

Wayne Bjorne's Interview

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with
Peter Johnson

Me: Hello my name is Wayne Bjorne, I'm interviewing Mr. Johnson on the 13th of December, I'm interviewing him as a teacher and a coach in his classroom.

Mr. J.: Peter Johnson, born October 3, 1943. My parents are Harold and Gerty Johnson, I have one older brother, born in 1939. I was born and raised basically in the Ishpeming area, so I've been here all of my life. I went to school in Ishpeming, I graduated Ishpeming High School in 1962. But prior to graduation from high school, I^{had} traveled with my parents, fairly extensively having gone to California on a couple occasions and the East Coast and really had a feel and enjoyment for appreciating the size of the country and the fact that there are different things in life other than just living in the U.P. and kind of engrained in my self. The fact that I would probably someday would do the same thing with my children. I attended one year at Michigan Tech ~~and decided~~ in Engineering and decided that wasn't what I was looking for and transferred to Northern into a teaching background of which I don't regret having done. I graduated from Northern in January 1967. And prior to graduation did my student teaching in Negaunee, Lakeview, and was told by one of the teachers down there that he had heard that National Mine was looking for a 5th grade teacher, of which I went and applied for and as far as I know I might of been the only one that they interviewed, but I had the job. But the students that year had had three other teachers, 5th grade teachers, by the time they had me (caught), because Mr. Keto started off being there 5th grade teacher. The shop teacher at that time passed away and Mr. Keto moved down to take over the shop. And the sub that

they hired until a permanent teacher could be hired, her husband passed away so she could no longer fill out the year, and so yet a third teacher came in, she did not want it for the duration of the year, so I was hired in January. I was married that fall, ~~and~~ in the fall of 67, and our first child was born in October of 68, a girl, Lisa, and two years later my oldest son was born, Eric, and somewhere inbetween ~~at~~ ^{the} middle one and the last one, Chad who was born in 74, we lost one child somewhere in there I don't remember which year. And since that time we have travelled several times to the East Coast and one major trip to the ~~West Coast~~, that lasted more than a month. (Ahh) My oldest child Lisa is working in the kitchen at the Valente Medical Center. My middle child Eric is at Central Michigan University, he's a Sophomore, and my carrosse is a junior at Westwood High School. My wife over most of this time has stayed home to be with the children when they came home from school, but has now for almost two years has been working as a teller at the Ishpeming Credit Union. Our Family is very close and we attend ^{we} are members of the Trinity Lutheran Church.

mc: Ok What years did you work at National Mine School?

Mr. J: I started teaching at National Mine in January of 1967, and for the most part I've been at National Mine, except for the two years they were building the high school. The 5th grade, 6th grade, and I believe the 3rd + 4th ^{numbers of} were moved out of the building to make room for the high school students that were attending during the building of that, during the building period, which was around 1973

mc: When they were building Westwood?

Mr. J: When they were building Westwood.

me: In as much detail as possible please describe the job?

Mr. J: When I was hired in '67 it was, the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades were departmentized, and I taught strictly math + geography.

Mr. Ruesing taught History + Science, and Mrs. Nault taught Reading + Spelling. And so (ahh) we would change, I don't remember how long our periods ~~was~~ of study were, but we would change classes then several times a day. We would teach our two subjects and then get a new batch of kids, so you were teaching 4th graders, 5th graders, and 6th graders. Mrs. Nault had the 4th grade, and Mr. Ruesing had the 6th grade, I had 5th graders, and we had our own homeroom of kids.

me: Like that one year that I came here it was Mr. Vial

Mr. J: (cough) yeah

me: Instead of three teachers there was only two.

Mr. J: Only we would of had three teachers, ^{and} it would of been three different grades of kids instead of two.

me: (whisper) right

Mr. J: Since that then since that time it's most of my almost 24 years have been self-contained ~~is~~ where I've taught everything except ahh not this year but the previous three years to now we had two 5th grades here so that Mr. Vial and I would share teaching assignments where I taught all the Math and Science and he taught all the English and Spelling and Geography to the 5th graders.

me: What was the most rewarding part of your career?

Mr. J: I suppose the most rewarding thing is to see the 5th graders that have go on and simply have gone on and graduated from high school and the ones that from even that point that made something of their lives. Having gone to college gotten some position of worth and thinking back to the fact

that you were their ~~5th~~ ^{knowing} 5th grade teacher is kind of a rewarding thing, and you helped them along the way to achieve what they are achieving.

me: What was the most difficult part of your job?

Mr. J: I guess the most difficult or some of the ~~most~~ difficult things that I've seen with the job would first of all be the students who are so unmanageable and have no desire to be here or be educated making it difficult for the teacher to teach and robbing his fellow students of an opportunity to learn so that something can become of their lives so I guess one of the things I see as being difficult is managing students who refuse to be manageable regardless of what you tried to do with them. The other thing I found so ~~difficult~~ difficult to deal with is there's been a number of programs, a number of new ideas to be tried and have been added to the curriculum. And when you add something to curriculum that's already been jam packed with reading and writing, geography and history and science and whatnot and you don't add any time to the length of the day, you're trying to condense too many things into the same period of time and nobody tells you what you can leave out, all they do is to tell you to add this to the curriculum but they don't give you any more time to do it in. And, so I see that as a very difficult thing to deal with. Too many things to do in a period of time that is too short to deal with.

me: I see.

Mr. J: I mean like the Dare Program, it's a good idea it's excellent, but it's seventeen hours out of a semester that I don't get to teach them. And there have been other types of programs like that that ~~have~~ ^{time} have come along that just keep taking and when you ~~ask~~ ask them what do we cut out, they don't tell you

what to cut out, they just — teach,
 me: What type of programs were there?

Mr. J: I can't remember the name of it but it was one, Career Ed. was one of them. Mr. E. (laugh), Mr. Emblem would like to make a few comments about Career Ed., but Career Ed. was, it was another good idea, but it just didn't work out where you would transfer even, even at the 5th grade ^{level} would transfer, direct kids into this is what they do in that particular career. Of nursing, of engineering, of being a doctor, of being a conservation officer, or whatever it might be. It kinda ~~X~~ gives them direction as to these are the kind of things that these people do. Then again it was just something that took from the classroom teachers time. There was no time added to the day in order to make it possible to fit that in, and it eventually died.

me: How or why did you choose your career?

Mr. J: Well, in order to be a teacher you have to like kids. Of which is certainly true in my case. To spend as much time teaching and to even go on and work in the coaching field, which is still dealing with kids, and I got about 25 years of teaching Sunday School. I don't think any one can tell me I don't like kids. So it's just the reward with working with young minds and being able to guide them in the direction that is important for them to receive some sort of training that would do them some good further down the road of their life's why I guess I choose teaching.

me: ~~X~~ How have you seen the duties of your job change over the years?

Mr. J: Just repeating what I had said earlier is the duties is the duty changes that I've seen are trying to fit to much curriculum into the same amount of time, and there's just not enough time. I

feel that certain times during the year and certain times during students lives that you can't just get all of these things in and theres just too much to do and not enough time to do it.

me: During your career were you involved in any special projects, programs or extracurricular activities?

Mr. J: Ohh as far as extracurricular things that I've worked with, about the second year I was here we started a 5TH and 6TH grade basketball program. Where the 5TH and 6TH graders would practice early in the morning before the, before school started, because naturally after school the high schoolers practicing because National Mine was still a high school and the JV would practice after them and there was a 7TH and 8TH grade team at that time so they would even practice, so for 5TH and 6TH graders to get in we got to practice first thing in the morning. And then we would play schools like Champion and Bishop Barragan and Vadsworth, and Republic. So I coached 5TH + 6TH graders for, I must of been 12, 14 years, I don't remember. Then I took over the 7TH grade coaching job. And I held that for about 4 years or whatever. And I've even coached both 7TH and 8TH grade basketball at the same time for 7 or 8 years. To the point where I've went back to just coaching 7TH grade basketball. In track I've also coached for about 23 years at National Mine for the 7TH and 8TH graders.

My most memorable event of coaching track is I believe in 1985 when the National Mine track team was competing... National Mine was considered a small school along with Champion, Bishop Barraga, and Republic, but that particular year we were thrown in with the bigger schools, which is Ishpeming, Negaunee, and both of the Marquette schools, Gravenet and Bathwell, Cavin was also in, and on that year in that year 1985 the National Mine track team took first place. When the first small, the first small school to beat all of the big schools

continued in a track meet. It was quite, quite exciting me! Yeah, I see why.

Mr. J.: Ahh, special projects, both of my boys were apart of red dust. One worked on a project entitled the Edmund Fitz Gerald.

Ahh, and they went to Washington, they went as far as Washington D.C. with that project.

me: What year was that?

Mr. J.: That would of been 80s, and my other, my youngest son, worked on a Red Dust project that (cuts off) My youngest son's project dealt with the discovery of Iron Ore in Upper Michigan and the development of the Iron Ore industry throughout the Upper Peninsula, and his project also competed like the others at Northern, and at Detroit and then went on to Washington D.C. to compete nationally, but they, ahh, did not win the nationals. I, I myself worked in the late 80's with a group of kids and we constructed the Vietnam War Memorial, and then that group of kids travelled to, after having ahh, competed at Northern and won, and having competed Detroit again and won, we traveled by bus to Washington D.C. to compete. But they did not win, that would of been in mid 80's.

mid 80's. 1986 I think.

me: What about the Dare program? — — — as a special program?

Mr. J.: No I don't really, I don't really, I make comments if I feel like there's something I want to add, but ahh I basically just have to sit there. Make sure the kids are ok

me: Did you receive any special training for your job?

Mr. J.: Ahh to become a teacher you have to have a high school education and go on to a teacher's college ahh to prepare yourself, of which I did. I attended Northern Michigan University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1967 and have since gone back after waiting 26 some years and have gotten my masters in education. So that was basically the training that was required.

me: How long did it take you?

Mr. J.: It took me four years for my bachelor's degree and the master's degree, ahh going a little bit each year. I started in 87 and finished the summer of 1990. So it took me three years to pick classes here and there during the year when I wasn't too busy ——— going to summer school.

me: What about like for basketball coaching and ——— is there anything special you had to do for that?

Mr. J.: I've attended some clinics where the coaches have been provided the opportunity to observe other people, and other techniques, and other ideas that other coaches have used, but to begin with I never ever received any training in the coaching

of basketball or coaching of track. In fact I never played basketball in high school, I ran some track my junior and senior year of high school, but ahh mostly have learned by being a observer of the game, having seen alot of basketball and enjoyed watching it and having seen alot of track meets and having enjoyed watching them. I felt as though I had some capabilities of training students, at least in the beginning of it, You notice I only deal with people who are beginning in the sport and not people are very far along.

me: I always, or last year would see you at the Westwood games

Mr. T: Pardon

me: The X Westwood games for basketball

Mr. J: Yeah

me: I saw you there last year. Um. Could you describe some interesting or humorous events that happened during your career.

Mr. T: One of the ways I could bring humor into the classroom is when in the process of having been joking around with some students he says something or she says something jokingly ^{to me} I've been known to literally pick that person up and after having removed the plastic liner to a garbage can I have plumped them in the garbage and this usually brings a roll of laughter X from the

other students
me: Could you describe what your co-workers are like? How did you feel toward them?

Mr. J My fellow workers at National Mine have been very u-I don't know if it would be unique to work with, but we've been a very

close knit group, especially the elementary end, where our coffee breaks and noon hours are usually very ahh enjoyable time when much joking and light hearted exchanging between the teachers has gone on. Probably making us a very close knit group of people who are willing to help one another when theres a problem and support one another when theres a problem.

me: At any time did you feel like changing your careers

Mr. J: There certainly are days when you wonder if this is exactly ahh the career that you want to stay with. Ahh, but I guess for the most part after giving the situation or incident some thought and some reconsideration I still think this is the best ~~ahh~~ ahh career that I could of chosen for myself. Especially then enjoying working with people, and a variety of people, ahh this is certainly ~~the~~ case where meet a number of people and become involved with working with their lives and directing them and helping them. ~~X~~

me: How did the community feel about National Mine school?

Mr. J: I think the community for the most part has been very supportive of the National Mine School. And I see, ahh, An even more interest in the last year or so of a parent group that is willing to assist their own their children which may be students who are willing to assist teachers in ahh planning activities and working with ~~the~~ students that may need help.

me: Did any of your family members or relatives work for the school?

Mr. J: Earlier in the history of National Mine my mother in law worked as a cook for National Mine for maybe two years. But she was the only relative that worked for National Mine.

me: How has the building itself changed over the years?

Mr. J: The building has had some major relevation, where at one time it was four new, four new classrooms added to the west end of the building, allowing the Kindergarten, 1ST, 2ND, and 3RD grades to move into that area. The gymnasium and ~~con~~ the auditorium at one time were one large room, where the people would sit in the auditorium in order to watch basketball games. It was, the basketball floor itself appeared as though it was on the stage area. And so the gym floor could be both for athletic activities and it also served as a stage for performances, whether it be high school or elementary performances, and that area has since been renovated so that's the existing lunch room, and it is completely separated from the gymnasium. And just lately the school grounds have had two portable classrooms added to them in order to make even more room for the growth and population of the middle school classes and to make room for them. In the building itself they moved 4TH and 5TH graders to the portable classrooms

me: Your class and Mr. Emblems

Mr. J: My class and Mr. Emblems

me: Have you maintained contact with former students or co-workers?

Mr. J: About the only contact I've maintained with any of my students is often times the 8TH graders that have left here will come back as freshmen and sophomores. It seems like they'll do it for the first two years that they're at Westwood. They'll come back to visit teachers at National Mine. And often times they've come in to

my room just to see what was going on. Usually by the time there juniors or seniors they don't bother coming back, and this summer there's the 75th year reunion, and I suspect that I will see a number of former students at that particular event.

me: What were the greatest challenges you faced during your career?

Mr. J: I suppose the biggest challenges every year you have a new group of kids and the challenge is how your ~~is~~ going to present this new group of people who have come from different backgrounds and they have different learning abilities. And the challenge of how you're going to present the information. To get them the wealth of information that is going to be presented to them, over the school year.

me: Any other challenges?

Mr. J: In the field of athletics there's been some challenging years as to having some real fine athletic teams that were capable of winning game after game after game, and yet other years where the talent wasn't there and the challenge is to, how you prepare those individuals to become better athletes and better competitors in the, in both the athletic field and the game of life, to, preparing them for the demands that life is going to present on them.

me: What were your biggest responsibilities?

Mr. J: Responsibilities I guess would, I would have to say would be being responsible every day and every week to the needs of a classroom, keeping it organized, seeing that students are with the necessary material the 5th graders should learn in order to be passed on into the 6th grade. Attending to the responsibility of whatever emergencies might occur during the day. Would be the important responsibilities that

me: Right. Did you ever win any special awards or be recognized for your job performance?

Mr. J: I can't think of any academic awards, but certainly in the area of athletics. The Basketball teams that I've coached have done fairly well over the 20 plus years I've coached them and I'm sure they've brought home for the school awards in the form of trophies on at least a dozen occasions or more. And the same thing would be true in track, where track teams have competed in their respective conference or whatever it might be, and brought home yet again another dozen trophies or more. Displaying their abilities in that particular ~~an~~ athletic event.

me: What are your fondest memories of National Mine?

Mr. J: Fondest memories of National Mine. Certainly some of fondest memories are some of the programs that have taken place here. Both in the past and present. Ahh particularly Christmas programs where a lot of effort has been put in by the students and the teachers, and music teacher. And then the final culmination of all the practice and the program, and the pleasure that this brings to the community and to the parents that certainly has to be one of the fondest memories that I have.

me: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Mr. J: One other program that I was a part of is an outdoor education program where I was responsible for organizing activities and transportation to a camp where the students spend a night and a couple of days. Ahh Learning in the outdoors whether it be hitting and examining leaves of trees or having

a department of natural resource representative there with furs that have been trapped, or talking about fire prevention, or some other aspect of conservation area. Ahh The children would go to this camp on a bus and spend the night at a camp. Often times it was two camps that were used that were about 10 miles apart. The girls would spend a night at the base camp and there was another camp that was used where the boys would stay. And so this was a responsibility^{mc} to plan the activities and plan the transportation and organize the food, and have somebody else there with me to help prepare that food and then keep the students organized and interested in what they were doing over that particular stay and this went on for a couple of years. And it involved five different 5th grades that were in different buildings throughout the district.

me: Where were the camps?

Mr. J: The base camp was located on Distinct? Lake north of Champion. And the other camp that was used for sleeping was on ~~the~~? Lake which is another about two miles or so further up the ^{Mc}Resheate Grade, along side the Resheate River.

me: So they are north...

Mr. J: North of Champion, both of them north of Champion

me: Is there anything else you'd like to add

Mr. J: I don't believe there's anything else that I can come up with at the moment to add to the interview.

me: Thank you for talking to me and for the interview.

Mr. J: You're welcome