton before going to Fort Hunt, and that his son was a senior at Groveton the year the two schools merged.

You can listen to an audio file of the interview, or read the full text at the link above, or click, "Read More."

Interview with Rodney Taylor

9/30/87.

This is September 30, 1987. I am interviewing Rodney Taylor a former principal in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Q: Mr. Taylor, would you tell me how many years you have been in education as a teacher and as a principal?

A: About 28 years.

Q: How much of that is teaching and how much as a principal?

A: I started teaching in 1954 and I think I became an assistant principal at Groveton High School in March 1961. No, that's when I became principal in March 1963. I became assistant principal, I guess, in July 1961. I don't have it in my head that well. But..uh..It's on that little sheet there.

Q: So, the majority of your time in education was as a principal?

A: That's right. I was principal of Groveton High School from 1963 until 1970. Then I went to Falls Church. That was when Superintendent Watts decided to move principals around who were in schools longer than ten years. So then Fort Hunt became available, had an opening, it was close to home and just seemed like the logical place for me to be. Fort Hunt was a real challenge. It was a school needing some change in administration. And uh..

Q: You came in at a very crucial time in education, the early seventies?

A: Very difficult time, very difficult time.. right. In some of these papers, when you go through them, you'll see some of the efforts that I have --for example, I was trying to improve the relationships between teachers and students. There was real hostility on the part of a lot of the students at Ft. Hunt towards the staff members. It was a lot to do with the makeup of the staff, a large percentage of retired military, excellent subject matter people, very skilled in physics and mathematics, those fields. I'd have to say that department was one of the best departments but in dealing with kids they didn't score so well some times. The social studies department was all males, no women at all. And I was trying to integrate females into the various departments.

Q: What really made you decide to become a principal?

A: I was asked. I just barely had the requirements. in fact I had to take courses.

Q: So there were Particular individuals who influenced you?

A: Well, at that time there was a Director of Personnel named Sam Coffee in Fairfax County and he, I would say, probably, was one of the convergent persons. Plus I'd have to Mr. Gibson, the principal of Groveton credit because he asked me to come into administration. I was a guidance counselor at the time and he asked me to come in as an assistant principal.

Q: That was a time of a lot of growth within the county, too, new schools were opening?

A: Oh my, they opened up four schools, I guess, the year that I went in they opened up, I think, I'm not certain I think it was Jeb Stuart and Robert E. Lee and James Madison. Those three schools were opened, I think, at that time. They opened three high schools in one year.

Q: Would you take me on an imaginary tour of one of the school of which you were principal, and tell me which one it is please?

A: Well, you'll note in some of these pieces of paper around here if you read it, they said that I, Superintendent Watts came to see me at Groveton High School and said "You know, you're part of these walls. You've been here too long." And it was interesting that was where I retired from. I went back to that building. In 1956 it was opened up, the newest Fairfax County High School. It was a very expensive school, plastered walls with the exception of the classrooms, but there where plastered walls. Now days you go in a school and it is cinder-block walls, painted. That school had terrazzo tile halls. There was a quality about it. It had birch wood on the doors, birch cabinets, birch material on the auditorium seating. It was considered a showplace in 1956. But it soon became, as it was called, a shoebox. by some people. It was so small. It was built for like 1100 to 1200 students to start with. But the thing about Groveton, the size of the school and

the relationship between the people in that building there was congeniality, there was a mutual trust. The atmosphere at Groveton High School and you can talk to old Groveton teachers, there are still a few around. Jack Hiller is one over at West Potomac now, but (sees cricket on floor and makes comment about lower level houses). The thing at Ft. Hunt was that "he school was sprawled all over the place, 25 acres of building down there. And it was just all over the place. And the capacity of Ft.

Q: Ft. Hunt was much harder?

A: A lot. When I went to Ft. Hunt it was somewhere over 2500. It rose to 2758, I think, in 74. Groveton High School was a school that served quite a cross section of population. There was no real majority of social class. It was just a cross section. It just had everything. And I think that actually was a plus for that school. Ft. Hunt when I was there was 44% senior military, either retired or active duty. It was heavy military. Certain attitudes and so forth, you know, are generated in that environment.

Q: But you were actually at Groveton when integration came into the county?

A: Yes, yes, that's right. We were actually one of the first schools, James Madison and Groveton integrated, I think, I keep forgetting the year.

Q: Had there been just one black school?

A: Yes, Luther Jackson. Since we were located in one of the two areas in the county where there was a predominately large black population, Gum Springs is right behind us, which today doesn't have the homes it had then, I mean many of the homes have disappeared. Ray Barber was the first black student. I see him every now and then. He made a career of the Air Force.

Q: Were there any particular problems with the integration?

A: Ah, I think Groveton had it very smooth. We had problems later on, yes. As more students came in, the issue always seems to follow, cheerleading always seems to be the problem. And it happened at Ft. Hunt, believe it, or not as late as 1975, fall of 75. It just suddenly happened that there weren't any black cheerleaders.

Q: What was the particular incident at Groveton?

A: Well, we had a pep club and the pep club had an election. What happened was the black students should have caught on to something, the idea of block voting. But they voted for the different friends they had and so none of them made it. The pep club was 60, 70, maybe 80 kids.. mostly girls. John White, the basketball coach was the sponsor. And they had an election for officers and other typical things, you know. And every time a black student was nominated, they would nominate another one and what happened was they dispersed their strength. The next day there was a lot of movement in the halls. It was the beginning of that kind of thing anyway. I can't even tell you what date it was. It would have been around 65, 66 maybe 67. I don't know. I'd have to look at the yearbooks back there. Mrs. Torrice was at that time a guidance counselor, and she did a fantastic job. She led the kids into a large room, would have to be the Home Ec. department which is right down the hall. She steered them into that room. There were only about 25 or 30 students in all. She talked to them about how you can handle something like this and how to do it and it worked very well. And we did eventually also have some later problems with the cheerleaders. I simply had to state, "we will have one. We will have one, a token, if nothing else. Don't come back without one."

Q: This statement was made to the teachers who were choosing the cheerleaders?

A: That's right. To the teachers and to the students. There were students also involved in the election.

Q: Did this cause resentment?

A: It was done like a sorority, it really was, I'll have to submit. That and the Keyettes, the same thing. And that was the kind of thing that we had to deal with. Once people realized the need, that it was only fair, because these kids had these things taken away from them. Here they were at Luther Jackson and had all these activities and suddenly dispersed to the white high schools and no chance to participate, But I think Groveton was one school which made a great deal of progress in human relations as we later called it. I tried to import some of that to Ft. Hunt. The problem was Ft. Hunt and Groveton were such rivalries. It was always a rivalry, up till today when there in one building. I'm not sure so sure the rivalry is not still there underneath the surface somewhere..

Q: This may get at the next question I was going to ask. What was the philosophy of the school during your leadership and so it probably carries from one school to the other and how was your philosophy developed.

A: Well I think you'd better stop the tape while I think about how I want to say that. First of all you have to know where I was coming from. I was a history teacher and I was a subject matter oriented teacher. Along the way there were some people who influenced me. There was one teacher in North Carolina, at Needham-Broughton High School and we did some team teaching together. I learned so much from her about how to deal with adolescents. If I hadn't had some of those people supporting me, teaching me how to teach really, I probably would have been a failure. I probably would have left teaching. I think that is the whole thrust of my philosophy. Number one, we want to offer quality teaching. We want to offer good sound instruction. At the same time, it is how it's delivered. Are you involving the students in the process or are they simply receiving? If you read this little statement here that will fill you in later on more details on that. So that's been pretty much ... The school exists for the students, not for the teachers. But at the same time you have to also think of the teachers and their environment and the problems they are constantly bombarded with, discipline, various pressures. And I think in Fairfax County we have a great deal of community pressure. It is very difficult to teach and not have people, you know, on your back all the time. It is very difficult and I imagine you understand what I'm talking about. So I think you have to support a staff at the same time. You have got to be a person who backs up your teachers providing them as much assistance as you can, budget and otherwise. I think it's good to let teachers know how they're doing, to be visible. I was at all my schools. I was not an office person; I was out participating and even attempted to teach a class one time at Ft. Hunt. The biggest problem was that I missed class and was late to class. Fortunately, I had an intern at that time. That was Vic Lutz, he's the principal at Hayfield. Vic was my intern and we

taught the class. It was during that cycle when we really went way out on curricula changes and we had students electing their own courses in social studies. And we had an election system. We taught a course called Education USA: It was history of education. It was basically kids who wanted to be teachers or who thought they wanted to become teachers. So we really taught a little bit about how you become a teacher. That's what we called it. It was a six week thing.

Q: Did you have a large enrollment?

A: We had about 20 students, mostly girls.

Q: For education at that time that was pretty good.. wasn't it?

A: That's right. So I've rambled on. I don't know if I answered the question or not. I read a book written by a classical scholar called The Art of Teaching. I don't know where I read it, somewhere. I think there was a copy years ago in the professional library at Groveton because I liked it and I bought it for the school. The author talks about the three qualities a teacher should have. One is their knowledge of the subject. The other 'is their interest, genuine interest, in the students. in the students learning, in being successful in their learning. What was the other one? I guess it was how you deliver the message. The three qualities in being a successful teacher.

Q: How did you create or stimulate a climate for learning? I imagine you have that in some of these papers. Would you care to condense it for me?

A: This is so stiff though that I don't want to read this. I don't think. it would sound good on the tape.

Q: It seems to me that some of what you have been saying is along the lines of what I'm looking for.

A: I quote Dewey. I don't know whether he's so great to quote or not. With the present climate of conservatism in the country, Dewey's not so great, so I hear. See, at this time I wrote this to the staff, there was a growing discontent; schools were having sit-ins and whatever. There was just a great deal of animosity between some teachers and their students and student behavior. It came from many different things. A lot of it was just simply, purely, mocking what was taking place on college campuses. It was also the Vietnam War. It was a whole lot of things. My statement was that there was a growing discontent between numbers of students, teachers, and parents. I said the success of education was going to depend on teaching the values of a democratic society. John Dewey envisioned a school as a democratic society in miniature. Fundamental to all such social organizations is a commitment to two principals; one, participation in the functions of the society by all its citizens; two, a relationship between the members of the society based on respect and dignity and humanity of each of the individuals. Both principals are characteristics of and necessary in the achievement of a democratic society. In other words, students have to be recognized as citizens of the school and efforts should be made to (again this statement is to my staff) include them in the planning of the instruction. In other words, students should have some part in planning what's going to be taught. They need the involvement, to have a piece of it. Now, that's hard to communicate to an algebra teacher or a let's pick on an algebra teacher.

Q: Use chemistry.

A: Use chemistry. Alright. Now I've seen chemistry teachers who were fantastic in including students. it can be done. I think, again, the student can recognize the authority of the teacher in probably one week's time, whether that person knows what it's about or just going through the motions. It doesn't take them long to tell. How to stimulate the classroom, what did you say, climate for learning? Well, I think you have to teach by example. You have to be on time yourself. Be businesslike and ready to go. Show evidence of organization. A lot of that passes on to students. Give the students some tips on how to do things. I have a sheet right here and its some hints for chairmen of discussion groups. And this is for students to know how to lead a discussion, and how to handle a committee. I used this as a social studies teacher way back when. I guess coming from a social studies background has a lot to do with the way I run a school. I think relationships between a teacher and a student should be kept on a professional basis. I don't think teachers should be buddy-buddy. That only breeds disrespect. Oh I know there are informal situations. A drama teacher, for example, frequently, is quite often very close to students. They sometimes have a tendency to drop all the formalities including being called by their first names. But I say avoid that. I tell that to my student teachers now. That's one of the things I'm working with Longwood supervising student teachers here in Fairfax. I say to the students, "You have to go from this side of the desk to the other side of the desk. Your role on Monday morning or whenever you start is going to be different and you are going to have to act a different role. Don't let them start calling you by your first name."

Q: At least not where you can hear them?

A: That's right.

Q: What role did you play in public community relations during the late 1960's and the early 1970's when there was such a tremendous change in the attitudes of students?

A: We started a, one thing we did, I wish I could show you, I may have one. We started sending home a monthly bulletin. It was actually in conjunction with the PTA: And the idea for it was still being used by the PTA's around here. Two years ago I was still part of the Groveton community. What was Groveton became West Potomac when Fort Hunt was phased out. My son was a senior there the first year they merged. So that was my last year of PTA: The idea of the newsletter, also parent conferences, especially in the area of human relations I had a black professor, I can't think of his name, Carter, I think, who sat in the rocking chair down in the Home Ec. living room. The teachers on their planning periods came down and they just talked. Basically, what he was talking about...

Q: This was a teacher from the school?

A: No, this teacher was a visiting, we had a visiting scholar program. And one of the visiting scholars was a black scholar. And we wanted our staff to have some touch with someone like this to have some communication with him. Also that evening he was available for a PTA board meeting. There, again, there was .-just one effort to introduce black individuals into our school. We got parents down here in the community with Mrs. Torrice many years ago to try to hear their complaints and concerns about the school. Communication was the key and keeping the school open and having people come into the school. We had, of course, the usual Back-to-School Night but we had other times when we invited people

into the school to participate. We had a program called HEP.

Q: What did that stand for?

A: It rotated with the English department. It was a Humanities program. We had these visiting scholars but we also used parents. In this community we had quite a score of, you know. We had a poet that came. He actually demonstrated writing a poem to a group of senior students. Again we were using the community. Parents didn't cost anything.

Q: I guess you've probably already answered, but I'll ask so that I can get a compact answer, what is your philosophy of education?

A: Turn the tape off.

Q: Alright.

A: The biggest problem I have with philosophy is just your asking me the question because I do think a lot of people are so phony and come up with these fine sounding things and in Fairfax County, here's a paper, I had to submit my goals. It gets to be phony. I think that's why I said turn the tape off. I think what I've been talking about I've been imparting some of my philosophy. Number one, I feel that the schools have to be an alive place, they have to be interesting. They have to give all sorts of options to all types of children there. It can't be just a prep school. It has to be a school that opens doors for kids. A lot of that comes about, I think.. between the human contact, the encouragement. I have a letter, for example, I found in there this morning when I was getting ready for you to come here. A letter from a parent as a matter of fact. who talks about a Latin teacher coached one of her students after school on the evening she was going to have a dinner party. She stayed after school to help this kid in Latin. The student was going to be in a Latin competition, some kind of state competition. So she gave her time to do that. Of course that's the kind of thing that I'm talking about. It's being so much interested in students and their progress. The parents also said the Driver Ed teacher that complimented their son who was not doing very well in school.. who had very low esteem. But when the Driver Ed teacher said, "You're the best student I've ever had!" it just did so much for that kid's esteem. It helped him. That's what you have to be. You have to have staff that are aware of the needs of kids. That's why, I guess my philosophy of education is such that schools can be very rote, can be boring. They can be, also, killing, really, you know the pressure that young people have placed on them. It's no fun. They burn out. I mean I've seen some of this with my son. The burnout just takes place. In a sense he's taking a year off this year. He went to the University of Vermont last year. It was a tough year, freshman year. So he's taking the year off this year. Oh, haven't I answered that question pretty well?

Q: I think so.

A: Not very wrapped up very neatly.

Q: What do you think teachers expect of principals?

A: Okay, I think teachers expect principals to provide them a place to teach that is clean, safe, and good environment and with the materials they need. They don't have to have everything under the sun but they do need materials. And I think what I told you earlier they need some communication with the principal from time to time, or at least from his assistant. You know, say, "That's a great job you're doing". Walk by and see them. I did a lot of, I just walked the halls and just stopped by, step in a room. Sometimes I got invitations to come all the time because they knew I was interested and I think that's important. A little note to say "Well done" goes a long way. It's like I said, its pressure work. Again, I think, the inevitable problems do emerge again. The problems with discipline more often happen in classes that where you've got remedial problems in the class, poor readers. These kids are striving for attention. They can't get it in the classroom. So that class needs to be staffed with a person who understands those kids and that particular staff person may get a little more help sometimes, in some of class, reduce the numbers. I'll have to think about that. Provide support.

Q: Along the same lines, What techniques did you use to make teachers feel important?

A: I'm trying to think how that is translated. Many different ways. Of course, I think the first thing is you deal with them professionally and you treat them as experts in their field and you recognize that. Again, the weekly bulletin that I put out at the school recognized efforts of teachers from time to time, gave recognition to other staff members. Gail Carr that you spoke of earlier, she was my administrative assistant. She wasn't an assistant principal, she was an aide, administrative aide. And one of her responsibilities was to help me get that weekly bulletin together and to find out things that were happening so that the staff knew. That way you don't have to have faculty meetings every week. The weekly bulletin would come out once a week and you could have a faculty meeting maybe once a month or twice a month. I think teacher recognition and recognizing them as professionals had, we had departments, some of our faculty meetings were such things that the department was putting on a program for the rest of the staff. The math department might be, for example, inviting all the rest of the staff up to their math lab, demonstrating the math lab so that other teachers could see ... That makes the teachers involved feel important that they can kind of do this stuff in front of other members. And that's the kind of thing I'm talking about. You know, your music teachers and drama teachers get public recognition all the time. But the English teacher working away in the English classroom doesn't get that same thing. So there are ways that you can do it.

Q: What was your role in the evaluation of teachers in your building?

A: Well, I was, I usually took a whole department. And I usually selected a department that taught all the students. It was either English or social studies. And the assistant principals took the others. That was for the actual visitations in the classrooms, the formal evaluation. Cause I ended up writing a narrative on every teacher's evaluation.

Q: Based on the information you had gotten from the assistant principals?

A: That's right. That's right. And my own. You had a staff at Ft. Hunt of 110 staff members. It was hard. But when you are a new principal you have to evaluate the entire staff. That's in the different combinations of things that happen. I did it. It was a chore. Their math lab, demonstrating the math lab so that other teachers could see ... That makes the teachers involved feel important that they can kind of do this stuff in front of other members. And that's the kind of thing I'm talking about. You know, your music teachers and drama teachers get public recognition all the time. But the English teacher

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Q: But you were constantly gaining informal information through your classroom visits? Did you ever ask for dismissal of a teacher and if so, what were the issues?

A: Yes. It was, there were several cases. Some of them were automatic things and were even taken out of my hands. It was a case of ... I don't even want to discuss that one. It's ... not very pleasant. I had to, I've had a number of teachers that I had to, just got to the point where they resigned because they knew they weren't making it. And the process is lengthy, the writing of letters, the offering of help, and then you have a final conference. If you've done all these things and you've come down to the wire here and still, the problem that originally was cited in the first letter is still a problem. It might be lack of organization, inability to control students because of disorganization. And with all the help ...

Q: Was incompetence in the subject area ever the issue?

A: Ah, actually no, I must say maybe in a few cases. I must say that when I went to Falls Church High School I inherited some teachers who weren't competent. I didn't stay there long enough to finish that job. Joe King took it over. He was the assistant when I went in and he was really the natural one to be principal of that school. So I went down to Ft. Hunt. And here again I inherited a few that ... I think the only incompetent in subject matter was when they were trying to staff Special Ed. and hiring any person that had anything that applied. They were not really certified. I was really irritated with that. I had a teacher from Bowie State, over in Maryland. Basically he was a Phys Ed. teacher. That's all he was and all he could ever be. I'm not even talking about Driver Ed. or anything else. I'm talking about just throwing the ball out. That's all he could do. They had him working with, what did they call it, it was for the self contained learning disabled. And L couldn't believe it.

Q: This, again, was in the seventies?

A: It was 77. And needless to say he didn't return at the end of the year. He was incompetent. Subject matter and everything else. I mean he didn't even stay in the county. He's gone.

Q: Any moral issues?

A: Yes. I had the one I started earlier.

Q: Would you rather not get into it?

A: Well, it is messy, you know. I had some, you know, that involved an assistant principal, too. That was one of those that was taken out of my hands. So there have been several, yeah. Assistant principal and a secretary and you know. A member of personnel, Carl Musser, came down and said, "What is it about this school?" Yes, I've had that. I've had it with a teacher, ah, a teacher and students. You know, some of those things were handled different back then. Today it's such a touchy thing. But I went right straight to the teacher and I said, "You're way off base. You don't have a thing to do with high school girls". But ah, yes, we've had that.

Q: Have you ever been involved in a teacher grievance procedure?

A: Yes, I was part of one. Right. It was resolved.

Q: What steps did you take? I think, now there are very formal steps to be taken.

A: This was very formal, too. I've had parents go to the superintendent. We've had formal complaints over that. Formal complaints by parents about me over discipline. That went all the way to the Area Superintendent all the way to the Assistant Superintendent. But I was, at least, supported. The issue was resolved. And I've had a professional grievance by one of my staff members through the professional association. He had been censured by the superintendent. He just did a very foolish thing. Two black girls asked if there were any parts in the play and he said, "Oh, yes. A maid or a receptionist." I called him in and said.. "No way can you do that". He said, "They understand me. They know me." He was telling me how much he knew about.. Of course what happened, it got out of the school rather quickly. And it was out of our hands just like that. So his grievance was that I didn't control it, that I let it get out in the community. Well, the kids took it to the community. Of course, the community was organized, the black students, and there was a black, ah ... it got to be a real flap. I'm the one who caught "he heat. He thought he was getting it. And then he turns around and puts the grievance on me. I was threatened by the, ah ... And it was such a joke to me because I'm not really, I don't come across that way. But they didn't know who I was. It was Civil Rights. Was it Civil Rights? I can't think of what it was. it was some organization in the County, I remember I got a mail-o-gram from them because of this issue.

Q: That was a question I had much further back. How did you handle civil rights issues?

A: Well, again, it started with cheerleaders. Well, this issue was the play. The Human Relations Staff was in place at this time. And Dr. What's his name, that's terrible, I can't think of his name, anyway, came down and investigated; talked to the students, talked to the teacher and talked with me. And superintendent censured the teacher, put a letter in his file and then I got a professional grievance filed because he said I let things get out of hand. He went up and talked with the FEA: I went up and talked with the FEA similar to right now, tape recorder and they asked questions. That was the end of it. Civil rights, ah, like I told you I had to fight to get an assistant principal appointed, a female. And I told the Area Superintendent, I said, "If I don't have a choice in appointing my assistants, then you go on and appoint whoever you want." And he took it and went ahead and appointed this person. But he just felt that, ah, he gave some superficial

reason. Later on, he apologized, he apologized in front of myself and Doris Torrice.

Q: And look where she is now. The superintendent then was.. Dr. Funderburk?

A: Well, it was Funderburk, and also, yeah it would have been Funderburk. ...because the area superintendents ... it was a change, it was my first experience. So I called up Jack Burkholder who was in personnel and I said, "Since when does a person no longer have the opportunity to select ... " They have these review panels. I sat on the review panel that selected Jack Davis for assistant principal, now he's State Superintendent of Schools. They can blame me for that!

Q: What kind of a superintendent was he?

A: Jack Davis was a very supportive superintendent.

Q: Did you consider yourself a manager of the building or an instructional leader?

A: Instructional leader. I rebel at this manager stuff. I went through it. But you know... Some principals are managers. They said they were. I couldn't come out ... I didn't intend to be a principal. I didn't study to be a principal. I was a teacher and then I became a head teacher. I'll have to admit there were some skills that -L lacked that I should have had because you really are a manager as far as that goes.

Q: What does it take to be an effective principal in an affluent, potentially politically active community such as Ft. Hunt and how does that contrast to your other schools? Groveton was probably not as politically active.

A: Well, I can't say that there is any difference. One demands just as much as the other. I mean there is a very, very political minority in this Groveton area, and what was the Groveton community. The thing that I feel is you have to be visible. You have to be fair. You can't do favors for people. For example, take a schedule change. You wouldn't make a schedule change. In fact, there is in place a procedure. I'd like to say this. It sort of reflects back on one of the other questions, whether I consider myself a manager or instructional leader. The one thing that I did at Ft. Hunt was that I defined roles: my roles, the role of assistants, the role of staff. I wish I had a copy of my handbook but I think I pitched it out. But I put in welting everything we had to live by. It helped to establish, I guess, a management role for me. In other words, it was in place. You have to have that. Very explicit detail on everything including the role of the teacher in terms of discipline, what they could and couldn't do. That was always something you could go back to. It avoided getting into these complicated situations where you weren't operating from something. Of course, the County has very well defined regulations. You know, the Blue Book is monstrous. And you have to do this for PTA boards. I think the kinds of things that Paul Douglas did at West Potomac were remarkable when the two schools merged. He took the student leaders off. He took the staff off on these retreat kind of things. We did some of that. You'll see some evidence in here of that. But we only went to Area I. But in trying to establish a better climate at Ft. Hunt we all signed it. I hope it's in here. A commitment. Here's what we did. It came out of the staff. This was part of the handbook, page 46a. These pages are to be inserted in your handbook. See, administrators and department chair persons have held work sessions on facilitating effective communication. It was a result of our getting together and working. We all signed our, indicating our concurrence with this. Those were teacher staff members and chair persons. It was a goal to achieve a team of all staff pulling together. That was our goal. And each member of the team agreed to hold him or herself accountable for achieving this goal at Ft. Hunt.

Q: And did the climate change after a period of time?

A: I think it did. I think it did. It wore me out, I'll tell you that. And then the racial issue came in. It's funny. it came in late at Ft. Hunt. There was considerable resentment directed toward one of my assistant principals that happened to be black. And it was a problem for me. It was difficult to work through but I could understand it too. (Get away from here. I've had enough of you. Go upstairs. We don't need a dog at this interview. That will give someone a chuckle. His name is Henry. He's an eight pound dachshund

Q: When you went from the high school to the intermediate, was there a lot of difference?

A: It was like semi-retirement. I was getting older, had blood pressure. And at Ft. Hunt, six years at Ft. Hunt during those times it was definitely. Yes I think, I didn't really answer your question. I think we did a lot down there. I tell you how I know. I know from the reports of the staff that I know, and I know some of them socially even today, after I left. And there was a lot of genuine feeling. I left at almost this time of year and Bryant was opening up. I went to Herman Howard and said, "I need a break". I didn't know about Bryant at the time. He said, "I can offer you two things. You can be ... there's going to be the associate principal job at Hayfield with Doris Torrice as principal." I said, "The trouble with that is once you're captain of the ship, you never like to be first mate again." So he told me about the Bryant job. I said I'd really enjoy that as a different kind of instructional program. It's a bridging kind of thing between the elementary school and the high school. And I had one fantastic guidance director who really trained me in six months how to prepare myself for the intermediate school. I felt I did a good job there. I capped my educational career with a real fun job. And I was truly an instructional leader at the time. We had a great staff at Bryant. And, of course, it was back in that old building, you know, where I started.

Q: Were the differences due more just to the grade level of the students are also the change in times?

A: Change in teachers, too. I mean, elementary. I have the greatest respect for elementary education now. it started with my getting to know and see in action teachers who were successful in the elementary school and they became excellent seventh grade teachers and eighth grade teachers in the intermediate school. They are highly organized for instruction. Mary Charl, a seventh grade English teacher, it was fantastic to see her work, and the she units she taught. Since I've been with Longwood College -they've given me the title of supervisor- I go sit in kindergarten classrooms. Of course, the first time I did this I didn't know a lot about what I was doing. So I told Dr. Vasser, "I don't think I'm really qualified". He said, "Oh yes you are." But I've learned so much about the fantastic teachers in Fairfax County. I've been doing this now since the spring of '82. I had a heart attack fall of 183 so I was out and Don Lytle took my place. And this fall I'm vacationing, I'm going on a cruise. I'm going to do it next semester. Education is, on each level has its own style and you are a different person. There is a ... between a twelfth grade government teacher and a kindergarten teacher who is

shuttling kids in for a couple of hours and they're on their way again. Another bunch comes in the afternoon, the P.M. group. It is fantastic to see them involved. Here are these kids sitting in what they call "open circle". They involve everyone, and they are involved, no question about it. Of course they come in such, some are really not ready for kindergarten, their parents have pushed them. They really are not ready; socially they can't handle it; it's just too much for them. They can't concentrate on a task long enough to finish it. I've had an education since I've been doing this. You never quit learning.

Q: Change of pace. What were you doing the day President Kennedy was assassinated? What school were you in and what were you doing?

A: I was at Groveton High School. I think, to tell you the truth, I think what happened was my wife was expecting our first child and I had gone home because of something she needed. Actually my son was born the day he was buried. I went back to school. There is a very poignant picture ... You see I've got the picture of Kennedy back there. This picture was ... the flag at half staff and I went back behind that counter and I went on the P.A. system and ... Fortunately the announcement came so late. And I went out and I personally put the flag at half staff. (Mr. Taylor looks -for year book.) I tell him it will be t'-he C-,4 yearbook, since the assassination occurred on Nov. 22, 1963. (This is barely audible in the background as he searches for the yearbook.) That's what I did. I put the flag at half staff after I made my announcement. I think that's poignant. That's a lone black student just looking at the flag. See the picture was taken after I made my announcement. It hit a real nerve there. It was the beginning of something in terms of unrest. So that's when things started falling apart.

Q: As a principal, how did you utilize your assistant principals, department chairs?

A: I gave them as much as they could handle. As much responsibility. Plus I constantly tried to provide a variety of responsibilities. You know, no one wants to be stuck in the office with problems all the time and you don't learn much that way either. I wanted them to learn about all aspects of the position, discipline as well as budgeting other aspects.

Q: Will you describe the most effective assistant principal you have had, characteristics, integrity, creativity, support, etc.?

A: I've had many good assistant principals. I think Tim Bahr was one of the most effective principals I ever had. He had been a science teacher for me and then became an assistant principal at Ft. Hunt. As I've said we had some problems at Ft. Hunt. He was organized. He was bright. He worked well with the teachers and with the students. He's now at West Springfield. But I'd have to say Doris Torrice was the most effective principal I ever had and I had to fight to get her appointed. She just has a way about her.

Q: What was your code of ethics as a principal?

A: I took it right out of the handbook, either NEA's or somebody's. I just told it like it was, I was just pretty straight.

Q: What were your biggest concerns as a principal?

A: Safety. Safety is always a major concern. Safety in the classrooms, in the labs, and on the grounds. I was constantly checking the building and grounds for safety violations.

Q: What were your biggest headaches as a principal?

A: That was safety, too. One year students were producing a play. A girl climbed up on the catwalk to fix the lights. She was not supposed to be up there. The drama coach had left the auditorium. She fell through the ceiling. The athletic director heard her fall and was there immediately to care for her. She broke her leg. We had a big go round with that one. The county finally settled out of court rather than face the negligence suit.

Q: What do you consider your biggest success as a principal?

A: Oh. I guess working with the black students and integration at Groveton would have to be one of the big successes. As I said earlier, we really managed to get through that period without any serious incidents.

Q: What do you consider the key to your success as a principal?

A: I believe that would be treating individuals as important whether they are teachers or students; making them feel that they are an important part of the program. Treating teachers as professionals and experts in their fields.

Q: What consumed the majority of your time in the role of principal?

A: Discipline. Working with disgruntled students or parents. Several times parents even took decisions to the Area Office or beyond.

Q: What would you have liked to have spent more time on but other responsibilities prevented you from doing so?

A: I would like to have spent more time in the classroom, observing classes, talking with students. But time just didn't allow ...

Q: Would you enter administration on the principal level again if you had to do it over again?

A: I'm not sure. You know, if you've done it once maybe there's more out there. I think I'd like to travel.

Q: What advice would you give to a person who is considering a school-based administration position?

A: Be prepared, be organized. Know that hours will be long and days often tedious. Be prepared to deal with the community, to listen, to be understanding, but not to compromise your standards. Be sensitive.

Q: What in your experience did you find most beneficial in helping maintain a "sane" attitude toward being a principal?

A: I walked the halls. Melvin Landis told me that was the best tonic. I walked the halls during lunch. Everyone knew that was where they could find me, it gave me a chance to talk to both the students and teachers as they changed classes. The exercise was good for me also since T had high blood pressure.

Q: What five things were you most happy to leave behind when you retired?

A: Cafeteria food! Cafeteria food and cafeteria food. There really aren't five things I'm glad to have left. But I am glad to have left the late hours. You know in a high school there is always some event at Night. I tried to attend all the football games. During the winter there was basketball and wrestling. And I liked to attend both boys and girls events. Of course. I couldn't make them all, but I liked to attend some each quarter. Also, the meetings. It seemed that before I retired I was

always out of the building for one meeting or another. I was spending more time in meetings than in the school. Boring meetings, but we had to attend. Is that five?

Q: What five things do you miss the most?

A: The people. The association with the people. That's it. I really can't give you five.

Q: Mr. Taylor, what have I not asked you about your principalship that I should have?

A: I think you've done a pretty thorough job.

Q: Thank you very much for taking this time with me today.

http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/principalship/t/175taylor.html