

ROBERT AHRENS. Born 1943.

SUMMARY of OH 1805

This interview was recorded on July 13, 2012, for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program. The interviewer is Luke Lorenz.

ABSTRACT: Bob Ahrens describes his thirty-year career as a guidance counselor in the Boulder Valley School District, first at Baseline Junior High and later at Boulder High School. He discusses differences between providing counseling for junior high school students versus high school students, remembers the challenges of the 1960s and 1970s with regard to anti-Vietnam-War protests and drug use, and reminisces about various teachers and administrators with whom he worked. He describes the culture of Boulder High in terms programs that addressed the diversity of the student body, its extensive AP program, and the variety of senior pranks for which the school was famous (including placing a VW bug on the roof of the school and releasing chickens to roam the Pearl St. Mall.)

NOTE: This interview is one of a series about the Boulder Valley School District.

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00:00

Introduction.

Born in Columbus, Nebraska, in 1943. Grew up there.

College: Concordia College in Nebraska, then to a Lutheran college.

After college, he taught in the Bronx, New York City.

More about growing up: lots of freedom, no worries about safety, bikes used for transportation. Started in a public school, then went to a Lutheran school.

Sports: Little League baseball and basketball.

Even today he walks and swims a lot.

Father worked in the field of fuel oil, gas, gasoline stations, cars. Last job was as a station inspector for the state of Nebraska.

Mother worked for Safeway for 32 years as a checker, for most of the time. Unable to become an assistant manager because it required lifting 60-pound items.

05:33

Mother's talent at spelling.

Sister, two years older.

Played basketball in high school. Conflict between playing basketball and taking Latin.

Decision to go to Concordia College, with intent to study education. Majored in math, with intention of teaching math.

Tells about being assigned to teach in the Bronx at a small Lutheran school for his first teaching assignment. Taught there for three years. Wife joined him for the last year.

Moved to Colorado after his three years in the Bronx with intention of going to graduate school at the University of Colorado.

11:44

Obtained a masters degree at CU in guidance and counseling. Worked at Baseline Junior High in Boulder for thirteen years. Then worked at Boulder High School for seventeen years.

Graduate school at CU: also studied research and statistics in addition to guidance and counseling.

15:52

Reason for moving to Colorado: attracted by the natural beauty of the state. Desirability of Boulder as a place to live. Changes in Boulder and in students over the past forty years.

Ways in which parents have changed over the years in Boulder. Increase in leniency. Example of the senior campout and alcohol. Parents less willing to say "no."

20:56

1970s and drugs in the schools. "Heard about it more than you saw it." Happened more after school, evenings and weekends than in school.

Consequences if students were found to be using drugs or alcohol in school.

John Thompson, Baseline principal. Leadership style and educational philosophy.

Early Gifted and Talented program at Baseline.

26:17

John Thompson's handling of a Vietnam War protest in which CU students came to Baseline Junior High to recruit junior high students for the protest.

Riot on University Hill that broke all the windows in the Colorado Bookstore during that same time.

Personal feelings about the Vietnam War and the protests.

31:28

Discussion of underpinnings of unrest during the 1960s/1970s: Vietnam War.
Community feeling about the war and the protests.

Baseline Junior High School and proximity to CU: advantages and disadvantages

35:16

Open lunch concept. Controversy about whether students should be able to leave campus during lunch time.

Move from Baseline Junior High to Boulder High School. Differences in the job of guidance counselor between junior high (affective) and high school (cognitive).

41:18

Gary Cox as principal at Boulder High: high expectations of his faculty.

Principal Jean Bonelli: more involved in the content of the curriculum with the faculty.
Encouraged change and new programs.

Principal Marcy McMillan: popular with students and faculty.

44:28

Senior pranks at Boulder High: 1) One involved putting a Volkswagen bug on top of the roof of the school building. 2) The chicken incident: chickens released on the Boulder mall. There was concern about this being abusive to the chickens. 3) Mo Siegel's graduation speech that ended by him tossing a rubber chicken at the senior class.

South Boulder, where he lived, as being more conservative than north Boulder. There were good schools in South Boulder. His children went to Fairview. Characterizes Fairview as more of an upper-middle class school with less ethnic diversity compared to Boulder High.

Boulder High was a leader in having an in-depth advanced placement program. Fairview now has both AP and International Baccalaureate program

49:46

Superintendent Pat Ryan.

Dave Jansen [?], who worked with students who were truant. Turned around a lot of lives.

Margaret Wheeling: a teacher who was very influential.

Briefly mentions other good and influential teachers.

56:21

Ethnic and economic diversity at Boulder High. Many languages represented; ESL programs. Stories about students who learned English very fast and became student leaders.

60:00

Pearl Street Mall: controversy about whether to build it. Watching the street getting ripped up to create the mall alongside architect Charles Haertling.

Anecdote about construction violating the noise pollution laws in the city and construction of the mall being shut down temporarily.

64:38

Enjoyable and appreciated things about Boulder such as the Boulder Boulder and the rich cultural life.

Wrap-up by interviewer.

67:09

End of interview