

Susan Guiger

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of century high school. The interviewee is Susan Guiger. The interviewer is Sarah Smith. The interview took place at 8:15 on Wednesday, May 22, 2002.

*What was your first involvement at CHS?*

Well I was involved from the very beginning. I was lucky enough to move over to this school from Hilhi. Mr. Barnekoff, who was the original principal here, when he was appointed as the principal at CHS and I heard that, I knew that I wanted to come and work here because he was my principal at Hilhi and he was the kind of person that just inspires you so if he had been opening even an old school, I would have applied to come to the school just to work with him. So my very first involvement was just to make sure that he knew that I was interested to come and be the registrar at Century, which was what I did at Hilhi from 1990 to 1997, when I came to CHS. That is where my first interest started. Actually, when I started working at Hilhi it was Mr. Barnekoff's first year as principal there as well, and I was one of the first people he hired there, so we worked together all those years. There were a lot of staff members (Mrs. Duyckinck) that are here now that were also with him at Hilhi that felt the same way I did, that really wanted to be a part of this. Like I said I think I would have followed him just about anywhere. He is that kind of guy. As far as working on the new school - I still think of it as a new school even though this is the fifth year, because in the history of schools that's still pretty new - when we opened in 1997, it was exciting because Mr. Barnekoff made it real clear to the entire staff that he saw really great things for this school. He was looking for people who would be innovative and creative, in terms of being willing to move to a different kind of schedule. We all knew that that was his vision and .... I think that when he interviewed people for staff positions, that was what he was looking for - people who were willing to change and grow and be a part of something really new and exciting. So the people - the staff - who opened the school had a feeling of something really wonderful starting - and it was scary, because it was so much work. When we came into this building it was empty, essentially. We came in and made it what it is and kind of faked it as we went along. Some of the things we did, we kind of learned the hard way and took a different approach. Mr. Barnekoff is the kind of person who values the input of everybody on the staff, and when he was working with the architects on the design of the building, he would take the design to the different people - for example, the design for the library, he would take to the librarian to look at, and say "you're the expert here, tell me what we need to do to improve this." He brought me the plans for the registrar's office - it was part of the whole administration office set-up - he said, "I want you to look at this, and tell me what we can do to make it better." He just honored each of us in that he respected that we were the experts in what we needed for our work space, and how we would work together, rather than him making the decisions and not including us in the process. So because of that, we all felt that we all contributed, not only to the design of the building, but just the over-all feeling of being a valuable contributor.

*So, do you think the vision [of Century] has been realized?*

I do, absolutely. The very first year that we had school here, we were on a traditional schedule –the same eight period day at Hilhi and Glencoe- because Mr. Barnekoff thought we can't do everything the first year, we've got to work our way into some of these changes. The biggest change was our block schedule the second year. Now, you're a junior, right? So you've only been on a block schedule here at Century. You didn't know what it was like before. It was a big change -kids heard things about ninety minute periods, and they thought they were just going to be so bored and the day was going to drag- there were all these fears that people have when there is change, and that's a normal thing. The staff was that way too –even though most of the teachers were in favor of going to a different kind of a schedule- any time you have a change it creates fear and concern. Once you really start doing it you realize –hey this isn't so bad. In fact people started liking it because there were some real advantages. The first year went really well because it was exciting to be in a new building, the kids did really well for the most part although there was still a lot of the Hilhi vs. Glencoe kind of rivalry. Some of the kids that came here didn't want to come here because they thought they would be spending their high school careers at their home high schools that their brothers and sisters had gone to. Some of them weren't to sure about being at Century, but it didn't take long before the kids started feeling like they were part of being a Jaguar. That took a while though, it always does. So the second year, the big change was the block schedule. My biggest contribution, I think, has been how I was able to help implement the block schedule. The administrators and Mr. Barnekoff –he knew how he wanted to look, and the staff talked about different options. Some schools that are on a block schedule do all their classes every other day or they do all their classes every day. They don't have the combination like we do here at Century. We have a very unusual kind of block schedule. It's very unique. Sometimes it makes it difficult for the kids to get all the classes they want because there are more conflicts in terms of they scheduling process. But –because some classes do better every other day, and some classes need to be every day depending on what kind of class it is. For example, music needs to be all year. There are a lot of classes that need to be run on a full year basis that can't just be done in one semester. So, those departments were able to say, 'we need to have class every day' or 'we need to have class every other day'. Again, it was that feedback that people were able to give that helped made it what it is today. My part of it was to deal with the computer end of things. When they told me 'we need to have a schedule that looks like this' no one had thought of how that would look on a computer and how we would get the computer to help us do the scheduling for students. So, I did a lot of research, and figured out that we could do a five period day with A and B days. The first time you looked at your schedule when you were a freshman, I don't know what you thought –'this is weird' 'Why do I have two lunches?' things like that- but how long did it take you to figure that out? Very quickly. The kids actually caught on quicker than some of the staff because some teachers have to teach a different set of classes on A day than on B day. It is [very confusing] when you first get started, but then you just get used to it, just like anything, you adjust. So working on the block schedule for the first time with Mr. Barnekoff was very challenging. He was a wonderful teacher in terms of how to build a schedule. So between his expertise in what the staffing needs needed to be and my expertise with the computer, we put something together that really worked well. It was exciting to see how that all came together. Each year we have kind of perfected it more and more. We have

teachers who are team teaching, we have these freshman teams, next year we are going to have junior teams. We are going to have an advanced junior block, a regular junior block –it seem that every year they get a little more creative on how they want to teach things.

*Was that something that they saw from the very beginning that they wanted to happen? The initial vision?*

Yes. The integrating team concept has been the vision all along –not only for Mr. Barnekoff, but also for Ms. Montgomery. When she became Principal, that was very important to her –that these learning communities be built. What has been difficult, and has really hindered Century High school, has been our enrollment numbers. Because we are so overcrowded, it hasn't allowed us to have –for example the classroom space is a big issue. For some of the teachers who have wanted to work together there haven't been enough classrooms available during all periods of the day for that to be happening, and so, you know it is one thing to have a vision for something, but then there is the practicality of our building of being so overcrowded. One of the things that has happened with working on the teacher's schedules each year – and each year it has gotten worse because there are more and more students- we would have, for example: we might figure out that AP history should be second period, then you look at the other classes that are already taking place during second period and there may not be a classroom available so you have to move something out of second period to, lets say fifth period. That doesn't mean it is best for the kids, because there is more conflicts. So, if we had all the classrooms that we needed and all the space that we needed, we would have the schedule running a lot smoother. So next year after Liberty opens we are going to loose probably one third of our students to Liberty. That's a big chunk. We are going to go from 2100 students down to 1400 or 1500 students. Even though that is going to be really hard for people because you have this change thing going on again and you are going to have people who don't want to go. We will have an easier time scheduling the remaining students, because we will have more classroom space and it will be easier to resolve the scheduling conflicts that we have now.

Now, your in AP history, what other advanced classes are you taking this year?  
*AP English, Physics, Pre Calculus, and Symphonic band.*

Were there any classes that you were hoping to get that you didn't get this year?

*Well, I always sign up for art, but it never fits into my schedule. Neither does the choir I waned.*

It's probably because of all those classes you are taking that are offered only once. They block out a whole period and restrict what electives you are allowed to take. Now here's what is interesting –and most kids don't think about this- even though you are frustrated that you didn't get all the classes you wanted, you are still getting more classes here at Century than you would be getting at either of the other high schools. You can get up to eight credits every year because you have four academic periods each semester. At Hilhi and Glencoe you can only earn six credits each year. They get six credits plus a study hall or a campus pass. Now, our kids are getting kind of spoilt, because they are thinking 'oh shoot, I wanted to take this and this and this and I didn't get it all' –well you are still getting more than kids at traditional schools. Liberty, Hilhi, and Glencoe are all going to be on trimesters –that is a block schedule that is different than our block schedule. Our block schedule is four academic periods a day that are ninety minutes each. The trimester schedule is five academics periods a day that are seventy

minutes each. So, you are not in class quite as long, and you have a fifth class, but you take seventy minutes every day for one trimester from September to November is the first trimester so they will be in those five classes seventy minutes every day, not every other day. At the end of that grading period they will get one half credit for each of the five classes. The second trimester is from about December to February and the last trimester is from about March to June. So the grading period is divided into thirds instead of fourths like we have ours. It is very different, but it still gives those kids more opportunities, because they can earn seven and one half credits every year with those five academic periods a day. The big question is whether the district will require Century to change over to the trimester schedule the year after next so that all the schools will be on the same grading schedule. There is a lot of interesting discussion about that. We have been promised we can have the same schedule we have now for next year. Next year is going to be a challenge because we will have even more students than we did this year. If you thought it was crowded this year, well it is going to be just as bad if not worse. Then, with the opening of Liberty, it will drop off. When you graduate you will have the biggest class Century will see for a long time. Hopefully it will take the population a number of years to build up like this again.

*So, what exactly was the greatest satisfaction you have had working at Century?*

I think it was helping to create the block schedule. It is something that people don't realize how complex the whole thing is. In fact, I'll show you the room where we do the planning for how the teachers schedules and room assignments are worked out. I'll show you what the board looks like, and I think that will explain to you how complex it is.

Mr. Barnekoff created this vision for Century, and it absolutely has been realized, and Ms. Montgomery has done a wonderful job of continuing that and allowing people to be creative and innovative. At this school there are so many staff members who do such a good job at making it unique and special. I mean, how much better could that assembly [Jagfest] have been on Monday? That is an amazing thing, all the effort that goes into making this a special place for students. The sad thing, for me, is the students who don't appreciate it and don't realize how hard everyone here works to make it all worthwhile. But that's true at any school, not just here.

*How about the culture of CHS, the relations among the staff. How would you describe that?*

Definitely very diverse. We have a very, very diverse population of students at this school, certainly more so than at the other two schools. And I think that has made it stronger. I think that all the students coming from different cultures, different backgrounds –I don't know how connected they feel because I'm not a student, I can't imagine how you guys feel. I like the fact that there seems to be a real effort for people to be incorporated into the whole community here. And I know that the teachers work real hard on that too. And I think that there is overall a real acceptance of differences among the staff members too. Classified and certified staff here, I think work very well together. I think there is a good relationship between classified and certified. I'm a classified employee, but I have never felt that the administrators have not been completely supportive of me and other classified employees who have key roles at this school. There is a lot of respect and appreciation that they do show for what we do. Because everybody in this school works really hard- every single thing is so important. Consider how hard

those people in attendance work every day and all the kinds of things they deal with – the health assistant- I mean, you could just go down the line every single person here works really hard. And part of that is, we are understaffed. We don't have enough people to do all the work. And next year, we've actually lost some positions because of the budget being cut. It's going to be harder for everyone next year because we don't have as much help, and we have more students. So you have fewer employees doing more work than we do this year, and that's true district wide, all the schools have had to cut staff. I'm really hoping that Oregon gets its education funding worked out one of these days. It's frustrating.

*Are there any historic events you participated in?*

Oh, well I have this, I'll show this to you. I saved this because this marks a special day. The day this school was dedicated. It's just a little ribbon that we all got, and I always saved that because you know – it was really a privilege to be a part of the initial staff here at Century. When Mr. Barnekoff retired, we surprised him by naming the auditorium after him at his retirement. He didn't know that was going to happen. He had to retire earlier than he expected to, and I know that was really hard for him to do that. When he made the decision to retire, at the last assembly of that school year he was honored at an all school assembly. He didn't know that the auditorium was being named in his honor. They had this big great sign that showed Phil Barnekoff auditorium that they presented to him. And he is a very emotional anyway. Do you know him? Oh, well, he is this huge man that's like a big teddy bear, and you look at him, and you might be scared of him because he is so big -he's a weight lifter- but he has the softest sweetest heart, and the kids loved him. Phil Barnekoff's name is all over this building –in more ways than one- I mean, he is the heart and soul behind this building. Mrs. Duyckinck knows what I'm talking about too. She is another one who would have gone anywhere and worked for Phil. There is a certain group of us that worked together at Hilhi, and we still have kind of a bond because we all came over with Mr. Barnekoff. We knew what it was going to be like to work with him, but all the other people that came over from the other schools also found out really quickly how special it was to be here. So, its been great, it really has.

*Thank you*

Your welcome. I'm going to take you in and show you that board.