

Transcript of interview with Julie Browne by Karen Lillywhite May 20, 2003

What is your background regarding Century and what has been your involvement, or role, during this school year?

What do you mean by background?

Like, um, in the past years what have you done- were you on the planning committee, or did you come here in later years?

Uh, I came the third year Century was open, I was their third activities director in three years. What was the second part of the question?

Um, and, what involvement?

Okay, uh, I've been the activities director for four years. Uh, I've helped with graduation for three, I've been the dance team coach for three, uh, and just generally helping out, you know, with other parts of my job: model united nations is something that I help Miss Hamilton with for our freshman block. We've been doing our freshman block for three years. Just helping with senior activities, dances, pep assemblies, other parts of my activities job too.

So, in general, how does this school year compare to other school years you've experienced here or in other places?

I would say this school year has been, uh, pretty stressful, but also pretty exciting. Uh, I think that the stressfulness from this year comes from budget cuts- not knowing when we'd have cut days, not knowing, ya know, if we'd have one day a week off, or if the days would be cut at the end of the year. Personally stressful I think just financially- ya know, I'm a single, younger teacher trying to live on my own and have had to get a part time job. But exciting at the same point personally for me because this is the first class at Century High School who I've known all four years- their first year at this school was my first year. So I think that's pretty exciting to see where some of these seniors started and how much they have grown since then, as well as to see how much I've grown as a teacher. My first year here was my second first year at a school- I taught in Salem before that and uh sometimes it's a little stressful knowing the norms of the school: meeting and learning the ways of a new administration. So I think just maybe the last year and this year I really feel like, um... I think the last couple years I've just felt comfortable here and that I'm a big part of this school and what I do is good for the kids I guess.

For you, what have been the high points of this school year, or what do you think have been the high points for other people, in general?

Probably the first thing that comes to mind is the success of the dance team. The first year that I coached we decided to back up and not compete at all, just to kind of

recreate and restructure who that team was. And last year when we went to state, all we wanted to do was to make it to the second round. And then this year we just, we really wanted to bring a trophy home and so I think, I think that how quickly they improved as well as how successful they were coming in second place was personally exciting for me and really rewarding because I took over the job of dance team not wanting to commit for a really long time and then I just found it really rewarding and again exciting to work with a different group of students other than the kids I work with in the classroom, or the kids I have on student government. To coach, you work with kids in an entirely different way so that's pretty exciting and pretty rewarding. Other high points, uh, ya know, I would say this week in general. We've been wanting to use the USO theme for Jagfest for a couple years and we thought this year was our year and then kind of last minute needed to take what we had in terms of props and the decorations and create a new theme and that was scary and stressful. And I think that the Jagfest assembly ended up being really good and picking a theme like Austin Powers was really um, was a theme that the students could connect with and so I think it was entertaining for kids in a different way. Um, other high points... Again, I just think looking at the seniors I have on student government and seeing how much they've grown since their freshman year, as well as involving kids that haven't been involved in leadership. Charles Oglesby, for example, did a great job on assemblies this year and he hadn't been involved in leadership before. I think he did a really great job. Model United Nations I had mentioned before- again, something that we weren't sure if we were gonna be able to do because of the budget and so, uh, we cut it down to two days, moved it earlier in the school year so we could get it done, and I think that was, again, really successful. Seeing that kids, and I have nothing to do with this, but seeing kids from the PAK2 CAM take on the silver grad assembly as opposed to the administrators bringing in speakers, having Century students organize that and show that that's important, I think is great. I don't know, this year's a hard year because we knew going into it that at the end of the year, ya know, in a matter of a few days now, that we would lose a significant portion of our staff and student body, and uh, I think the amount of class and dignity that the teaching staff has carried on throughout the year is very telling of who works in the Hillsboro school district and, ya know, more importantly who works at Century High School, because I think we've all had to deal with a lot whether it's financially or not knowing where we'd be or not knowing if we'd teach more or less or if we'd actually teach our content area, and so I think, I think a really high point for me is just looking at the people who I work with and really acknowledging them as pretty cool individuals really, full of class and integrity. And so that makes me feel good for working at our school.

How would you describe the morale this year among faculty, students, administration, whatever?

It's hard, uh, again I think one of the goals for our teaching staff was that we wanted to carry on with the school year without it- regardless of what happened, whether positive or negative, we wanted to make sure that the kids ended the school year on a positive note and that they felt that we did the best we could with what we had. And we tried to keep politics out of the classroom, and sometimes that happened and sometimes it didn't. I think this year has taught me a big lesson on how much you protect the kids and

you don't share with them, and also the necessity to keep students informed, especially my student government members. I don't know, morale's been really low. It's hard not to feel angry or frustrated with the state of the economy and whether or not the federal or state government is going to fund education, I think that's really sad. And so, because of that I think teachers have tried to fight the good fight in terms of getting what we need but also making sure that we're providing what's best for kids. So, it's been a hard year. I would hope, though, that especially this year's seniors are leaving on a positive note. I would hope that they felt good about what they did this year, and then their past high school career. I don't know, it's been hard, it's been hard. I've tried personally to stay positive and to stay focused and just try to get the kids through.

Who are some key people that you think have really made a difference at Century this year, and how have they done that?

Ya know, I really look at some more seasoned teachers who have been around a lot longer than I have and are just really incredible people. Kristy Duyckinck is so well deserving of the Spirit of the Century award. She does amazing things and honestly I think she's the most intelligent person I know. And so I think, as a friend, and as a colleague, and as someone I respect, I'm just really glad to have her in the building. She does amazing things in the classroom with kids. This project, for example, is so integral to creating the culture of our school and documenting what has happened and how we're growing. I just really, I really respect her, and she handles herself with class. And not only does she do great things in the classroom, but she also, from a union perspective, really helps keep teachers educated about politics and what's going on and what could affect us and she's so well-spoken and I just, I really admire Kristy Duyckinck. I will be sad to lose Gary Morton in the English department. I also really respect what he does in the classroom and how he treats students and having grown up in Hillsboro I wish that I would have taken a class from Gary Morton. He wasn't at Glencoe when I was there, but he's an amazing, amazing teacher and he is here to teach kids first and I think that shows on a daily basis. When I talk to his students, I think, as the activities director, it's only sad that the kids, having asked him every year, never got him to do a graduation speech, because I think he would have been really effective and really successful and the kids would have really enjoyed that. Who else? I saw Allan Schmertzler does some art exhibits with his personal artwork, and I saw his first exhibit this year and that was amazing to me. He's in the social studies department but also the art department and I've seen some of his sketches but never before seen a collection of his work. It's neat to have such interesting people on our staff- someone who teaches fulltime but also is an artist and does amazing work. I think he's doing great in the classroom. I think the people I admire are people who I really respect for a variety of reasons and I think- if there are three people who I really think are doing a great job at our school it would be Allan and Kristy and Gary.

What do you see as the impact of cutting seventeen days off of the school year this year?

In the classroom I'm sad that... I mean it completely slaughtered my Romeo and Juliet unit and that's one of my favorite units and uh, ya know, to get freshmen into

Shakespeare is a bit of a challenge and so I'm sad that some of my curriculum was cut. In terms of student government we're not able to bring the year to as clean of a close as we would have liked. Something that we took on this year were school improvement projects and there are a lot of my kids who will have to come in the next few weeks to paint walls in the gym and plant, like you know, landscaping in the courtyards and all these amazing things that they had planned that will have to be finished after school's out and I'm just sorry that they have to come in on their own time and finish those things. I just, I hope the seniors are not feeling like they have been disserved at all: grad party sales are way down and I think the seniors are just, with all the turmoil and the stress and the cut days and whatever else, I think the seniors are just really ready to get out of here and it's sad because you shouldn't- as much as everyone is ready to graduate when they graduate you shouldn't have to be pushed out, ya know a couple, or a few weeks early. I think that seniors will leave school on Friday, attend their prom, and really be finished. And so it will be interesting to see how many people actually show up for graduation and will walk. I think some parents will have some hands in- yes you *will* walk at graduation. But I just think to have those events a couple weeks later is not quite, doesn't quite create the feeling as, ya know, getting out of school and then graduating and then... I just think the seniors are being rushed and that's sad to me.

So, being involved in the activities of the school so much, heading them, how would you describe the school spirit of the students at Century this year, as well as the staff?

I don't know, I don't know... This year's seniors are an interesting class, and I think we have felt that way for all four years. I think who the leaders in this school are play a key part in the school spirit and then that was only jeopardized by the element of politics and school funding. I don't know, I think morale plays a big part in school spirit, so I'm glad that I had a handful of kids who really wanted to push forward and keep doing positive things. We had to fight to keep the rest of our assemblies and some of the Jagfest activities. I think we're disappointed that we didn't get to keep everything but that's all right. Hopefully things like Javalava and Jagapalooza will have a strong comeback next year. I don't know, I wouldn't say that school spirit is completely hurting, but we're still a very young school and so I think a part of not having a really solid, solid enriched lots of history kind of tradition as well as everything that happened this year hurt us a little bit. But I don't think that, you know, I think this year kinda, I dunno how to finish that statement, I just, I think it hurt us a little bit, but, you know, the kids still had their pep assemblies, they still did what they wanted to do. I think it's okay, I just think morale affected some of the activities and some of what we wanted to get done.

The budget cuts and measure 28 have been a big part of everyone's lives that's involved in schools this school year, so if you were on the school board, what would you do in terms of budget cuts, and if you had to make budget cuts, where would you make them?

You know, if I was on the school board I think I would be writing letters to the state government and doing probably... gosh... Trying to create the same projects that the students who are involved in, you know, the SAFFE group: Mike O'Neil, DeCruz, Ian Atkins over at Glencoe. I think I would be trying to create some of the same activities

among adults. I don't know, I'm a firm believer that, I don't feel like our community is as educated as they should be. I said that to the kids months ago. I also said, what are you gonna do kids, because as student leaders I think your student body's looking to you to do something about this, even though the outcome may be out of your hands, I think education is key. I don't know, I, gosh I'd be prayin for some state funding. I'm not quite sure why, when Beaverton and Multnomah, when Beaverton as well as Multnomah County, I'm not quite sure when they're having a vote on an option tax why Washington County is not, why Hillsboro is not, that baffles me. I don't know, I do think though as much as, maybe we should have made some plans earlier on, I think because we did have cut days this year in the great amount that we had, we will be better off, or at least I hope, we will be better off next year. I think if the option tax doesn't pass in Beaverton they will be far worse than we are right now. But I also think that, from a political standpoint, our district will be, and I don't wanna misuse this word but, from a political standpoint, our district will be intelligent where they make the cuts that people will really feel. So I think where there, where Mr. Webb in athletics have, has already seen and been planning for cuts, there may be another round of cuts that will hit athletics. Why would that be a smart decision for the school district? It's not my opinion, but from a political standpoint, that's where people will gripe, and that's where people will push for something to be done. From a, you know, a larger perspective, I think that's where people will feel it. Those are the kids who are involved in schools, those are also often the parents who are involved in schools. And so that's where I think our school district will, that's where they'll cut because that's where they'll see a larger reaction and parents will kind of buck up and fight for funding for our schools. Next year could be a really expensive year for kids who are involved and I think that that's really sad but, but hopefully, you know, because of what we've experienced this year we'll be in better shape for next year. So I don't know if I was an adult on the school board I don't know what I would do. I don't know what I would do differently. I'm in an odd position because I'm in the schools, and those people, for the most part, are not. And so, my answer could be, possibly, different than theirs is, I don't know.

So, with all these problems, who do you think has been affected worst by them?

I don't know, uh, I don't know if, and I, it could sound really bad, but I don't know if all kids are mature enough to see what a bad situation this is. I think some kids, as well as some adults, parents for example, don't understand how bad it is to cut this many days. It worries me a little bit. Tell me the question again?

Who has been affected the worst by the problems this year?

Selfishly, I would say teachers. But that's because I am where I am, and like I said, I had to get a part-time job. It's a disservice to kids though. And I don't think that as many kids understand that as they should, but, you know, in the future it's worse for kids. You know, adults, we can take care of ourselves, we'll do what needs to be done. But I think ultimately my answer would have to be kids, although my immediate reaction would be, just because I'm a teacher and I'm experiencing it, I'd say, oh gosh, me, but I think it's kids.

Kind of finished now, so if you have any more comments, things that you wanna throw in, that you wanted to say but didn't really get a chance?

As much as even my interview, or, you know, kind of what we've experienced the last couple weeks of school, or the last few months of school, I think it's important to remember that this year wasn't all about the budget. We still did amazing things. Ya know, kids went to districts, and state in so many athletic events, we've got so many kids going to nationals this summer- for drama, and for leadership, and for speech. I just think it's key to remember that this year was much more than budget cuts and teacher layoffs and redistributing the teachers in the Hillsboro school district in opening Liberty. Century is still an amazing place and I don't think that that should be overshadowed by the negative. And I think that's just my personality, ya know, try to focus on the positive and get where you need to go, uh, but let's just remember that this year wasn't all gloom and doom and budget cuts and lack of money. We were, as, Century High School as a whole, still able to do amazing things and for that we should be proud.