

AL 91

Interviewee: Tommy Tomlinson

Interviewer: Jeff Charbonnet

Date: July 29, 1987

C: Could you tell me about your background and how you came to be employed at the school board of Alachua County?

T: Jeff, I went to two years of junior college up in Tennessee. I came to the University in mid-term of 1950, and I graduated in February of 1952. I had a degree in physical education with a minor in the broad field of social studies. Back then you could take a thirty-six-hour block, and you could teach everything from psychology to economics and all the histories and geographies. I presume it is still that way. I graduated in 1952, but I could not find a job anywhere. We were expecting our first child, so we took off for Tennessee to sponge off my mother-in-law. I was up there two days and got a job teaching. That kind of fell in my lap. I did that the rest of the year.

Then I came back to Florida and started over in Lafayette County in August [1952] as a teacher/coach in the Mayo, Florida, in Lafayette County. I stayed there for three years. I started working on my master's immediately when I went over there, so I commuted to Gainesville for three years on Monday nights, working on my master's. I got to within one course of receiving my master's when we moved to Gainesville. That was a good thing.

I came to Gainesville to become a millionaire in the field of insurance. I worked three days--I thought I would give it a fair chance. I missed education, so I went back into teaching. This was in 1955. I was a science and social studies teacher at the first junior high school in Alachua County, which was Buchholz Junior High School. It was in the old Gainesville High building down on West University Avenue.

C: That is what they used to call "Ole Buchholz."

T: It is now a beautiful parking lot and office complex for Alachua General Hospital. This is the only brick I have out of that building. I spent eleven years there.

C: So the new GHS [Gainesville High School] on [U.S. Highway] 441 had just opened?

T: It opened in August of 1955; we opened the junior high. They wore that building out, stripped it, and moved out to the new building. We moved in there and started with seventh and eighth graders. We had about a thousand kids. Of course, the high school still had the ninth grade. It continued that way for several years. I spent three years as a teacher and coach there. I coached

basketball for junior high kids.

Then Mr. [W. S. "Tiny"] Talbot, who was the principal, was transferred to Gainesville High School. Sam Hendricks came in as principal, and Mr. Talbot recommended me as assistant principal. Mr. Hendricks hired me as his assistant, and I spent four years as his assistant there. Then we opened Howard Bishop Junior High School, which was a new building. Sam moved over there, and the board appointed me as principal at Buchholz. I stayed there two complete years and into April of my third year. Mr. Hendricks then moved to the district office, and the board moved me to Howard Bishop. I spent the rest of that year and all of the following year there. Finally, I moved to the district office, and I have been here ever since at one job or another at the district level. Since probably about 1966, I have been at the district level, which is roughly twenty-one or twenty-two years. I guess I have done everything at the district level. When I first came on board, I was administrative assistant to the superintendent.

C: That was Talbot at that time?

T: Yes, "Tiny" Talbot. I have been administrative assistant, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, deputy superintendent, and acting superintendent on two different occasions. I am starting my thirty-sixth year in education, thirty-three of which have been here in Alachua County. I would not have done anything else if I knew how. I really enjoy what I am doing. That is kind of my history up to this point.

I grew up in the big city of Hastings, which is over between here and Crescent Beach. Everybody knows where Hastings is because of the smell of the cabbage, and also because you have to go through there to go to the beach.

C: Were you a potato farmer's son?

T: No, but I was a potato farm worker. We did not have any money. We moved every time the rent came due. My dad was a carpenter, but I grew up with the crops and worked with them. My mother and sister still live over there.

C: A lot of the period that I was interested in asking you about is before you got here. I am not sure how much of that you would know. I have heard you, on occasion, talk about Howard Bishop and some of the things he did.

T: When I came to the district, the superintendent was Paul Peters. Paul had been a principal at Gainesville High School. The superintendent just prior to Paul Peters was Mr. Howard Bishop. Howard was a legend in Alachua County. He spent thirty-something years here in one capacity or another. He was a very

successful coach, a very successful teacher, and a role model for young people. Of course, there is a large family of Bishops here in Alachua County. They have an outstanding record of public service. They have been in government work, and they have been teachers, lawyers, and judges--there are all kind of Bishops here.

Howard was elected superintendent. One of Howard's dreams of being superintendent was to organize and revitalize the county's schools. He saw that there was a large number of small or fragmented, ineffective schools. In fact, there were almost seventy schools the term he served. When he got ready to run the second time, his platform was the consolidation of the schools of Alachua County. Most of the people who ran on that platform the first time back in those days got the fool beat out of them. Howard was no exception. Paul Peters came out and saw an opportunity to beat Howard, and he came in and ran on the opposite platform: "I will preserve all of your buildings, and we will keep your hometown schools," even though they did not have but three teachers and seventy-two kids. This was costing them three times as much to remain open.

C: But Peters had a political chord that got him results.

T: When you deal with politics, you do not necessarily have to be rational or right, as long as you are political. He was playing the music the people wanted to hear, and he defeated Howard. It was not a large defeat. I was not here at that time, but I do know from history that it was not all that dramatic.

Then, ironically, when Paul went into the office--he only served the four years--guess what he did immediately? He took Howard's platform that he was so opposed to and put it into effect. Therefore, when I came into the district, as Paul was going out, it was largely in place. We had a better school district. At that time, we had probably close to fifty schools, rather than seventy some-odd schools.

Of course, one of the things that Howard started during his last term was a bond issue to build the present Lincoln Middle School, the Santa Fe High School building, and the Gainesville High School building. Incidentally, to give you a comparison of cost, that bond issue was for \$3 million, and it built three high schools and some renovations to other buildings. If you were to duplicate Gainesville High School today, it would cost you in the neighborhood of between \$20 million and \$22 million. We opened an elementary two years ago, and we spent \$4.8 million on one elementary school. Back in 1953, we built three high schools with \$3 million. So everything is relative.

You might have noticed recently in the papers that two of our neighboring counties, Levy and Gilchrist, are facing this same decision. While I do not have

a lot of money, I would bet you ten bucks that although the majority of people in Levy County know that it is very ineffective to have a high school at Cedar Key, Williston, Bronson, and Chiefland, they will not approve consolidation. I have been in all of them and have served on the evaluation teams on all of them. The buildings are in poor shape. The classes are small. The programs are not broad enough, and the kids are not really getting a fair shake. But they are in "my hometown." I daresay that if you follow this ten years from now, they will still be in the same shape they are in today, with more additions and more patches and more portable buildings. Consolidation normally does not take effect the first attempt, and most of the time not the second attempt. Gilchrist County, which only has two schools, Bell and Trenton, will hold out even longer than Levy County.

- C: They are natural rivals of each other, and they are not going to want to get together.
- T: Like the superintendent in Gilchrist County said, "When you modern people show me that consolidation is better than what we are doing, I will be willing to listen. Meanwhile, we will stay where we are." Ray Thomas is pretty much speaking the sentiment of Gilchrist County.
- C: Are they still electing the superintendent over there?
- T: Yes. There are sixty-seven districts in Florida, fifteen of which have an appointed superintendent. By and large, most of them are elected.
- C: In a little while I want to talk about how we came to have an appointed one here in Alachua County. A lot of what Howard Bishop had to face, too, was that community sentiment. People who had graduated from the small high schools just felt that loyalty. They did not want their kids bused to a different school. They felt like their school was just as good, although it was small.
- T: There were little schools in places like LaCrosse, Rochelle, and Forest Grove. Of course, in the little town of Waldo there was the black school and the white school. The white school at that particular time had grades K through eight, but just a few years prior to that it had been K through twelve. You can imagine the metropolis of Waldo having K through twelve. The same was true at Micanopy. Then, too, there was Archer, Newberry, High Springs, and Alachua. Of course, no one was even dreaming about integration at that time. There was a high school at Mebane that was K-12. [A. L. Mebane is now a middle school. Ed.] Of course, Lincoln was 7-12. I do not recall whether there were, in any type of modern history, any black high schools besides Lincoln and Mebane. I believe those were the only two.

C: There was one called Douglas in Hawthorne.

T: Yes, but that goes way back.

C: I think it was there through the 1940s. Do you remember the days of the old special tax school districts, with their trustees in the schools? Do you remember what kind of things the trustees did? Did they have any useful function, or was that given over to the school board?

T: Having trustees was almost an honorary thing. In fact, when I came to Gainesville, they still had trustees in the schools. But they were on their way out.

C: Yes. There was only one countywide board of trustees by then. Up until 1947, there were eleven boards of trustees in this county.

T: Every district had one. Of course, you know what that enabled you to do. You could have pretty much the kind of system you could afford. Not necessarily the particular kind that you wanted, but the kind you wanted that you could afford. That was pretty much what you had. There is a two-story building in Newberry that, to my knowledge, is the last building I am familiar with that was built strictly with independent tax funds, from district money. Those people will tell you about it even today.

C: They really do like their school over there in Newberry. Both Bishop and Peters used a school survey as a tactic to try to get what they already wanted and to bring in state people to tell them the kinds of changes that they needed. There were surveys in 1947, 1951, and I think another one before they finally built the new high schools. But the plan was to build Santa Fe in the northwest, a new Hawthorne High in the east, then Gainesville High. The plan was for students in Newberry, High Springs, and Alachua to go into that new northwest county high school, and that caused a lot of hard feelings out there. Do you remember any of the goings-on involved with that?

T: What happened was that Santa Fe High School was supposed to be built at Forest Grove. If you will look at Forest Grove on the map, it is less than five miles from Forest Grove to Newberry, to Alachua, and to High Springs; it is centrally located. That is the way you often have to do these things--build them in a central location. If you do not, some people do not admit that they belong to them because they are a mile closer to you. This was not only a beautiful spot, but we already owned the property. Of course, we could have gotten as much property as we needed. So it was sold on the basis of this, of where the school was going to be built. Politics being what it is, it got involved, and late in the ball game the site got moved from there to [Highway] 441, where it is now. Well, if

you look on the map again, you will find out that it [Sante Fe High School] is two miles closer to Alachua than it is to High Springs, and, of course, it is thirteen or fourteen miles to Newberry. Well, Newberry said, "To hell with it. We are not going," and they did not go. Nobody forced them to go. Consequently, the old dilapidated building in Newberry continued K-12.

C: What role did W. M. Berry play in that?

T: Bill Berry was a legend in Newberry, and he is still a legend in Newberry. He must be 114 now.

C: I went out to talk to him. I stopped out at a little roadside store to ask where W. M. Berry lived, and they asked, "Junior or Senior?" I said Senior, and they showed me right to his house.

T: The funny thing is that Junior is no spring chicken himself. Bill Berry was on the board when I came to the district. Bill was and continues to be very influential in Newberry. He would not accept the new site for the high school, and he fought to keep the Newberry school open. Santa Fe High School opened serving Alachua and High Springs.

C: Was that typical of board members back then, rather than have a countywide outlook, to feel like they represented their community?

T: Back then, you had to live in a particular district to be elected. Not only that, once you were elected, the attitude was "90 percent of my efforts are going to be for that particular district. I will help you and scratch your back for some trade-offs to help you in your district." Yes, it was very much so. In fact, it is something that you have to work against all the time to keep a district from creeping back into that.

Of course, what changed it here in this county was that during the 1970s we had a board that voted to do away with any district. All five of you could live in the same house. Of course, we were told that it was not constitutional at the time, but we said we were going to do it anyway. We continued to do it for several years. During that several years, the philosophy was kind of eliminated that a representative was going to work only for his particular district, because it did not work that way.

The first thing we did was to draw new district lines. Of course, we made the mistake of aggravating some local political people later on. Then they used this and hit us over the head with it, even though that was not the main issue. It was a way to get back at us. Therefore, they beat us hands down in court. The board then had to go back to living in particular districts.

C: There were some pretty progressive people on that board at that time, were there not?

T: The two guys who really promoted and pushed it were Drs. Ben Samuels and William F. (Bill) Enneking. They did not feel like districts or a partisan election were really needed. You just said if you wanted to work for the school board, run and get elected. I think the really good thing about that time is that it did erase the fact that I am going home to work for my particular district. I can remember when we first came in here. You would actually have some things held hostage because if three or four happened to be irritated with a guy over in district five and he needed something, hell, he might not get it. I remember on one occasion lightning hit a pump and a well at a particular school, and the guy who lived in that district considered it an emergency. It needed fixed right now. He did not get it fixed until he came across with a couple of concessions that people were trying to get voted.

We would have board members come on the board who really did not know how the board operates. The standard joke was that it took about six months to turn you into a good board member, to teach you that it is not the way you thought it was when you ran. When you get in and see the total picture, sometimes it takes us a year. Then we have had one or two occasions that we never did make the person a board member; we never could turn them around. Most of the time, they would run on these platforms. We used to have people who ran on antiplatforms. They were mad at whoever was on the board or at somebody on the administration and decided to run, thinking, "Hell, I am going to run and get you straightened out." We do not have that so much. It is more of a give-and-take thing.

C: We had that antifellow here in the last campaign.

T: Yes, and that is a good example. I am always suspect of anybody that the only reason he thought about running is because somebody ruffled his feathers. If he was all that damn interested in education, why did he not run twenty years ago when he had no ax to grind? It seems to be something of an afterthought on their part. I am leery of people like that.

I do not know if you talked to Ed Simmons about that. Ed came on the board--Ed and I are still good friends--and his philosophy was if it was not good for Archer and Newberry, then the hell with it. That was just his philosophy. He was irritated with some people on the board, and I will say rightfully so. But once he got on the board and saw the broader picture, we have never had a better board member than Ed Simmons. He developed into a fine board member during the eight years. We had seven and a half months of good production out of Ed. It took us about six months to show him that we were all

on the same team and that we were not his enemy but his ally.

C: Well, the reason I came across him before I had even known that he had ever been on the board was that in the 1940s he had gone head to head with Howard Bishop trying to save Archer High School.

T: Yes, sir. I guarantee, even today, he would probably still fight for Archer High School. That is Ed's background. He figures there is not a damn good thing that happens in Gainesville. He feels there is too much electricity, too much jiving and loud music, they do not grow watermelons up here, and there is too much crime and corruption. When I would drive out to his farm, we would get into his jeep and ride around--hell, I am not so sure that he is not right. There is plenty of bird hunting and fishing, growing watermelons, and eating good. He has raised a nice family. I have had all his kids in school. He is the salt of the earth.

C: He talked to me at length about when he was on the board and how he looked out for and tried to protect parents's interests and things like that. That was his special intention, because he felt that the board had so often taken control of the schools away from the people. If they had a legitimate gripe, he wanted to go out of his way to try and get what they wanted.

T: Ed had a high antenna, meaning that he had developed a feeling in Alachua County that you could call him if you were frustrated and it did not seem like you were getting anywhere. You could call Ed. The reason I know you could call Ed is that he would call me and get after me. I knew how many phone calls he got, because I got them as soon as he was through with them. I was his contact at the district level. I had coached his son and son-in-law, and I had taught two of his daughters. In fact, Ed and I had coached together. We had coached the Babe Ruth teams together, and we had built up a relationship over the years. Then when I got in the district office, even before he was elected, Ed would call me, and then certainly ever since he got on the board. He had a high antenna.

He was an approachable guy; he would always get back with parents. But if I investigated something for him and gave him the facts and you had not leveled with him, he would scorch you. He would say, "Look. Do not bother to call me anymore." But if you were right, he would go to the wall for you.

C: Do you remember much about the Peters/Bishop campaign of 1952, when Paul Peters was able to defeat Howard Bishop? Of course, the bond issue kept coming up over and over again. One thing that has fascinated me that I have come across in my research was the big controversy between Peters and Buchholz over at GHS. Those two just could not get along. Buchholz had been around for so long, and apparently Bishop adored Buchholz and supported him

over Peters.

T: Bishop had worked under Buchholz for a number of years. Their relationship was not only professional, but they were personal friends. Paul was not the warm and personable guy that Howard was. Buchholz, now, was not all that warm. He was a very strict German educator--it was his way or wrong. He ran Gainesville High School with an iron hand, and he hired people that helped him do it that way.

During the campaign, when Paul was running for superintendent, there were some pretty tough issues there. Buchholz was the kind of guy that you felt like he was the principal. Just because you were the superintendent, that did not give you a hell of a lot of ability to tell him what to do. Of course, being a political thing, and since GHS was "the" high school, it was naturally an issue. There were student walkouts back before kids knew they could walk out. There was one in March of 1951. In fact, they sat out on the grass out in the front yard of the school. I was in college at that time.

C: There was an incident, a big fight, at a basketball game with P. K. Yonge in which some of the GHS students followed some of the P. K. Yonge students home and harassed them.

T: We had to stop the playing and to sever our relationship with P. K. Yonge.

C: Buchholz suspended all the students that were involved in it and proclaimed, "No more sports until you come back and apologize for what you did." And everybody else walked out.

T: I was at the University when that happened. Of course, being an education major, hell, every class that I would go to would have that incident as a topic of discussion. We would have to write a paper on it, we would have to go get an interview, kind of like what you are doing here. It was "on scene." We have some people that work for us who were students during that time.

Ironically, shortly thereafter I did my internship at the old Gainesville High building. I graduated in February of 1952, so you can see that I did my internship just prior to that. I was there November or December. Of course, the walkout had been in March just prior to that. I showed up as a real smart intern, knowing it all. We are here in the middle of an administrative change. I never did see my principal because he was busy having a nervous breakdown. In fact, he was never there the entire time I was there. He was actually in the hospital. The school was being run by Mr. Talbot, who was the assistant principal. I remember very expressly that we had 1,160 kids in grades seven through twelve.

C: The school was busting at the seams.

T: Busting at the seams, yes, and sitting there on about five acres of land. On that back playground were about two acres, and if a sprig of grass came up, they attacked it with a vengeance. I mean, a sprig of grass did not have prayer back there.

The place was heated with coal earlier. Back during the early years, they would take the seniors out back and spread them out to pick up cinders on those two acres of land, where physical education took place. You can go back there now and, if you can dig through all that asphalt, you will find cinders about a foot big.

C: It seems like Peters became excited after that happened. He was forced to resign from GHS after that because Bishop supported Buchholz instead of him, and I think he decided he did not want to go up against Howard on that.

T: Well, I think that was one of those antimotivation things that causes someone to run for politics.

C: Do you remember Dr. Hussey?

T: I do not remember him.

C: In that same election in 1952 is when Beth Pearson came on the board and defeated him. I have not found out much about that and how she was able to defeat him after all of his years on the board.

T: I do not know. Have you interviewed Mrs. Pearson?

C: No, not yet.

T: Mrs. Pearson is the epitome of a lady. She had the audacity to do this sort of masculine thing and run for anything like the school board. She was a community social leader and a well-respected lady. There was no cloud over her whatsoever. I do not know about Dr. Hussey. How long had he been a board member?

C: Twenty years.

T: You see, when you do that that long and get a good person coming out against you, you had better buckle up.

C: When there are people out there who are upset about you.

T: Particularly back in those years. There is an old adage in politics, particularly school politics, that as a superintendent or board member, you are going to irritate about 20 percent of the people every year. You do not want that number to be accumulative, see. But you will probably irritate 20 percent this year, and you re-recruit them and get them back under your wings. Then you piss off another 20 percent. But make it another group. Back then, board members were not paid a nickel. In fact, I doubt if those board members even got expenses.

C: I think they got travel, but that was it.

T: When I came here, board members were getting an unheard of \$100 a month. That was because of their travel. I think now they get paid \$13,000 to \$15,000. It is based on population, so it keeps moving up as the population does. When I came here, Bill Berry was on the board, Lester Hodge (a successful business man) was on, Beth Pearson came on, Ralph Stoudemeyer had just gone off as I came in, Hugh Williams from Hawthorne was on the board and stayed on it for many years, Willard Williams came on, Walt Ebling from Micanopy came on, and Jasper Joiner came on as a negative vote. Jasper had been a pretty good board member for a short period of time until his health failed. The board member make-up has really changed direction.

Once a month at 1:30 in the afternoon, we would be through. A long board meeting would take us until 3:00 or longer. These were businessmen, and they had things to do. Now we have two meetings a month, and sometimes we have to call a special meeting in between. The board members now are very involved and very active. All of them have high incomes. Even though they are busy and have other things to do, they spend a lot of time. Of course, back in the olden days, when we would elect the superintendent, there would be five board members that were elected. The superintendent would frequently take a much stronger stand on a particular issue than perhaps under the appointed system. He had to get re-elected, too, so he could not take an unpopular stand on something just because three board members wanted to do a certain thing.

C: Do you remember what role some of the people like Dr. Roe Johns [professor of education and head of administration and field service], Edgar Morfit, and some of those people at the University might have had in making reforms in the county? I know they were involved all over the state in this kind of stuff around that time. Do you remember their coming into Alachua County and trying support the superintendent or the board in the changes that they wanted to make?

T: Well, ironically, University people have not been all that popular coming into schools because they were always kind of suspect. We would use those quick

answers like "what do they know, coming out of that ivory tower?" Dr. Johns, as you know, is most widely remembered and known for the Minimum Foundation. He was a great proponent of consolidation, and he was a big pusher of the appointed superintendent. He would not get all that active locally; he would be more global. He wanted his influence to settle as much on Alabama, for example, as Gainesville, even though he spouted it from this area.

He spoke several times locally to business groups, wanting to move from the elected to the appointed superintendent. When we did the bond issue in 1969, he spoke. Of course, the way to ensure selling a bond issue is by giving everybody something. We promised them something, whether they needed it or not. The way we were going to swing Hawthorne was we were going to build them a new high school. We were going to swing Newberry the same way--build them a new high school. That was the way the bond issue was promoted and sold. Dr. Johns said we should not build. He said we should close those two high schools because he felt they were too small and were not cost effective. He said, "You should bring those kids into Gainesville, but you should retain your elementary schools." Of course, we knew we could not sell the bond issue under that, so we disagreed. You know educators can argue either side of an issue if you give them five minutes. He turned out to be a prophet--he was correct.

- C: He certainly has not fluctuated much on his stand.
- T: He was correct, and, of course, most of us knew it. But it was a situation where the bond issue could not be sold otherwise. I think it was ironic that even though we promised Newberry a new school, we did not carry Newberry anyway. In other words, there was a real irony in that little vote. Newberry is excellent at that. We probably did not get three dozen votes.
- C: So the people who were really involved in the system, especially the people who had to worry about the politics, were very conscious of the concerns of the community, whereas people like Johns did not have to worry about that, so they could say, "This is the way it is supposed to be."
- T: Well, he could take the realistic view. He could be truthful and honest up front because he did not have to run for election. We got a school at Hawthorne, and I think we had sixty seniors last year. We have to supplement Hawthorne. We probably pump at least a million dollars a year into Hawthorne more than they earn. This day and time, we do not have any school in the district that can survive on the FTE [Full Time Equivalent]. Hawthorne even less. We even have to supplement Buchholz [High School in Gainesville] because of some small classes.

But Dr. Johns was right. The kids would have been better _____ off if we had brought Hawthorne into Eastside [High School] and Newberry into Buchholz [High School]. We built new elementary buildings, meanwhile, but it took us a long time to do it, and great expense. The high schools in Hawthorne and Newberry, of course, were new in 1972. Now in Newberry we are faced with a dilapidated middle school situation. They use mostly portable buildings. So we are trying to decide whether to add on to it as a high school or convert it into a middle school and build a new high school to help relieve Buchholz. That is going to be the next big political question.

Rural statesmen are really down-to-earth people. If you are out there on their ground, you have to do a damn good selling job just to get an interview. I remember Mr. William Berry. Of course, he is probably worth several million dollars. He gets up in the morning, and it does not make a damn what he will be doing that day--he puts on that suit and tie. I guess he would mow the yard in it. I was at the board meeting one night, and somebody was there trying to hassle the board. There was a lot of give and take and participation from the audience. Mr. Berry, as you know, wears a hearing aid. Back then he wore the old kind that you can see; he carried it in his coat pocket. When he had listened to all the crap he wanted to hear, he would open his coat and turn it off. He would sit and let you talk as long as you wanted to, because he could not hear a damn word you are saying. I always thought that would be great. I would not mind wearing a hearing aid if I could do that. He would listen to so much bull, and then he would just turn your station off. I liked Mr. Berry.

[End side A1]

- C: Let us talk about the black schools a little bit. Do you remember the days of the "Jeannes" teacher? Ruth Lange was a "Jeannes" teacher.
- T: No. Tell me about that.
- C: Well, there was a fund, the Anna Jeannes fund, that paid for sending a visiting teacher around to those rural black schools. It was sort of like the forerunner of the supervisor of negro education.
- T: They called them "Jeannes" teachers?
- C: "Jeannes" teachers, yes, because the Jeannes fund paid for it.
- T: What was the Jeannes fund?
- C: She was a lady, a philanthropist, who was concerned about negro education. Ruth Lange was her name. I guess the program it was pretty widespread. This

was when Howard Bishop was here, but it did not last all the way through Bishop's tenure. Then we got Harold Jones as the new superintendent.

T: I knew Harold real well.

C: Tell me about him.

T: Of course, back then you always had a white school board and white superintendent, and all your district people were white. But it was good to have a black to "keep them in their place"--that type of thing. He was the liaison or the spokesman between the superintendent and the black teachers, the black community, the black everything. It was ridiculous to go into the black community. You just asked Harold what was going on, and that was it. Harold wore all kinds of hats. If you wanted to hire a black teacher, you asked Harold about it personally. Harold worked with attendance and with all the black noninstructional people. I guess he was kind of the foreman.

C: He was kind of the superintendent, the board, the trustees, and everything.

T: He was kind of the black godfather, really. Black people knew that if they were going anywhere, by gosh, they had to go through Harold. It was unheard of to go to the superintendent without going through Harold.

C: So he wielded an awful lot of power in this school system.

T: We would have a principal's meeting back in those days, and the black principals would meet from eight to ten. The only people there would be the superintendent, Harold, and the director, whoever that happened to be at that time. Then at ten o'clock, the white principals would show up. By gosh, that door opened up at ten o'clock whether they were through or not. All of these black people walked out with their hats in their hands and various subservient looks, and there we were--the brilliant, smart, eloquent white people. That was the only time we saw those guys that whole month. There was no affiliation or back-and-forth at all. Of course, now, Harold never sat in with us. He left with his troops. We would see these guys once a month. Hell, when integration came, I did not know any of the black principals. Oh, I might have known one or two of them, but very few of them.

C: It seems there were a lot more black schools than there were white schools. Was that largely because of transportation? They did not want to provide transportation for the black kids?

T: There were just a lot of small one-room or two-room schools. Like you said, there was Waldo, Campville, Lochloosa, LaCrosse, Micanopy, and Newberry.

C: Every little town had a black school.

T: And they were pathetic. They really were. Once I got on the district staff, part of my job was moving around, public relations, and getting to know these people. I believe the little old school up at Waldo, Nebo, had three rooms. The one down in Micanopy was an old frame building that looked like a World War II barracks. The cafeteria at the school in Newberry must have been fifty yards from the main building. The main building was an old upright frame building. If it would catch fire, it would burn in fifteen minutes. I believe it is still standing, though.

C: Bishop and later superintendents did close quite a few of those little schools, and it seemed like they could close them at will. I am sure it was better for them, that their education improved, when they consolidated those little schools. Do you think the black community resisted the closing of those little rural schools?

T: No. They did not know they were allowed to; they were outside the political belt. Back then, if you needed any black opinion, you asked for it; they did not offer it.

C: Was there still an idea that negro education was a charity rather than a responsibility?

T: Well, there probably was some of that. The white facilities were not all that much to write home about, either, but they were leaps and bounds ahead of the blacks. There just was not the conduit or organization for the black people to voice their opinions. It was easy to close the black schools. But it was something else to close the white schools.

I remember the little town of Micanopy. There were two schools with about two hundred kids in each one, K-6. Both buildings were pitiful. The programs were not adequate. Poor teachers were often funneled into places like that. Of course, it was so much better than their parents had had. They had the attitude that "it is as good as we want, and it is as good as we need. Hell, I did not go to school except through the second grade, and my kid has already gone through the fifth."

When integration came along down there--incidentally, the population down there was fifty-fifty black and white--all the rednecks down there at the time thought they were not about to go to school with a black kid, and the blacks knew they were not going to get any better facilities. Well, we went down there and held a couple of meetings. We told them, "We are going to integrate you down here and make do the best we can, or we will put you on buses and drive you to an integrated school." Well, the blacks and whites voted to come into Idylwild

[Elementary School in Gainesville]. That is the reason why Micanopy does not have a school today. We turned around and gave the former white school to the town, and they turned it into their city hall. They made a nice building out of it.

C: It was probably the most modern, state-of-the-art building of the 1900s it could be when it was built.

T: We could have done the same thing if we would have turned around and spent a couple hundred thousand dollars. The last time I was down at the old black school, it was being used for some kind of health clinic.

C: What year was it when the kids at Micanopy got bused?

T: It must have been the early 1960s, probably 1963.

C: What about in the city black schools? Did the blacks protest the closing of those schools when integration took place? A. Quinn Jones comes to mind.

T: The present A. Quinn Jones Center building was K-12. When the present Lincoln [Middle School] building was opened in 1965, it opened 7-12. Then we had Duval and Williams that were the elementary black schools, which I guess opened the year before Lincoln did. Of course, Lincoln enjoyed the rich history and heritage. When integration came along, the superintendent, the staff, the board--the white community--did not feel that we could peacefully integrate Lincoln High School, so consequently we closed it. Of course, we voted to close it, and that was when we had the student violence and fights and all of that. We rode it out, and we did close it. And it stayed closed. Later we reopened it as the vocational center, which was never really all that successful. Then, when the middle school came into effect, that is when we converted it to a middle school.

To show you how time is a great healer, how time really gives you a different perspective, Lincoln has been open thirteen years, so that would kick it back to around 1974. During the period from the middle 1960s to 1974, we suddenly discovered we could integrate this building. We had no trepidation when we sent John Spindler over there to open Lincoln, because the community had changed, the people had changed, and the atmosphere had changed. We did not think there would be any problems with its sitting in the black community, anymore than with Gainesville High's sitting in the white community.

C: But in the 1960s, you felt that that was a problem?

T: We felt like we had to put shotguns on the damn buses and in the hallways to put white kids over there. And to keep it open, we knew damn well the first thing we had to do was put five hundred to six hundred white kids over there. We knew

the liberal whites would not go along with it, and we did not want the redneck whites to go because that is where the problems were. So, no, we did not think we could make it work. At the same time, we felt that with elementary kids, particularly at Duval and Williams in the black communities, we could pull it off and get away with it. Of course, history has shown that we have had little or no problems at Williams and Duval related to where they are located. That was always our fear--the knives, the guns, the fights, and so forth. Of course, we will never know if it would have happened or not in the upper schools because of the seven- or eight-year interim.

C: Things have changed. So the biggest problem with Lincoln was that the blacks were upset over its closing.

T: Let me give you a little history on that. We were under court order to desegregate. I say this for Alachua County, I think, due to the University community, the board make-up, the superintendent, and administrators. Once we went under court order, there was no question that we were going to be desegregated. There was just a question of just how quickly we would move toward it and how quickly we could move toward it. We did. I will have to admit we did not get down in a sprinter's stance and run toward it, but neither did we walk backwards like many districts did. We casually strolled up to it.

C: When did that court order come down?

T: I guess our first court order must have been about 1963 or 1964. What we had then was what we called student assignment. A student could apply to go to a former black or white school, and we would decide. That is when Reverend [Thomas A.] Wright and his daughter and others filed suit to get into Gainesville High School.

As a result of that, we came up with the Freedom of Choice plan. You could go anywhere in the district you wanted to if it served your grade level. If you were black and eligible for transportation, we would transport you to the "black" school you were supposed to go to, or we would transport you to the closest white school. Now, if you did not want either one of them, but you wanted Podunk, you could go there if you could get there. Whites could do the same thing.

That is when I came into the district. My job was to supervise this freedom of choice. I will have to say we had a damn good plan. It served our purpose for several years. It gave all the black kids who wanted to go to a white school the opportunity to do so. But it left some all-black schools. It did not leave any all white schools, because all the white schools had some black kids. Lincoln at one time had two white kids, and Mebane had one. Those numbers would jump around a bit. We wound up with several hundred black children in white

schools, but we never had over half a dozen white kids in the black schools.

I was principal of old Buchholz. I had the first seven black kids who came into our school under Freedom of Choice. The following year I moved to Bishop, and I had the first twelve kids there.

C: You were experienced at dealing with such things.

T: If I could have seven, I could surely have twelve. But I would not take anything for the experience that it was. There were no problems, no sweat. But you talk about rehearsing, working, worrying, and preparing for something. Gosh, it was tough. I found out in June that I would have these seven black kids at old Buchholz. I did not know any black parents. So Dr. [Edgar] Cosby, the black dentist, called me and said he wanted to come over and talk to me. His daughter was one of the seven blacks. You know, he was a hell of a nice guy. Then he shared with me that these kids had all been hand picked because they wanted the project to go well, too.

C: They were hand-picked by the black community?

T: By the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. They had been hand-picked, they had been rehearsed, and they had been worked with. They were all good students who could succeed at anything. They had been taught on behavior, turning cheeks, and being tolerant of us rednecks. I set up the program that summer, and I had every one of the families come in individually--the kid, the mother, and dad. We spent hours together. I would take the kids around the building, which was closed, but still it got them familiar with what was going on. We rehearsed every conceivable problem that we could think of.

About a week before school started, I brought them all in together, and we rehearsed our opening day. It was my rule as principal that you did not even walk on the front yard because the grass was beautiful and the flowers were pretty. You could walk down the sidewalk and around back. When the bell rang, you came in from the back, and those kids knew it; we had been there two years together. But I told these black kids on the first day of school, "I want you to come in the front door, and the white kids will be coming in the back door. I do not want any mix up coming in. Then we will get you to your rooms, and we will start from that point." And that is how we did it. Those seven little black kids looked awfully lonesome coming up that walk that first morning. I had about eight hundred kids from Hawthorne Road, Lake Road, Orange Heights Road--well, southeast Gainesville. Like I said, they were all good kids and good students, and we had no problems whatsoever.

C: What did we move to after the Freedom of Choice?

T: Well, we kept the Freedom of Choice program as long as we could, but then the courts finally said it was leaving schools that were racially identifiable, which we could not have. That is when we started plans for the bond issue.

C: So that bond issue was to build Eastside and Buchholz high schools?

T: Eastside, Buchholz, Newberry, Hawthorne, and several elementary schools. That was almost an \$18-million bond issue. All these buildings were under construction, and the following September we would have a completely desegregated system.

C: What year was that?

T: It would be September of 1970. It was not something we were planning to do if we could. We had already zoned the community, and had already had Lincoln and Mebane closed as a high school. We had already divided the teachers and everything.

Then we got called to the [U.S.] District Court of Appeals out at Houston. The superintendent, our attorney, and I went out there. There were thirteen districts from the southeastern United States that were called in to give a progress report. The NAACP and the Legal Defense Fund were there with their slate of people. God, it was impressive. They had all those school districts over here on this side. That damn federal court room was as big as the O-Dome [the Stephen C. O'Connell Center on the University of Florida campus], I believe.

Then those judges walked out. That was the first time I found out what "en banc" meant. There were two tiers. Hell, they could not get them all in one line; they had to have two rows of them. Fourteen judges walked out, all wearing their black robes. Right on the end was [G.] Harrold Carswell who had just been appointed to the district court. He had been the judge from Tallahassee that we had been with all the way through. He had been our supervising judge the whole time. So I thought we are home free here. When it came time for us to give our case, he excused himself. I thought, "My god, the only friendly face in there, and he left." We were there with pictures of our architect's renderings of Buchholz and Eastside and all these other buildings that were under construction. We had our booklet showing what the racial make-up would be in each school this coming September. We would have integrated the administrative staff.

Of the thirteen districts there, we were the last one to present our case. I remember Griffin Bell, who later became attorney general, was one of the judges. He reared back and said, "When the United States desegregates the way this

school district is doing, we can forget the dual school system. This will erase the case for *Brown v. [Board of Education of] Topeka*. This is great." Then he looked at the superintendent and me. Now, imagine this. We are fifty yards from these judges, and he said, "Alachua County. That is where they have that good black quarterback." That was Eddy McShan at Gainesville High School. Hell, I popped up and said, "Yes, sir!" He said, "Well, that is where I do all my bird hunting. I go down to Micanopy all the time." I thought, "My God, we are home free." But they all praised us and how great we were. This was in December.

C: This was Tiny Talbot?

T: This was Tiny, me, and Harry Duncan, the attorney. We came back, and we were so pleased we called a press conference to tell everyone how well we had done in Houston. We brought the damn newspapers back. We had the headlines showing how great we were and how good they thought we were. This is in early December. So we went on and had the Christmas break. When we came back about the middle of January, we discovered that the [U.S.] Supreme Court had overruled the appellate court. They told us, "If you are so damn good and you can do this in September, is there any reason why you could not do it right now?" The NAACP appealed the appellate court's decision, and we did not even know the damn thing had been appealed and had been overturned. Here we were sitting, and they were telling us that in thirty days they wanted an integrated school system.

C: How are you going to do it with the schools under construction?

T: "That is your problem, buddy!" They give you the answer, and you find out how the hell it is done. What we did was close down the Alachua County school system on January 26. We pulled all our administrators. We reopened on February 7--this is 1970--with a completely integrated system. We closed Lincoln and Mebane. We converted Mebane from a K-12 all-black school to a 5-8 integrated one in seven days. We closed Lincoln completely. We took 1,200 black kids from Lincoln, 7-12, and moved all the high-school kids to GHS. A few of them at Hawthorne stayed at Hawthorne.

C: Did you have them on double session?

T: Gainesville High went on double sessions immediately. The eleventh and twelfth graders, 2,200 of them, went from seven to twelve. Then in the afternoon we had 1,100 tenth graders come in from 12:30 to 5:00 or something like that. It was a complete double session. The black kids from Newberry who had formerly gone to Mebane stayed at Newberry. Of course, Santa Fe was integrating with the High Springs and Alachua black kids.

[End side A2]

C: Did they go on double sessions, too?

T: No, they did not have to. But the biggest coup we achieved was this. Here we had Eastside and Buchholz half finished, or two-thirds finished. So what the hell do you do? We zoned the Eastside school and utilized the Howard Bishop building thus: Howard Bishop Middle School went in the mornings from seven to twelve, and then the Eastside population went from twelve to five. There were two different administrations, two different faculties--hell, we even had two different custodial staffs. It was just like the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. Then we did the same thing with Westwood and Buchholz. Eastside and Buchholz opened up at mid-term that year as grades seven, eight, and nine, and those ninth graders became the first senior class. When they got to be seniors, we kicked out the seventh and eighth graders and sent them back to junior high.

I knew we could do anything after we did that. We moved several thousand kids during this eight days, and we moved three or four hundred teachers. I had all the principals in the old office down there. At the same time that we integrated the student bodies we integrated the faculties. We told every one of them that they had to have 25 percent minorities on staff. Hell, it was just like trading chickens and cards: "I will give you a black social studies teacher for a white math teacher." It was a tough year.

C: Some schools were just flat closed. Were those teachers then absorbed into the system?

T: Every one of them. Nobody lost a job. We moved the principal from Lincoln, John Dukes, to become the principal at Eastside, which was in the Howard Bishop building. We took Jim Temple, who at the time was principal at Howard Bishop, and named him the new principal at Buchholz, so he was replaced at Bishop.

We reopened Buchholz on the seventh of February, and the kids tolerated each other. About the fifteenth of March, we had our first student riot. They showed up one morning with a big rebel flag up the flag pole, and it was one explosion after another. We had 2,200 kids on that morning session. There were two senior classes--a black senior class from Lincoln that resented being there, and a white senior class that resented their being there.

C: What was the ratio? About fifty-fifty?

T: No, it was about 30 percent black. Gainesville High School had about 1,900

kids without the black kids. They were crowded before we sent this other thousand kids over there.

C: So you needed the bond issue not only for integration but to relieve the overcrowding.

T: Gainesville High had been crowded years even prior to that. That particular day it hit about 9:00 in the morning when the kids started fighting. The black kids would get together in groups and isolate a white kid and isolated a couple of teachers, and they beat them up pretty badly. We had all the [Alachua County] sheriffs there, all the Gainesville police, and all the University police. We had the Florida Highway Patrol, and we alerted the National Guard. We probably had a hundred law enforcement people on the campus, and, of course, all of our staff were there. I finally got all the buses over there. Of course, parents were there picking up their kids.

We called an emergency session of the board that afternoon and gave a status report. The board did not adjourn but went into recess. We met every day for two weeks, I guess.

One of the assignments the board gave me was Gainesville High School. When I left home every morning, my first stop was Gainesville High School. My instructions were to stay there until I was assured that we were going to have school that day. Our long-range plan was to get through to the next class period. "Well, we got by the first two periods. I wonder if we can make it to lunch time."

One of the most inflammatory damn situations we had was when the morning shift was leaving and the afternoon shift was coming in. We had a complete new crew of teachers coming in, too. Special teachers sometimes overlapped, like a Latin teacher, calculus, or something like that. Those were good old days.

About once a week we would have another flare-up. But every time we would have it, it would be less severe. Of course, by the end of school, everyone had vented their spleens. The biggest thing for us is that we graduated two senior classes. The following year we had some bad days.

C: By then had you gotten the kids sent out to Buchholz and Eastside?

T: Yes. Then, to further complicate the opening of the school the second year, neither one of the buildings was finished in September. So we still had to keep this make-shift deal. About the middle of October we got to move into the new buildings. Then they started to get their own new identity, and everything began

to smooth out. It worked out pretty well.

- C: In the rural communities, there would be a black and white school. Did you all just pick the one that was in the best shape and put everyone in that one? I am thinking of the Archer and Mebane decisions.
- T: In Archer, the white school was in poor shape. In the middle of the year, we kept both buildings. We divided them by grades: some grades went to the black school and some to the white school. At the end of the year, we closed the old white building and put them all in the black building, which had plenty of space. In Hawthorne, the black building was in pretty good shape, although it was pretty small. The white building was in terrible shape. We could not get all the grades in the black building, but we got some of them integrated, and the rest of them we put into the old two-story building. In Alachua, we were able to get them all into the elementary school. In High Springs, we had to use Douglas, which was the old black school, for the middle school grades. Of course, then we built the new building [Spring Hill] up there for the middle school.
- C: What about Waldo?
- T: We had always had the two elementary schools at Waldo. We closed the black one and put the students all into the other. Even with that, there were only 250 kids. Waldo has a small black population. They are only about 22 percent black, even today.
- C: So you were saving money and improving the system by cutting out a school you did not need anyway.
- T: We were forced into making some good decisions.
- C: Now, tell me about the appointed superintendent. How did that come about in this county?
- T: I guess we have had an appointed superintendent for about fifteen or sixteen years now. When Mr. Talbot became our superintendent, Ed Manning, who was in just prior to Tiny, wanted to stay superintendent. In fact, he and Mr. Talbot had cut a couple of deals. Tiny said that if Manning wanted to run, he would accept Gainesville High School. That was going to be that way for four years. Then Mr. Talbot was going to run, and Manning was going to retire. But Mr. Manning said, "Look, I would like to stay one more term," so Tiny said okay. He backed off and Manning stayed another. Then, approaching the end of that four years, the second term, Mr. Manning, who liked the money and the job, decided to stay in. No way. No way. So Mr. Manning thought if he could get this damn thing turned around to being an appointed position that with his strangle hold on

the board he could become the first appointed superintendent. That was the method to his madness.

All of a sudden it came out of the superintendent's office that there was a ground swell from the population of the county that they wanted it to go on a ballot to see if the public would vote for the appointed system. Well, there was not a ground swell; it was about eight people, I guess. Anyway, it got on the ballot.

Mr. Talbot and I were always very close friends. He gave me my first job. I had the philosophy that I would follow him wherever he went and whatever it was. So he and I started speaking out publicly and at meetings against the appointed system. Dr. [Roe] Johns was speaking for it.

C: Did you have anything against it per se, or was it just that you knew what the deal was?

T: I had never heard of it. I thought everybody was elected. That is all I had ever grown up with. I had never been anywhere but here. Well, I spent a short time up in Tennessee, and the superintendent was elected up there. I knew that if Mr. Talbot liked it, I liked it. I knew if we got another four years of Mr. Manning, hell, we all would be fired anyway. I did not have anything to lose. I was on the way out anyway if he would have stayed in. So we just took the bull by the horns and spoke out against it, and we beat it. It was not even close.

C: That was in the early 1960s?

T: Yes. The vote was not even close. In the meantime, Mr. Talbot got elected superintendent. We thought Mr. Manning was going to retire, but he did not, so we assigned him to Buchholz, and he finished out the year for me. He knew that he could not beat Mr. Talbot, so what he would do was encourage people that he could control to run against Mr. Talbot.

Mr. Talbot's first opponent was a guy named Harry Evans. He was a vocational supervisor of the county. The second one was John Purdue, who was one of the principals in the county. Of course, neither one of them could come anywhere near Mr. Talbot.

In the meanwhile, the appointed thing came up again. Mr. Manning kept it on the front burner. Well, we spoke out again, and we beat it again. We beat the mud out of it because Mr. Talbot was very popular, and I was very popular. I was a principal. That is the way it was. We could pretty much sway anyway we wanted the thing to go, as long as we did not throw caution to the wind and not worry about what the administration thought or what Dr. Johns thought. So we beat it the second time.

In the meanwhile, integration came along. We went through some hard, really strange years there. Dr. [William] Enneking and Dr. [Benford] Samuels, who were members of the school board, were there. They were progressive individuals. The elected/appointed issue came up again. Tiny and I said we did not give a damn what we did because we were tired, so neither one of us spoke out one way or another. I was on the district staff, and I had tenure as a principal, so the worst thing they could do to me was make me a principal again, which I wish they had now. He was in the same situation as I, so we were not worried about job security. We just said we were tired of fighting it.

Dr. Enneking and Dr. Samuels pushed it, not madly, but they promoted it. There was a little organization behind it. I do not think Dr. Johns even took part in it that time. It passed 10,000 to 7,000 that time. But we beat it three times. If we had stayed after it and promoted it through the school system, it would have been close, and I think we could have beaten it.

In the meanwhile, Gainesville has changed tremendously. There is hardly anybody originally from Gainesville anymore. You are not, and I am not. We are all from somewhere else. Well, we appointed our superintendent, but all of these people that moved in were accustomed to electing a superintendent. When your move-ins exceed your old timers and you put something on the ballot, that is when your community changes. You can hardly find a damn Gainesvillian anymore. They are all dead and gone. There are only a few left. That is what happened to all your government.

Back in those days, the University had a policy that if you were an employee of the University of Florida, you could not even run for a political office. You could not become a city commissioner or school board member. Once they left the flood gates open, that opened a whole new dimension to politics in Gainesville. At the same time, they started paying board members and city commissioners. County commissioners make about \$18,000. Some people look at that as a full-time job. I think our board members make \$13,000 or \$14,000. City commissioners, I think, are up to about \$20,000.

- C: So the original idea was to get some of the business leaders to take a part-time interest in the board's work and so forth. It is still that to some degree, but the compensation is better.
- T: Right. The city government used to be dominated by land owners, guys like Addison Pounds, Fred Cone, Jim and Carlos Hope, M. M. Parrish, and people like that. Those people owned half of Gainesville and damn near all the downtown. They controlled all the zoning. You talk about Tammany Hall! [Tammany Hall was the headquarters of the imperious Tammany Society in New

York City during the late 1800s. Ed.] But now it has changed to the type of organization they have now. The county commissioners are holding on, although you still have Tom Coward and Ed Turlington. But then there are the newcomers, like [Penny] Wheat, [Jim] Notestein, and Leveda Brown. A lot of changes have gone through.

C: How did [Walter] Sickles get to be the appointed superintendent?

T: Our first appointed superintendent was Jim Longstreth. Jim was superintendent down at Punta Gorda in Charlotte County, a small district of about 12,000 kids. He was a [University of] Florida graduate; he got his doctorate at Florida. He was a protege of [Dr. Roe] Johns, the finance guy of the University of Florida. Anyway, he was a protege of two or three guys out there. They promoted him. Gene [Eugene Allan] Todd, from the College of Education, was a board member at the time. So Gene, Johns, and Kern Alexander were all bed buddies. That is the way Jim came in. Jim stayed four years. Bert Sharp, former dean of the College of Education, is a full professor out there, and his salary is higher than he was making as superintendent.

I was appointed as interim superintendent, and I served as interim for six months. A search team was hired to come up with a new superintendent. They brought in the four or five names, and my name was in the pot. As they came down to the vote, Mr. Ed Simmons backed me, and the other four people backed some of the other five. I said to Ed, "Look, you and I are not going to win, so let us get on a winning team." So then they all went together and unanimously elected Jim.

Then we did the same thing when Jim left. We hired a search team. It boiled down then between six candidates. When Walt Sickles came, I, again, had one vote. Ed was still voting for me. He did not want Walt because the board members wanted to give him too much money. He thought they had set his salary too high. They voted four-to-one to bring Walt in. Of course, Walt heard about the negative vote by Mr. Simmons and said, "Look, I am not coming unless I get all five votes."

I knew Walt. We had worked on several things. Well, I called him in July and said, "Look, the guy that voted against you did so because of a money problem. It had nothing to do with you personally. If you deserve it, he will be the best supporter you have got in a month." He came on up and took the job, and he and Ed Simmons are inseparable today. Walt still drives from Tampa out to bird hunt with Ed on the farm.

C: He told me that he and Walt had a meeting after he got here.

T: He told Walt when he came, "Look, there is no one worth \$40,000." Hell, they ought to be paying him fifty instead of forty. Ed wanted to pay him thirty-six because he is conservative. Well, within two months, they were the best of friends. Like Walt said, he became his strongest booster. Walt stayed four years.

We did the search team again. This time Barbara Gallant was backing me, and it boiled down between me, Doug Magann, and Jim Burns from Indian River. They were trying to get a unanimous vote again, I told Barbara, "Look, we cannot win on one vote." So she went along, and they agreed to bring in [Douglas] Magann. He did one hell of an interview, a selling job.

In my opinion, and I know every superintendent in the state, he is the best I ever worked for. He is the best I have ever seen, that I know of. He knows more about the school business than anybody I have ever known. He is not going to be fully appreciated by the present board until he is gone. Then they will know what he meant to the district. He is very smart. Most of us administrators feel fairly competent in one area, some of us none. He does not care what you want to talk about. If you want to talk about finance, foreign language, transportation, personnel, social studies--whatever it is, he knows it. He is disgustingly young. I do not know where he got all of his experience. Well, really his experience does not give him that kind of knowledge. He was a teacher/coach. He was an assistant principal. He was a principal at Wilmington, Delaware. He was an assistant superintendent at Columbia, South Carolina. Then he was a superintendent at Greensboro, North Carolina, but he got fired from that job.

It was then, while he was looking for a job, that he came down here for an interview. He told our board that he just gotten fired. He said he was in the middle of a divorce and he had just gotten fired. That is the way he did his interview. He told me, "Hell, I do not give a damn whether I get a job. I was not even looking for a job." They had just given him \$75,000 for a bought-up contract up there. He said, "I did not need to work. I just wanted to come down here to spend two or three days in the sunshine and get away from Greensboro."

I have his tapes, and he did one of the best damn jobs of interviewing. There were some new board members who wanted Jim Scaggs, Barbara wanted me, and the other two wanted two other people. He went in to that interview and took that job away from everybody. Of course, Barbara knew that he would be good, too, but she was going to vote for me come hell or high water. I told her again that it would be better for us to get on the winning team.

He likes Gainesville, and he has done one hell of a job with this school system. People will never really know how good a job he is doing unless they are on the inside. I do not think we will keep him all that much longer because he does not

get a job offer but once a month. He is what I call a professional superintendent. He has a package, like a football coach. He brings in his own staff, his own team, his own philosophy, his own package. You do not just buy the man--you buy the whole damn ship. That is the way he is. He is a nice-looking guy, he speaks well, he writes well, he thinks well on his feet, and he hears well. He is what I call a marketable individual. He is forty-four years old and has had twenty years of good experience, so he has twenty more years to work.

There are these "Head Hunters" that have a business of placing superintendents. They head up searches. They make \$25,000 or \$30,000 dollars to find you a superintendent. They will come in and tell you, "Any of these four people will do you a damn good job. Now, you as a board, interview them and pick which one you want." There were two hundred people they had narrowed down from; that is what you pay them the \$25,000 for. Now, he is in one of those stables. I call them race horses. He is one of those race horses in a stable. The guy that heads that stable up is Ed Wigham, who works at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He used to be the superintendent at Dade County. Wigham has about fifteen or twenty studs in his stable. That is what he does to supplement his income.

C: He trots them out every time there is an opening?

T: I guarantee you, every time the damn wind changes, he is on the phone with Magann, asking him again: "Tucson is open. Do you want your name put in the pot?" Thank God he has said no. But I am afraid one of these mornings when the board has pissed him off and he has gotten fed up and disgruntled, when Wigham calls he will say, "Yes, put my name in." That is when we will lose him.

When he is gone, I do not know anybody in the state of Florida who could sustain the programs that he has going, that he has put in personally since he has been in. That is what people will never know until he leaves. We have a \$4 million computer center right underneath you that he personally installed. Hell, most of us could not even turn the thing on. He has his own computer center in his office.

C: I do not see any terminals in here.

T: I have trouble with the radio. Not only that, I am not going to learn it. But he knows. He has made our salary schedule for the last five years personally. He is the one who plays with all that junk and gets it down. If he wants to know how many English teachers there are with five years experience or less, he swings around there and pulls it up. If he wants to know what your evaluation was last year, he does not call personnel--he pulls it up on the screen. If he wants to know how many kids are at the Gainesville High School, he has it right there.

He knows how many blacks, how many whites, how many tenth graders there are. If he wants to look at the grades Jim gave last year, his grade distribution, he just pulls it up. I would have to call him or ask him to do it for me. He is smart. He loves finance, and he loves budgets. He likes personnel. He gives us our responsibilities and our place to work. His instructions are to keep us out of jail and keep him informed.

Now, he checks behind you. He gives you the damn freedom, but he also uses the responsibility that goes with it. He will scorch your butt if you do not do it. He will do any damn thing in the world to help you. He will not give you anything to do that he will not do himself. He will keep the board off of your butt, and he will keep the public off of you, but he expects you to deserve that defense at some time.

The appointed superintendent, of course, is the best way to go. The greatest drawback to the appointed system is if you get a crazy board. See, if you ask most districts why they went to the appointed system, they will say they wanted to get the politics out of education. Well, what you have done at that point is taken it out of everybody's hands and put it in the hands of five. If you do not like that five, you can change them. But you may go through hell for two or three years before you get it changed.

For example, when Doug went to Greensboro as superintendent, he had a seven-member board--four women and three men. He went in on a 7-0 vote. The man before him had been there twenty years, but they had not made a damn change in nineteen. Everything was about to fall down. The place was in shambles. They had no policy, no directions, no maintenance, no buildings. They felt they needed a young, vibrant guy to come in and get some of these deadhead principals off their butts and do this and that. So they brought him in.

In less than a year, when he got everything cranked up and moving and was shaking things up, the damn election came up. Two of the board members ran and got beat, and two of them decided they were not even going to run, even though they had told him they were going to. The four that were elected came in on a platform to get rid of Magann because he was making too damn many waves. So in twelve months he went from a 7-0 board to a 3-4.

Before his third year was over, he told me they were in a board meeting one night, and the chairman, who was the crazy one, pulled out a piece of paper near the end of the meeting and said she had something she wanted to add to the agenda. It was just before the reappointments. She named off his whole damn staff--she wanted to wipe his whole damn staff out because they were loyal to and supportive of him. He looked around and saw that she had the support to do it, so he called time out and requested they go in the back for an executive

session. They went back there, and he told them, "If it is me you are after, you are fixing to cut your own damn throat. You are fixing to fire about eighteen damn good people. If it is me you are after, there is a more direct way to get me. You buy my damn contract out, and I will leave tomorrow." So they voted to do that. He saved his staff, but he took a direct shot himself.

Ironically, they ended up getting about five or six staff members the following year anyway. The board told the next superintendent they brought in that they would give him the job if he get rid of Sam, Sue, George, and whoever. Right now his deputy superintendent is director of transportation up there, so he has been demoted about three levels. The only reason they did not fire him is because he had tenure as a principal. Of course, they could not fire him, except for incompetence or immorality.

C: So if you get an appointed superintendent, you are not taking the politics out but are merely changing it a little.

T: You have condensed it. What you have done is you have made each board member 20 percent stronger than he was the night before. The superintendent does not give a damn what you think as a teacher or what parents think. If he can keep these five people or three of them pleased, he is going great.

C: The board member districts used to be pieces of the pie. Is it still like that? How does that work now?

T: What we try to do is get it balanced with the numbers people or kinds of people--blacks and whites, rural and urban--and keep it relative.

C: So they are not symmetrical in shape. Are they related to the county commission districts at all?

T: You would think that we would get together, but that is political, too.

C: People are not going to vote to change their district if they are going to be put in with somebody else.

T: In fact, a school board can sit down today and say, "We need to redraw our district lines." You can always make up a reason why. I can run down to see your house, and I can cut your house or put you in the wrong district. There has been some of that done over the years by county commissioners and school boards. It is political. Of course, it is such a traumatic thing that, thank God, we do not get into it very often. We have done it one time since Magann has been here.

C: We have covered the things I wanted to ask you about. I appreciate all the time you have given me. It is going to be really helpful. There is an Oral History Project at the University, and a copy of this transcript will be put in their archives for any historian or anyone who wants to learn more about the history of the school district. Thank you very much.