

Tracy Olsen 01-04-82
Sarah Olsen Interviewer
CHS Museum Series

This interview took place on behalf of the oral history project of Century High School. The interviewee is Tracy Olsen. The interviewer is Sarah Olsen. The interview took place on May 22, 2002 at Century High School at 8:00am.

What year did you first come to Century and from what school?

I came here the first year it opened. I think that was 97. I was the graduating class of 2000.

So what year did you come in as?

I came in as a sophomore.

What do you remember about your first impressions of the school?

Everybody that came in the first year didn't really know what to expect. They had just finished building everything and getting it set up right before school started. The whole building looked like...everybody joked around and said that it looked like a hospital because it was so clean and everything was white and nothing was on the walls yet. It was just bare.

What do remember about '97-'98? Was there anything special that happened that year?

They did a lot of assemblies and activities to try to get us our own school spirit being that Century opened up and some kids came from Hill High and some of us came from the Junior Highs and Century hadn't been established yet, there wasn't any sense of school pride really. They tried to get us all involved and give us our own identities. But the first year was tough.

Were you aware of the boundary changes and did it effect you or anyone you know?

When they set the boundaries, I was supposed to go to Hill High, but I petitioned to go Century and got in. But that was a big thing for everybody because everybody that went to my junior high when I went to Brown came to Century, but because I lived across TV Highway, that was district for Hill High.

What were some of the most positive things that you remember about going to Century?

Hmm...positive...positive...Well, we had a lot of fun the first couple years because there wasn't a real sense of identity, so they gave us as much right as could be to make it up as you went along. In that sense it was a lot of fun. All the classes were pretty much unestablished at that time. I was on the yearbook staff too, so that was another way that we could kind of make up our own school identity and school pride and be whoever we wanted to be basically at that point. That's about as positive as it got.

What are some of the most negative things that you remember?

(Laughter) Well...I think that without having the school be around for a really long time, it made it hard for anyone to be proud that they went to Century and know what it meant

to be a Jaguar. People went to football games and things like that, but...we got the turnout like other schools did, where people come and watch, but we didn't have any spirit of our own, we didn't have a mascot, we were just out there to give it our best shot. We didn't really have anything to stand up for, but we did anyway. It was hard to feel united as a school.

Looking back, what do you think the goals of Century staff were?

I think their main goal was just to teach us as well as they could. They had a lot of say in the planning, as far as I know, in the curriculum and how they wanted to teach it. I think they had...quite a bit of say in the way things turned out as far as class sizes and things like that. They did a lot of interactive projects and got to do a lot of hands on activities. I mean, I heard that a lot of the teachers...well, that it was pretty much a battle in who got to work here and who had to stay at the school they were at. And so, the teachers who went out in the end and got to come here, I think that their job was to live up to the standards that they made for themselves as far as saying 'I'm the best teacher.' I think their main goal was to make everyone feel welcome at the new school. They wanted to set the boundaries for that.

How did you feel about the size of the school?

Even when it first opened, it was huge. Student wise, even the first year, it was amazing. It got worse in the next year because they added another class. Even when it was opened, it was huge. There was not graduating class the first year, so that helped. But that was weird too. Everybody kind of looked forward to the end of the year and the parties that go on...graduation parties and getting excited for your friends that are graduating, and everything like that. The building size was nice. I would say it was good because there was so many students that it made it a little easier to deal with in the fact that everyone that was here the first year came from the junior highs and a couple people came from Hill High, but even Hill High has the buildings all separated and in the fact that this was one massive building that was could all share was nice.

What was it like we added another class the next year?

It just made it even more crazy because we felt like cattle herding through the halls and couldn't walk.

In the first year we had regular scheduling and the following year we changed to block scheduling. How did this work for you and what are your feelings about the block?

I liked block scheduling, it made it harder for me to stay awake sometimes because I've never been in a situation where I've had to focus all my attention on one teacher for that long of a period of time. But the eight period schedule was nice that they did that the first year because I came from Brown and they had shorter periods too. In coming here, it wasn't that big of a change and I could deal with the fact that we're in high school now.

What traditions do you think your class established?

I don't think we established any traditions at all. Like I said, the first year was hard and we tried to deal with that the best we could. Throughout the three years I guess we established some. Like I was here when they did the first Java Lava Lounge, the first Jag

Fest and the first Homecoming and all that. We tried to be original and do our own things, but I have a feeling that a lot of the things that we established as traditions were just knock offs from other schools.

How would you describe the culture of the school during the time you were here and did you see a change from the first to the second year?

Century was always about diversity, so that I can say was pretty much always like it is now. Everybody always taught from day one to accept that and kind of embrace it. I think the difference in the first to the second year was that we had more class difference. That helped a lot so we could kind of establish rank. I don't want to say that it's a bad thing, but just the class rank. You have the freshmen who are at the bottom and the seniors who are at the top. Not having that established the first year kind of threw the roles out of whack. Basically, we had a lot of conflicts because of that. Upper classmen would come in expecting to be top dogs and one little freshmen would think they're better than you, which caused a big problem as far as conflict goes.

Sometimes there were fights or ethnic conflicts that occurred. Do you think that's accurate and did you ever see these occur?

I didn't really see any fights. I know that there were some ethnic fights, but I don't really know how large of a scale it really got to. I only saw a couple of fights in the time I was here, but I do remember one fight pretty well. These two girls were in the commons area and just started swing at each other and pulling their hair out and...I'm pretty sure that was caused by a racial conflict. But I wasn't really a complete witness because I saw the aftermath of it when they were on the floor and the administration was restraining the girls, but that was pretty much it.

What do you remember about the early athletic programs and were you involved in any of them?

I played soccer for two years...the first year and the second year. The athletic program suffered a bit because there was a difficulty finding coaches that wanted to come into a program that wasn't established yet. I played for two years and had two different coaches and now I hear that the coach I had my second year isn't here anymore either. So...they had problems with the coaches...at least in the women's sports, I don't know much about the men's sports. It was hard playing other schools that had the support and had the school spirit and had people come out and watch them. We just had our team and a couple of parents and we called it good. We played well and tried our best, but we really weren't good. That comes from lack of experience and not playing together. The first year we were all new and basically didn't know how to operate as a team. I think most team sports had that problem.

Who do you remember as some of the most memorable people in the first two years and what were their contributions?

I don't remember if it was the first or second year, but Jesse Johnson was either the junior or senior who ran for president or...ASB president. He did a lot for the school. He came from Hill High, so he knew what their traditions were and knew how to get people involved. I think he probably did one of the best jobs of taking what he knew and

making it our own instead of just flat out copying it. I know that Mrs. Scheller and Ms. Farris were both very involved in getting the school united and that kind of stuff. They started the Java Lava Lounge, helped with Jagfest, they're always very active in the school. Angela Snodgrass and Karen Stevens both did a lot, they were both in Student council and they both tried really hard to get things done. They were both on the soccer team also and were getting out into the school using things like sports to promote togetherness. They did a lot.

How well did Century prepare you for what you did after high school?

They didn't really. I guess that was partly my fault. I missed the second half of my senior year because I graduated early, in January and that point they hadn't really done much with the seniors of that class as far as getting ready for college or how to get into college even. I didn't even know what a FAFSA was when I left Century. I didn't know how to register for classes or anything about any of that. And so, I don't really know what they did in the second half of that year, so I can't really say if it was their fault or mine for that, but I think they should at least, if they're not already, be prepared for seniors who want to leave early if they have enough credits. They should be able to work with them and help them figure it out.

What do you think the reputation of Century is as far as other schools and throughout the community?

Community wise, when I say community, I'm thinking of the older, parents, people out of high school. I think you have a really good reputation with them...they see it as a way for the community to stay connected through the high school with all of the donating that Intel did and all of the sponsorship that we got through local business. As far as the community goes, they see it as the 'prized school.' As far as students go, I think that they look at Century kind of like Westview or Jesuit, as kind of a snobby school in the fact that we got all of this great stuff donated and all of this great stuff paid for and it's all brand new. I think that caused a lot of jealousy with other high schools and that it kind of created a wedge, especially between the high schools of the district...Glencoe, and Hill High, I think that they don't really like us very much.

What was your graduating ceremony like and how do you feel about the way it went?

My graduation ceremony was okay. They had only done one before it, so they didn't have a lot to go on. Most of the administration had done them at other high schools, but as far as Century, there had only been one before it, so the second one didn't really go much better. It all ran smoothly, but it wasn't anything exceptional. We all got in our gowns and put on our little caps and walked across the thing and that was about it. It wasn't really anything else to it. It's kind of like a wedding...for the people that are there and for the people who are in it, you know you have to be there and you know it's an exciting event...but as far as how much fun it is to go to those kinds of things, it's really not. I guess basically, they need to find some kind of balance where they can still be professional and make it seem like an important event. Graduating is important, so you want to make it seem like it's nice and formal, but at the same time you don't want it to bore everyone in the audience either.

If you could change anything that happened in the time you were here, what would it be? I would have gone to Hill High (laughter). I think that I made a mistake personally when I tried to come here when I should have gone to Hill High in the first place. If I were to change something about Century though, I think they should have waited another year to open the school. I think that it got pretty rushed towards the beginning of the school year and that they just kind of threw some things together. They should have waited longer and established some things so that the kids that went here knew who they were when it opened. People who go to Hill high usually know what being a Spartan means. We didn't even have a fight song until the year I graduated. So, I mean, things like that don't seem important when you're out of high school, but when you're in it and that's your life, you kind of need a little bit more structure and a little bit more identity. It's a hard time in your life and you kind of need that support.

I think this is a great project and I'm really glad that my sister interviewed me.