

Interview with Nancy Haack
May 22, 2002
Interviewed by Katelyn Moorman and Anhthu
Lai

Km The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Century High School. The interviewee is Nancy Haack. The interviewers are Katelyn Moorman and Anhthu Lai. The interview took place at Century High School on May 22, 2002.

Km What was your first involvement at CHS?

Nh Ok, I was approached by Phil Barnekoff who was the appointed principal and asked if I would consider the job of activities director. Initially I said no, having not had any experience in the position and he tried to convince me but what he saw as my personal characteristics that it was sort of a good fit for an activities director. The more he talked to me the more I thought this would be fun, it's a challenge, it would be exciting to help to mold the energies of high school kids and maybe to channel the leadership focus in the directions that I would like to see a school go. It was really through the encouragement of Mr. Barnekoff that I took on that position.

Km How did he choose you to be activities director? What exactly are your qualities that he thought was going to help you at that?

Nh Well, as I remember he said that I have a tremendous love of kids, which I do. That I am inclusionary; I don't like to have kids to feel like they're on the peripheral. I wanted all kids, you know, I like to have kids feel like they have a sense of belonging. And he liked that. And I have a lot of energy and enthusiasm! I think it was the individual characteristics, not any past experiences that I'd had, and I've never done any thing like that before so it was a new thing for me.

Km What other schools have you been involved with?

Nh My teaching career parallels my husband's. He's a teacher and a coach and he has moved to different schools based on where his head coaching assignments have been. I've definitely taken a back seat to his

career. That was preferable to both of us because I wanted to be able to raise our kids and I never wanted to pay a babysitter to raise my children. So I wanted to be home with them. We've been in Newberg, Dallas, and Forest Grove, and I've subbed in all of those schools. When we came to Forest Grove it opened up my opportunities for substituting, and I started subbing in the Hillsboro district, as well as Forest Grove.

Km How would you compare that experience with your experience at Century?

Nh Well, most of my experience prior to Century was in a substitute capacity. I was permanent sub at Glencoe for six and a half years. Joe Rodriguez, who was our superintendent, asked me to take on that position cause he'd known me when he was principal over at Poynter. So I did that job. I had a full time PE teaching assignment in McMinnville and then came to Century. And how would I describe this as different? I think kids are great where ever you go. I think if kids know you respect them and if you really care about them, that feeling is reciprocated. I just have an amazing love for kids because I feel that I get back more than I give. The kids give me more than I give them. It's such a positive experience.

Km How did you make decisions as activities director?

Nh We tried to do them, instead of being a little dictator, where I would make the decisions, which I do like to do that. By nature I like to make decisions, they were not mine to make. I always tried to turn it over to the kids, and we would discuss it and we would discuss what the ramifications would be. What the different consequences would be, which decision had the most positive impact would be the decisions that we would make. Being an inclusionary freak, that was one of our focuses. We knew it would be important to establish traditions in a brand new school. You need to have traditions from the very beginning to keep continuity and to make all of the students; all the alums feel like they are still part of this school and having traditions. We tried to do a good job of recognizing kids in a lot of different areas, you know, recognizing students of the month, and we'd have their pictures up in the hall and we'd change those every month. We'd have an ice cream social for them. Having a social for exchange students and a special assembly where we recognized those. Down to the Jagaplooza where we started the skateboarding, the Battle of the Boarders, that was really trying to bring a group into the school and making them feel like they belong that probably never had felt like they

belong before. In our assemblies we would try to find kids talents that were not showcased in the school arena and bring them in so that they could be recognized for the talents that they had. Another thing we did is we always had a perfect attendance board that we kept right by the line in the commons area. We also had a four point. We didn't just want to recognize our great students but we wanted recognize kids that were doing a great job. Maybe they couldn't get a four point but maybe they could have great attendance. We really tried to go out of our way to recognize different people doing things well. We really tried to involve as many kids as possible and I will tell you that that first year a lot of the help I got came out of the study halls. I would go into study halls and ask for volunteers for a certain project, kids not wanting to stay in study hall and thinking it might be cool to be in the leadership room, I got lots and lots of volunteers. It's quite remarkable that a lot of those kids, who I really do believe would not have been leadership type kids, ended up getting in leadership positions because they got their foot in the door. It was just a blank statement addressed to the whole study hall and I would do that every free period I would have, I would go around and get kids in different study halls and bring them in. They got an amazing amount of work done. We also wanted to create pride in the school. Feeling good about being part of this school. We knew that we knew we were not going to get it through sports because not having a senior class that first year you're not going to sweep the metro league in any sport and so it was important to create pride some way. A way that we went about doing it is trying to make our students feel like we were the most caring community of high school students. I think we really did an excellent job in that respect. It also broadened kids ideas that you can make a difference. You're just one and maybe your numbers at school are small but when we put our minds to it we've got an amazing amount of good things accomplished in the community. We also tried to make the community believe that kids are good because it's very sad that people that don't have a pulse on the schools, think that the only thing they hear is what kids are like now. That kids are toting guns that kids are all on drugs, that kids just drink every night, that kids just go out and carouse around in their cars. That is so far from the truth! And I just want people in the community to know that these kids are absolutely amazing. We put on this one senior citizens tea and the people didn't want to leave! They did not want to leave, they loved it so much and what we did is we divided the seniors with the students so there was kind of an equal number of students and senior citizens. They were in such awe of our kids. We did a little kind of a talent, entertainment thing and then we had refreshments and just chatting and

we had lots of gifts for them. They just loved it and every one of them walked away saying oh this was so great, I just can't believe how awesome these are. Some of them came from Rosewood Manor over here and they were saying you know I used to look at that building and I'd just get shaky and think about all those kids over there that are on drugs. And she says and now I'm just going to look over there and just think of all those good thoughts. So one of my focuses also was I wanted the people in the community to know what I know and that's just that kids get better and better. I think I'm more impressed now with kids than I used to be five years ago and five years ago I was more impressed with kids than I was with the kids five years before that. So whatever you hear about how kids are changing and they're getting worse is so bogus because kids are just much more incredible. They're able to do so much more. They accomplish more, they're so organized, they're so efficient, and they're so multi talented. I mean I'm just in awe of kids! Okay, I guess I rattled on just a little on that. I don't even know what the question is!

Km What were some of the biggest challenges you faced as the first activities director?

Nh Well, having not been one before. I came with a blank slate. I came with an over all vision; feel, for what I wanted for the school. And then putting that into action. I would say one of the hardest things was, I had come from Glencoe, and not a lot of teachers came from Glencoe. My friendships or my connections were very limited. Most of the people that came from Glencoe were not people that were highly involved in student life any way. So I didn't come with any workhorses for me and not knowing a lot of the staff it was real hard to build on that. Another thing is that when you start a new school, everyone starts with a degree of stress and needing to find their way and I found that most people, most of the faculty, at that time, were so focused on their part of the puzzle that it was very difficult to get help with other things. When you're in another school where you have a past legacy of okay, well, these help at the Powder Puff, these people help with decorations on assemblies, and these people will run this assembly, you know, we just didn't have that. It was all student done. There really was not much faculty support and that was the hard thing. As I said one of the biggest challenges was getting faculty support plugged into the different areas. Personally, for me, as I was diagnosed with fibro mialgia four days before the school opened. That's chronic pain syndrome. I was in a world of hurt. I mean the pain that I had was immeasurable. I had migraine headaches like; I'd have about two

a week. It was hard for me to climb stairs, my body ached all over, I had insomnia. If I slept four hours in a night that was good. They couldn't find drugs that would work for me and so personally it was just absolutely unbelievable. Had I known that I had this when I was asked to take the position there would have been absolutely not way. Your personal health is something you cherish; you don't want to ruin your health. I knew no matter what, I was going to stick with it for a year. In April I made the decision that I would have to tell Mr. Barnekoff that I just could not continue. That was one the hardest things that I ever did because to me it was like quitting. I'd never quit a thing in my life. So personally for me it was a necessary decision, but it was a very hard decision. The thing that got me to be able to do it is my daughter, who's very logical, said to me mom, your whole life you wanted to be a grandma and you are jeopardizing that by continuing in this job. She said you might not ever see being a grandma if you keep this up. I can say often times in my life I do not make decisions that are based on my self. I base decisions on what is best for others or what's best for my family. So it seemed like such a narrow perspective to make a decision on. But it was the right decision. I would say another thing that was difficult in that first year is not having a senior class. When you don't have a senior class, you don't have that strong leadership. That is, and you were asking what are your words of wisdom for Liberty?

Km Uh huh.

Nh And I would say my words of wisdom to liberty is to convince the faculty before that school ever opens that they are the senior class. That they need to be supportive of every activity, they need to be involved in the assemblies, they need to show by role modeling, what leadership is and then you create leaders after that. It was just hard to find people...I remember going around trying to find people for a skit and I was told so many times, oh, you know, maybe I will later on or maybe I'd help with that assembly next year. It was just all these on hold type things. So that was difficult.

Km What were some of the greatest satisfactions that you had as the activities director?

Nh I think making kids feel like they were part of this school. I can specifically remember a kid at Glencoe that I had in team sports that was really pretty ostracized. I know he was miserable there. Coming here he

was accepted and that was what I heard from so many kids was that they felt like they were accepted here like they would never have been at their other school. I think that acceptance, and you guys know it too, is such a strong component of self-esteem. My heart just breaks when I know a kid does not feel accepted or part of and so I would say that that was probably the thing that I felt the best about. Because an individual's self-esteem is pretty important.

Km What was your initial vision of CHS?

Nh Well, I thought it was so exciting to be able to kind of chart the course. And along with charting the course, I felt like we had the best captain we could have. Now do you guys know Mr. Barnekoff?

Km Not personally.

Al No.

Nh Well I'll tell you. He was an absolutely dynamic individual. Who totally believed in kids, who loved kids, and whose every decision was based on kids. I think when you have someone at the helm that has that course in mind then you feel like it can happen. The kids totally respected him, they didn't just respect him, they just really liked him. I think that that's such a positive thing for a school to have someone like that. I mean we could not have had a better first principal.

Km Have there been any barriers to realizing the vision?

Nh (Laughs)

Km ...of Century?

Nh You know, I'm thinking now did I answer that question of what the vision was? The vision of...dynamic leadership, leading a group of students where they would feel positive about their school is all included. I guess that's my vision. So I guess barriers would be, in the natural selection, kids are sometimes mean to kids. Even though you're generating a school where most kids are going to feel like they fit in. I remember at one dance where we had the Hispanics do a break dancing thing at it. Cause of different factions, trying to bring them in. I think that kids can still be

mean to kids and then that erodes that vision that you have of everyone feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Km What are some of the most significant changes you've seen at Century since it opened?

Nh Significant changes? I think we are developing more a sense of spirit. I think that's good and I think with the boy's baseball team, making it to the state playoffs and being metro champions, I think that will help. I would say one of the things that I have seen change that I certainly wish it hadn't was the fall back of going into block and having kids that are out of here so early. That to me is very sad because it's hard to create a community when you have so many satellite students. Students that are here for a short time, never to share in the assemblies, never to be part of what high school life has to offer. And looking at it just as an opportunity to get out. I mean, your high school years are something you can never replace, you can never go back. The memories you have of high school are not going to be oh, gol I remember that fantastic lecture in French 5! That's not really what you remember, you're going to remember the committees you served on, the special functions that you were part of or the after school life that you had. I just feel so badly that the scheduling has allowed kids to not be part of this school. So in a way we are developing stronger spirit but in the same sense, it's a stronger spirit for fewer students.

Km How would you describe the culture of CHS?

Nh The culture of CHS?

Km Yeah.

Nh Well, now by culture do you mean the multiculturalism, or the climate of the culture?

Al Probably the multiculturalism of CHS.

Nh See because Century's diversity is greater than any of the other Hillsboro schools. I mean, we draw from an area that pulls a greater cross section of students. I think that's absolutely awesome but I think in some extent that opportunity is lost when the groups stay with in the group and they are not blended. I mean our nation prides itself on being this melting

pot, the blend, a patchwork quilt. Well, maybe we're a patchwork quilt, but we're in quadrants. We need to break those up into smaller pieces and re-quilt or something.

Km What activities did you first want to include at CHS?

Nh What activities?

Km Yes.

Nh Well, I would say that wasn't so much my emphasis as the students that we had. We started, kind of like the planning team; we started with a group of students that were also planning team coming from the very schools. They were selected from their schools. We hoped that it would be a good cross sectional representation of all of the students that would be coming here and that's kind of why they were selected. Activities, you know we wanted to have the regular things. I remember that we also did a Wacky Wednesday thing in the cafeteria and on Wednesdays we would do some sort of crazy little competition during lunch times in the cafeteria to kind of break up the week and make kids feel like it's okay to be here. Other activities...dances and assemblies and I would have to say one of the main things that we ended up doing was our community service. I required every student that was in leadership to come forth with a service project. They all had to develop one, and then some of them were larger than others and they required that all of us get together and serve on them. Then a lot of them required that we involved the other students. I would say in general they were activities that almost every school does. The one that I can remember that was different was that Wacky Wednesday. I would say that the activities that we had in mind, we wanted to pull from different groups so we would say what can we do to get this group of students involved. We would try to identify those fringe groups and what activity can we do that would pull them in like the break dancing competition would pull in those Hispanic kids. So activities that included were what we were focusing on.

Km Why have you decided to retire this year?

Nh You know, it's really funny because it seems like most people that I know, when they are retiring are like, counting the days down. And it was a decision they've made like, they've finished, or they've done enough, or they're tired of it. I have none of those, absolutely none of those! It's like I love teaching more now than I used to. I love kids more now. If it were an

individual choice, I would say that I would teach at least three more years and maybe more. But I think it's nice to go out when you are not an old foggy, when you still do relate to the kids, when you still do have energy, when you still are positive. So that's a good thing about going out on an upbeat. But the reason that I have decided is that my daughter is completing her doctorate and she has a small baby, and just like I did not want to have my children raised by babysitters, we don't want to have our grandkids raised by babysitters either. So it works out as far as my ability to do this and so I am going to stay at home and be a grandma that's a nanny.

Km What have been some of your best teaching experiences?

Nh Well, just talking to Tony in the hall, I had him in freshmen PE, and I told him from the very beginning that you've got some wheels, you've got to use those. Having them go out for something I have suggested. I mean I had two kids that I had convinced to go out for wrestling as freshmen that became state champions. A kid that I got to go out to football as a senior, who was on the all district team. I'd say kids have so many talents than they realize, and it's like they don't see the forest through the trees and then when you're out here and you see those and being an athlete my whole life. I know what that can translate to. Especially for a kid, who doesn't have any other connection, if you can tell them what their talent is and have them go out. My last year at Glencoe, I had two kids in team sports that I convinced to, I was coaching long jump and triple-jump, and I convinced them to come out. They were awesome! They were both sophomores that year. Their senior year one guy went here, and he was a district placer, I think he placed third in both the triple and the long. The other kid was district first place and state champion. It makes you feel good when a talent that you have told them they have, they do some thing with it because the potential that kids have is some times not realized by them. Then, outside of that, I would say a lot of the students that I've had in aerobics come back to me and tell me that they are still working out, that the information that I gave them on nutrition...they still use that, and they know not to listen to diets, they know that the scale doesn't make sense, it's body composition. I think when a student tells you that they are using the information that you've given them, that's really powerful. I would say that the most exciting thing for me has been when I've gotten some letters from kids that have said that I've made a difference in their life. That's pretty amazing to have someone say I didn't really think much of myself or my self-esteem was

not good and now I know what I can do and I want to thank you. I mean that's just like so amazing to know that you've really touched someone's life, that you've made a difference, such a positive thing! Oh my gosh!

Km Who started the scratch the cat tradition?

Nh Oh, okay, so you want me to elaborate on that. It was actually Phil Barnekoff's idea. He had graduated from Cleveland High School in Portland and it was a tradition that they had there. It was Nick the Nickel because they were the Cleveland Indians and I guess there was an Indian on the nickel or something. I don't know was it an Indian head penny? I don't know, I think it was called Nick the Nickel, anyway, he talked to me about that and I thought that just sounded awesome. We were looking for new traditions and it's so important to have something started at the very get go that can be continued. Every one of our varsity Metro League wins could be represented by scratching the cat. At every pep assembly we would have we would have them go out there and make a mark, whichever team had won, and make a mark then kids who hadn't been there for it would learn about it and maybe they would come back or their kids would end up going here and look at those marks and know that some of them that they saw or were a part of the team. That was just kind of a way of charting their athletic successes.

Km What were some of the community outreach projects that you did?

Nh Well, let's see. And where are my bifocals? Well, one of the things that we did is at Christmas time a Christmas tree lot manager had been beaten up with a baseball bat by some kids from Hilhi. He underwent a lot of different brain surgeries and he was going through physical therapy, it was just devastating. It seemed like we needed to do something to off set the negative press as well as the negative feelings. That was just horrific to us that young kids would do something like that. We wanted the community to know that that's not indicative of students in this community. It was an attempt to balance the feedback that they were getting on students, to make them realize that not all kids are that way. And most kids are compassionate, and caring, and giving. The kids wanted to do it. We had this barometer thing that showed how much money we were making and it was collected in all of the classes. Kids just felt absolutely energized about doing something for a human being who obviously deserved it. I really that that was important, that our kids, you know it wasn't just our leadership kids, but it was the kids in the school

knew we were making a difference in our community. I hope that a lot of them will continue in that arena and keep that part of their life, to know that every person should serve. We're put on this earth for a purpose and I think one of our purposes should be giving to other people. Okay, so we did the Richard Underwood. Oh, we did canned food drives and we actually won the competition in the spring and collected more cans of food than any other high school had ever done. We got this big trophy and they came out and awarded it. That was pretty exciting because we had three classes and we're going against schools that are four classes. They were just energized over our participation and the kids just felt good. It was kind of in lieu of not having those sports teams that you could rally around because not having a real varsity team we just didn't have that positive thing. But, boy we could sure come a long way with all those service things. Oh, and we made the baskets at Thanksgiving time. I think it was something like twenty-eight of those. We were driving a long time. We made care packages for the veterans on Veteran's Day. They loved that and I get notes a lot on if we'd like to continue doing that. I already talked about the Senior Citizen's Tea. The kids did the Salvation Army ringing of the bell. We donated Christmas trees to the Women's Shelter. There was a lot of others but I'm 55 I don't remember them all.

Km What is this about a banner that showed the most school spirit on here?

Nh Oh, that was a tradition that was started in the first year and I got a woman in the community that was an absolute fantastic seamstress. She made this amazing banner that we would be able to give out every year to the class that showed the most spirit. What we had done during that year was we kept track spirit points. Points at the assembly for spirit, who makes the most noise, we also did counts at like the play. If the seniors had the most kids that went to the play they got I think it was five, three, one, and zero was how we did it, how we gave out the points. We did this in attempt of not just getting people to support the athletic teams, but getting them to support other things. We did a count of club involvement and we got the total number of students involved in the clubs and we did a count of who had the most students involved in clubs. We tried to come up with as many ways as we could to award these points that would make the kids feel like they wanted to be part of and participate and make the kids that are in different things, like that are in the choir, know that we look as that as important as a track meet or something. And so we gave points for who came to those. That first year it was awarded to the

freshman class, so the class of 2001. This is a great banner and it's still in the counseling center and you can see it there. I've talked to a lot of the kids and I'm hoping that it will be given out next year. Cause I think that that's...we talk about our spirit as...come see, come saw. If we want to do something to build it up there is nothing like a good competition to help booster spirits.

Al What would you say helped influence you a lot in all your accomplishments and achievements?

Nh What has influenced me? Well, my parents. Obviously, I think parents even if they're a negative influence, influence you. But my parents were pretty incredible individuals. They were a great balancing act. My mom was incredibly intelligent, and very well read, and very articulate, and very artistic. And my dad was an amazing athlete and so I kind of had a balance there, I would say. My personal philosophy. I just think you need to live a life of purpose; you need to know what you want to do with life. I always tell my kids don't just flounder, don't tread water, do something with your life, go some place, see something, do something, be something, make the best choices for yourself. So my personal philosophy, I know I'm a person that has an amazing sense of integrity, and I would never compromise that. That's very important to me. Just understanding the value of all human beings. I think every human being has a purpose. I've just felt very fortunate to be in a capacity where you do get to be there to help influence that. Most of my accomplishments are athletics. Because I was a very serious athletic my entire life, from the time I was six until I was twenty-one. I went to school on an athletic scholarship and I had twelve varsity letters in college. I had national swimming records. Then, as an adult, I competed in triathlons for six years and I was nationally ranked for six years. I think it's probably pretty hard to find someone who is as competitive as I am. It's a real fierce thing that I have. A gun goes off and something goes off in me. I just love to see what I can do, I love to push myself to my absolute limits, I love to see what those are. When I was in swimming and when I was in track, I was always a sprinter. I know I have a lot of fast twitch muscle fibers, so naturally that should have been what I did. But as an adult, getting into triathlons, you can train yourself to be a distance athlete even though naturally you're not. I put in the time and energy to do that. In the summers I would bike twenty-five, fifty miles a day, I would swim one to two, and I would run six to ten. And I would do that every day.

Km And you didn't drop dead!

Nh No, I didn't drop dead! I would get in a competition and I would just want to see what I could do. The funny thing was is my husband and I used to bike together because triathlons too. Well, there was no way I could keep up with him on a bike, I mean, just no way. But in a triathlon, I would kill him on a bike. I would beat him in swimming, of course, in running, I was faster, but biking, when we would go for bike rides, he would always beat me. But in a triathlon, because it was a race, even my spilt time of the bike was considerably faster than his. And my husband was a very competitive athlete, he played professional football. I don't know, there's something about a competition and I just want to see what I can do. The real exciting thing about doing triathlons, for me, was the head. Seeing the psychological aspect of it, because when you are a sprinter, there's just not time to really run a real in your head. But when your competing in a triathlon, that's going to last a little over two hours...I did international distance, I never did the Iron Man distance, those were called sprint triathlons, they were a mile swim, twenty-five mile bike, and a ten k, six point two mile run. But it gave you the chance to really explore your body and your mind and I absolutely love that because I found out I was so tough. I know I was tough physically, but I found out just how tough I was mentally. That was awesome! So anyway, my mom and my dad!

Km Do you have anything else that you what to tell us?

Nh That I want to tell you? Well, I would say for anyone who wants a profession that they will love every day. Well, I guess not anyone, but I think teachers are so fortunate because you are constantly energized by your students, you are constantly in awe of them, you learn so much every day. I just can't think of another thing you could do in your life that you would get more positive coming back to you. I think teaching is the greatest profession. I'm very happy that I chose it. Do you know when I decided to be a teacher?

Km No.

Nh I was in the fourth grade. I walked into a gym and it was the first time that I had ever had a PE teacher. We hadn't had a PE teacher. I walked in the gym and there was this guy and he starts telling us about PE and what we're going to do. I'm like oh, this is what I'm going to do. I

remember marching home from school at the end of that first day and telling my mom and dad that I was going to be a PE teacher. It's that amazing? I mean I never changed, I mean I knew that's what I wanted and I just stayed true to the course. And it's so funny because when you hear about freshmen in college, I think it's that they'll change their major five times before they graduate? I never changed my major once from the fourth grade! And I haven't regretted it, so I'm very lucky that way.

Al What were your parent's reactions went you told them you wanted to be a PE teacher?

Nh They thought that would be great! My dad was an athletic director and a coach. My mom had wanted to be a teacher. It was kind of the blending of both of them I think they thought. Already by then I was an athlete and they knew that. It's nice to be an athlete and a PE teacher instead of some non-athletic person trying to teach PE. They believed I would and they supported that. And that's the way my parents were. I could say something totally off the wall and well, you could explore that. I remember coming up with a cure for cancer once, it was so stupid, my mom-well, you know that's really interesting.

[Tape cuts off at this point, sorry]