

Interview with Gail Young,
Interviewers: Daylena Schmidt, Melissa Owskey

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Century High School. The interviewee is Mrs. Young. The interviewer is Melissa and Daylena. The interview took place at 12:05 on May 16.

What was your first involvement with Century High School?

My first involvement was two years before it opened I was a teacher over at Hilhi, my principal was Mr. Barnekoff, Phil Barnekoff and he was the principal chosen to be the principal at CHS. Two years he worked out of Hilhi over at the District Office while he was preparing for Century. I worked with him in a way in that I was on the committee that named the school, I was not on the planning team though because those were the two years that I was a part time teacher, my daughter had moved here with her children and she was starting medical school so for two years I was just teaching I think it was four fifths so I couldn't be on the planning team but I told Mr. Barnekoff that if I had been available I would have wanted to be on the planning team so I kinda felt I was on the planning team even though I wasn't that was my first involvement and of course I had to decide just like all the other teachers over at Hilhi whether I even wanted to come to Century because we, those people who wanted to come over here applied at Century and then teachers from all over the district you know at the other districts applied to come to Century also and not everyone who wanted to come over was actually chosen. And I had such a positive experience over at Hilhi with my special ed department where I did most of my work over there, I really wasn't sure that I wanted to come over at first and then I realized that the principal I would be working for would be really important and since Mr. Barnekoff was going to be the principal here and I would greatly prefer working under him then the principal we had at Hilhi I decided to come to Century.

How did you know that he would be so important as a principal?

Mr. Barnekoff?

Yeah.

Well I worked under him a couple of years over at Hilhi and he is just the kind of man I enjoy working with he is a one of a kind kinda guy he puts a lot of faith in his teachers. He always starts the year by saying to teachers you do the most, you teachers do the most important job in this district and my hats off to you, my job as a principal is to support you in any way that I can that was just the way that he operated he had a lot of faith in teachers he didn't snoop around and try to find things we did wrong instead he congratulated us and complemented us on things we did right and I can tell that on several occasions he came to me and told me stories and showed me notes thing that he had gotten from parents around the district that were good positive feed back for me and

he always made sure that I heard that, and I'm sure that the way he was with other teachers too. He's also the kinda guy I believe liked kids from the very beginning I knew that his heart was with the students in his school and that's the kinda principal I like to work under. When he was here you remember that he used to dress up as Santa Clause at Christmas time and have pictures taken the kids would all sit on his lap that's the kind of guy Mr. Barnekoff was as a principal and still is so I was really eager to follow him to Century High School.

Do you feel that because Mr. Barnekoff was so into the teaching in the kids just the school that's what made Century so different?

I think so he had a lot to do with it and another quality that he has that I think was really instrumental in making Century the school it is he trusted the teachers to make the decisions about Century, for instance when it came time plan how the art room would be laid out he went and talked to art teachers, he didn't try and figure it out on his own and he always consulted with people that he willing to admit knew a little bit more about something than he knew because he hadn't had the experience and he had absolutely no problem in saying to somebody else, another teacher or another employee of the district I need your help with this, I need your ideas your input to help me make the decisions he was never threatened by people who knew a little more about some specific area than he. He had 4enourmous faith in the staff, teachers and the staff that he brought with him to Century. And we opened the school from my perspective feeling like one big family we were all working together for the end, that is the best school we could open for our kids our students.

So you've been working for Century since it opened?

Right, I've been here since the fall of 1997 when we opened the building, do you have a specific question?

No.

Okay, when we opened the building we were on the standard 8 period day which meant students took 5 classes and they had a study hall, no students took 6 classes study hall and lunch on a 8 period day, and teachers taught 5, and during that first year that the building was open I was on site council, I was one of the teachers elected to be a site council member, and the number one charge that site council took that year was to investigate to research and think about a block schedule So we worked really hard, not just the teachers who were on site council but also other teachers in the building visiting others schools who were already on block schedule doing a lot of reading of articles to see what's happening across the country with scheduling and at the end of that first year we took a vote for block scheduling and the vote passed yes, to go onto block schedule by 97.3 % that's what it was, I think we had 72 teachers in the building that year, remember we didn't have any seniors the first year and out of 74 teachers, 72 of them voted for block schedule. And so it was implemented the following year, which was the fall of 1998. The teachers who were on the planning committee, I think there were 16, 17 teachers

who worked for the two years before the building opened on planning and many of those teachers were already committed to a block schedule, and many thought the school should have opened with a block schedule. But Mr. Barnekoff being the kind of guy he was wanted to give everybody, all the teachers in the building a chance to be heard on that issue and so he encouraged the planning team, who, opened the school on regular schedule and let that decision be made by the staff here. Which again is another reason that I'm so fond of him. Just the fact that he is always so thoughtful and um inclusive, when it comes to making decisions. So we've been on block schedule ever since, and I've been here for five years.

Did you want to go on block schedule?

Yes, absolutely. I was one of the um, one of the teachers who spoke strongly for it. In fact I did a couple of presentations. I did a couple of presentations with uh ya know the other site counsel's people here at Century, so the other teachers on the staff could understand it. And also I did some presentations over at HEA, and we uh we had to persuade them the people at HEA. That's our teacher's association kind of our teaching union. We had to persuade them to allow our teachers to waive their contract. Because when you go on block schedule, instead of teachers teaching five classes a year, their teaching six because they teach three first semester and three second semester. And that's kind of in violation of our contract; we're choosing to work more then we're have to work. And so we have to make sure that everybody agrees with that, and that's the reason we took the vote. And the vote was yes for block schedule, which means we will have to waive our contract. So I was a very strong voice in favor of block schedule from the very beginning and I still feel really strongly about it. I think the advantages of block schedule for students and teachers are enormous and uh, we've had to vote on it every since the school's been open and every year it's passed.

So since you're so strong in favor of block schedule, what do you think of the trimester schedule?

Oh I was hoping you would ask me that question, (laughs), um I think um the trimester is several steps backwards from block schedule. First of all one of the advantages of block schedule is 32 opportunities over a four year period. Um with trimester there's only 30 over a four-year period. So in terms of opportunities in terms of students to take classes trimester is fewer. But that's not even the biggest problem with trimester in my opinion, I think that segmenting a one credit course the way trimester would do that kind of break up, we would lose that continuity for teachers and for students. For instance if you were taking sophomore English you might have it trimester one and two or you might have it two and three. But you might have it one and three, and it would be broken up with some class in between and even worse you might have the two chunks of sophomore English with two different teachers, and even if you had it with the same teacher the class would be a different composition, maybe some of the kids in your class would be the same you had the previous trimester it wouldn't be exactly the same class. So then I think that lack of continuity is a huge disadvantage. Um I also think what it would necessitate for teachers in terms of planning lessons. It's a disadvantage what that would mean is that

every teacher who teaches sophomore English would have to teach the same stuff whatever that stuff is trimester one and trimester two so if you get a different teacher at a different trimester you don't miss out on a particular novel or you don't end up doing the same novel twice. So it kind of it takes away the autonomy from teachers to plan their curriculum and plan the way they deliver services and curriculum to students. It takes that away and makes it seem a little bit more um assembly line or, you know a little bit of where everybody being in a lock step. And I don't know how that would work for other classes, but for language arts which is my specialty that would be a huge disadvantage, and we would have start up's three times a year all the secretarial things that goes into starting a class and ending a class we would be doing that three times a year instead of twice a year, so that loses time too. And you know one of the differences on the trimester you would have 12 weeks and 70 min. a day instead of 18 weeks at 90 min a day so there's...a ...that kind of breaks down whether you would meet for 70min or 90 min and in my mind that doesn't make a significant difference, but for some teachers that might make a difference.

You said you were on Site Council, what exactly is Site Council?

Well, Site Council is a group of people that um, that has some responsibility in terms of how things happen in the building, the curriculum happens in the building. And uh, the format and the scheduling and so on. And on the Site council you have teachers, administrators, parents, community members and students. And that's a group mandated by the state. The break down of how that group has to work. And site council says, what the wording really means is that the decisions are made on site, at the school building rather than at the district office or in Salem, and we've always been lucky at Century our administrators Mr. Barnekoff, and Ms. Montgomery aren't dictators, they're not by nature authoritarian people so that our site council has had a lot of freedom, in a lot of decisions they wanted to make and what it is they wanted to tackle. So um we've been pretty lucky here, it's probably not the case in other schools. So you guys want me to tell you about the name of the building?

Sure, go ahead.

Okay, um since I couldn't be on that planning team two years before the building opened so that would've been 1995-6, and then 1996-7, those were the two years of the planning team, since I couldn't be on that because I went part time and I was taking care of my grandchildren Mr. Barnekoff asked me if I would be on the naming committee and I said yes I would love to do that. So we had um about I'm gonna guess about 40 people or so from all of the schools and the area as well as community people from like the Chamber of Commerce and all that kind of thing. Who met six or seven times who met to discuss the name of Century High School, before it's name had to be selected by the way before the ground could be broken that's the law, so it's kind of interesting we had a bit of a time line. I remember that we brainstormed and we asked community people and went back and got suggestions and names and I remember that we had a stapled packet of names suggested that was about a quarter of an inch thick, so whatever that would be. The names were in categories like one whole page was names after people, and then one

that would be more geographic names, and uh I don't even know what all the categories were. Just hundreds of names that were under consideration. And the committee met and we tried to narrow it down. It just seemed like it went on and on and on, and finally with input from all of these places from way over at Reedville, the Reedville community, and since we're in the Reedville community many people from this area wanted the school to reflect that, either calling it Reedville, or Reedville High School, or Reed or some name for somebody in this area for some Bog or slue or something around here. We finally narrowed the names down to, and these were the final three, Horizon, Heritage, and Century. And Century was selected for a couple of reasons. First of all, they didn't want it to start with an H, because of Hilhi, if you do the HHS or the CHS, I mean if you have two HHS' in the district that's kind of confusing. And uh Horizon was kind of eliminated because of Horizon Airlines, and then Heritage was eliminated because it seemed to many a look backwards rather than a look forwards, and we felt that Century was uh looking ahead to the year 2000, would be a more appropriate name. For the school to look to the future instead of the past. And that's how Century was selected as the name. And the minute we made that public we broke ground. Got out the steam shovel and dug the hole

Were you at the ground breaking?

I wasn't and I don't know why I wasn't I don't think I was invited, but I know Mr. Barnekoff was there. If I had been invited I would have been there, so I'm sure I wasn't invited, and I can't remember why I didn't sneak in and take a look. I don't know what I was doing, maybe I had a kick boxing class that day or something.

Since you have been at Century what kind of clubs have you been involved in?
The International club?

International club, right, that's been the main one that ive worked with here.

Now how did you get involved with the international club?

Well when I was at Hilhi I was part of the international high school in fact way in the beginning of this interview when I told you it was a tough decision for me to think about whether I was going to move from Hilhi over to Century that was one of the two things that held me there. One was the special ed department because I really like the other people in the department there, and the second was international high school because I was really active in that group and I knew that we were not going to have an international high school here at Century because we only, the district only wanted us to have one so when I made the decision to come here I decided to contunue some small part of international high school by doing the international club. I've done every year and we've always started, ive had kinda two groups that I pull from, one is the foreign exchange students who always at the beginning of the year kinda need a headquarters a landing spot tey need somebody, our counceling department does a great job of that. Mr. Taylor and also Mr. Cop, who took over for him a couple years later, those two men have really done a good job with the nitty gritty with the exchange students, but I felt as if I wanted

to do something to connect them with more of our students at the school, and also I wanted to use the exchange students as a resource for my students and the first 3 years I was here in the building I taught the world studies class, the sophomore block with Mr. Nelson, you guys remember that and, that was perfect we were studying the world, and to have the resource of the exchange students who would speak to the club and my block kids could go to the club and so on, it was perfect. And now I teach an American studies, so the focus is a little different but we still have as one of the goals of the class, one of the overall purposes of the class and the way we gear the curriculum is a world perspective on American history. So its really important for our students to understand how people in other countries view Americans, view American history, American culture, American decisions and so on. And to have one of our exchange srudents from Germany, or Brazil or where ever speak to a group of my block students in international club. And tell what they know to be the perception of their country is priceless it can never be better than first hand information from the mouth of the person who feels that way and had these experiences. So that's why I like to do international club, and I love having my kids from block last year, two years ago, three years ago join us, so we have quit a good group.

You said you were involved in special ed? Are you still here?

I am, my assignment here at Century is two-thirds advanced sophomore block and one-third special ed. I have a special ed case load I don't teach any special ed classes. So I have about 40 students 38 or so students on my case load that I am responsible for kind of overseeing their program here helping them when they need help doing the paper work mandated by the state and federal government and stuff, that's what I was working on when you guys came in I'm working on a IEP for one of my students, so I do that as well as the advanced, it's a good balance for me I like working with the advanced students who generally speaking have a pretty easy time as students, succeeding as students and the special ed kids because of a variety of disabilities have a tougher time and so I like working with that mix that variety of kids.

Since you have the mix of the special as well as the regular students what about the culture's here with Hillhi have, can you compare and contrast , like were there any obstacle you had to go over teaching the different cultures or the different kinds of students?

You mean in terms of the student body is it different from hillhi. Well you know how kids talk about cliques on campus, you know I don't even know all the words you guys use to describe them, but one of the groups that I have noticed when I came to Century is not represented is the group that calls itself, and is called by its peers the cowboy group. And when I was at Hillhi we had a number of students who wore cowboy hats and gigantic belt buckles, the bigger the better, you know you can picture it.

My step-mom worked there, I heard all about it.

Yeah okay. And I don't think we have any srudents who would put themselves in that category here, one of the reasons might be Hillhi has a really well developed horticulture

program , and a number of the kids in that sub-culture were involved in horticulture so they would choose to stay for that, other than that I would say the student body is similar, we might be a little more tech. Centered than Hillhi, but I don't know if that's because our students are different or because our facility is different, I mean we have 500 plus computers here way more than at hillhi, we have more courses that exploit that and teach kids how to do cisco and we have our tech lab, we have all that that we didn't have at hillhi, so.

We know that you are retiring, this is you last year?

This is my last year.

How did you come to that descision?

Well, that's a good question you girls are great. First of all I'm retiring because I'm old, that's my number one reason. I'm going to be 60 in October so its time for me to retire, I've been teaching for 30 years. This 30th year. I started in 1964, and I took an eight year maternity leave during which time I had two children and when my daughter was a third grader and my son first grader they were 6 and 8 years old I went back to teaching so I've been teaching for a long long time. I probably would have taught a couple years though, if my husband hadn't asked me to consider retiring. And um, he wanted to retire at 60 and a couple years ago he asked me if I would, and my first reaction was no you go ahead I'm not ready you go ahead and retire on your own. We are the same age I should tell you hes a couple months older so he just turned 60. I just said you go ahead and retire on your own, I could see he wasn't going to be able to do that the guilt of him laying in bed when I was getting up to go to work was more than he could handle. So about a year and half ago or so I made a commitment to him I promised him I would retire with him. And at the time I made the promise I wasn't really ready to do it, but I kept thinking well I'll get ready as it gets closer and closer I'm gonna be ready. A couple of months ago I started to panic because I realized I wasn't feeling anymore ready then I had two months ago. So I had to give myself a little pep talk, and you girls remember how I taught you to do persuasion speeches. Well I worked up a little persuasion speech for myself. And I thought of 3 reasons that I ought to retire this year, and I put them in the proper order and presented myself with this argument. "I said well Gail number one you should retire because you better retire while you still have enough energy and while you are still young enough to enjoy the rest of your life so you better do it now before you run out of steam. And secondly, I said you know you better retire Gail because you know you have trouble with transitions with changes in your life and that's part of getting old and you need to force yourself to make a change just force yourself to do it. So I said okay that's two pretty good reasons. And then I said to myself the big reason the real reason you should retire now, is you should get out before people start talking about you behind your back", and I'm gonna get out just in time. And with those three reasons I think I persuaded myself to retire so that's why I'm ready to go.

What are you going to miss most about Century?

Well you know I'm gonna miss the kids, I really am. I know that next fall when every body else is getting new classes and meeting a whole new group of students I'm going to feel really sad because for me that's the most fun part of teaching. I love having interactions with students, you know I've been in high school for 34 years, and I also love planning lessons. Planning a way to teach a lesson that's kinda fun, fun for me and fun for students. So those are things I'm going to miss. I'm also going to miss my teacher friends too. But I'll be able to come over and have lunch with them and still see them and ya know keep up my friendships. But with the students and planning lessons those are the things I won't have. But I have a lot of things I'm looking forward to, and so that will fill those gaps. I have a really close family, my daughter's a doctor I think you remember that so she works long hours and odd hours. And her husband travels a lot he's a fashion photographer so he's all over the world, and is gone two weeks at a time. So my husband and I spend a lot time with our grand kids. And that's one of the things we're looking forward to in retirement. Our daughter and her husband just built an addition onto her house for us, which is really nice. We're going to sell our Portland house and spend probably half the time we have a house in Manzanita on the coast, we'll probably spend half of our time there at the beach, and when our son-in-law is out of town, and our daughter is working we'll stay at their place and take care of our grand kids. We have two grandchildren our granddaughter is 12, and our grandson is 9, so they're lots of fun to be around. And we're hoping to do some traveling. My husband wanted to go to Australia when we were first married 38 years ago, and I said no way buddy if you're gonna go you're going alone I'll see you when you get back. So he didn't go, I've always thought of that so I told him the first big trip that we take we'll go to Australia. So that's one thing we have in mind, and we're interested in doing some kayaking, some ocean kayaking, soon as we get good enough to venture out into the ocean.

How would you like the International club and the block class, how would you like them to carry on once you're gone?

Oh absolutely, I know that Ms. Jacobs and Ms. Benton are going to teach the advanced sophomore block next year. And we've worked together for two years because they've been teaching the regular block for two years. So definitely that's going to be carried on. And I'm not sure what's going to happen to the international club, I don't know who will take that, the person who has expressed the most amount of interest probably is Ms. Rooke the French teacher. And she might do something like that maybe one of the other language teachers might do that too. I hope so because it's a fun club, and you know a couple of months ago when we sacrificed our Wednesday morning club slot, because of the Monday morning academic seminar the international club overwhelmingly decided to continue meeting, and we've been meeting Wednesday morning's at 7:30, so kids are interested enough to keep doing that. And last Friday night we had our end of the year dinner where every body brings an international dish, and we have music and so on. So I hope that continues I hope that some body does it.

What have been your biggest frustrations at Century? Have there been any?

Well I haven't really thought this question through to give you a thoughtful answer. So I'll just say what jumps in my head okay? The thing that hits me first when you say frustrations, I would have to say is student attendance it just drives me crazy when kids don't come to school. Now granted when you're in the Hospital or you have a fever of 104, you can't come to school. But that's pretty rare compared to the number of reasons kids don't come to school, for me that's probably the biggest frustration...attendance. You know I'm always here, and even though it's my last semester, and people say to me aren't you going to take every Friday off? And my students say aren't you going to take a break? And I say no I really want to be here everyday. And I expect students to be here everyday, I want them to be here everyday.

What would you do if you could change that about attendance?

Well I don't know what else to do. We've tried and when I say We I mean Mr. Naylor and I since we're teaching together now. We've tried to make our class interesting enough and appealing enough that kids would want to come to school. We've tried to make sure that a student could not get by doing the assignments at home that they can't get the class experience. You have to be there to get it, it's not a correspondence course. So we've tried that, we've even tried um, sort of heavy handed police methods by making kids make up the time, you know if you miss and I think all of those things have helped but it doesn't cure the problem entirely.

How would you like to be remembered at Century?

I think I would like to be remembered as a teacher whose class is fun. I've always felt that we learn the best when we're having fun and I know kids learn a lot in my class, I would like them to remember that it was fun to learn, because that's how we become life time learners.

How will you remember Century?

Probably when I think about it, I'll remember it as individual students rather than a whole big body of people. I've had a number of kids who have written me little notes over the year, and I always save them, and I always say to them when I'm gone I'm gonna read these notes this is going to make me cry. So that's how I'll remember Century.

Any funny stories, or funny moments that come to mind at all?

Nope I think this is the end of the interview.

I think so, is there anything you would like to tell us?

Nope, I don't think so, I think you've covered it all. Thank you.