

with
Clarence Thomas

me: I am Kelly Mitchell and I am going to interview Clarence Thomas who was a teacher at National Mine School. The interview will be done in my own house on December 9, 1990.

me: Okay, okay, When were you born?

Mr. T.: October 5, 1919

me: Okay and did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. T.: Yes, I had an older brother and I have a younger sister. My brother is dead and my sister is still living.

me: What are their names?

Mr. T.: My brother was named Roy and my sister was Edna May. She is called Mrs. Butler now.

me: Okay. And, did any of them go to National Mine School?

Mr. T.: No, No.

me: When^{was} and who did you marry?

Mr. T.: I married Janetta Medlynn in 1941. And Uh, I believe it was June 14.

me: Um-hu, okay, Do you have any children?

Mr. T.: Yes,

me: Um, what are their names?

Mr. T: Six children, four boys and two girls, The oldest boy is James Thomas, The second one is John, The next comes Jane and then Sally. Followed by Robert and Richard.

me: okay, And, did any of them go to National Mine?

Mr. T: No.

me: okay, Um, what years did you work at National Mine school?

Mr. T: I started working in National mine in 1949, I quit to go into the mine in 1953. I returned to Nation Mine in 1955 and taught there until 1959 when I went to California.

me: okay, In as much detail as possible, please describe your job.

Mr. T. My job ~~was~~ while I was at National Mine was all in the teaching field. Um, we had an eight period day and taught roughly 7 of the periods. The classes usually were doubled up. for example we taught both junior high and the high school.

me: um, hu.

Mr. T: um, The seventh and eight grade were quite often lumped together as specific field like the eleventh and twelve. For example the eleventh and twelfth grade literature, American literature one year and the next year would be eleventh

Mr. T: and twelve grade, uh, English literature.
We did this in many subjects.

me: and, um. What was the most rewarding part of this career?

Mr. T. (clear throat) Well, I guess the most rewarding part ~~was being~~ would be, um, satisfaction, you see when you, some of your students start making achievements, like a for example;

me: um, hu.

Mr. T: You try to get some students, uh, directed some way, sometimes, you did, sometimes you didn't, but when ~~you~~ ^{they} did, uh, ~~you~~ ^{then} prof. if for them, ~~you were quite satisfied~~, you were quite satisfied.

me. ~~uh~~ ^{okay} um, what was the most difficult part of your job?

Mr. T: Well, depends on what part of the job. I was teacher for a while and I was an administrator for a while. While teaching I guess the most difficult would be, in early in teaching when money was short to get adequate equipment to teach with.

me. um.

Mr. T: Sometimes we made the materials that we were going to use to teach with. Later years, of course, the stuff came quite easily.

me: okay, um, How or why did you choose your career?

Mr.T: Well, I didn't really choose my career in that sense. I originally went to school to become a forester and after a couple of years and uh, World War II stepping in and interrupting everything, uh, when I came back (clear throat) by that time I had been married and I had three children and so I figured the best thing to do was getting money really fast and I didn't want to get return to the mine, which I had work at before, so I went for a teachers degree

me: (m. hu.) okay, um, How have you seen the duties of your job change over the years?

Mr.T: Well, eh, the job has changed in many ways, uh, the entire school system has changed in many ways, ~~it~~ originally my job was to try prepare students as best as possible for, uh, a way of life that would be profitable to them.

me: um, hum

Mr.T: um, now it seems that we have many other things interfering in the school. We, oh, Actually where my job was teaching, before, now it becomes, ah, a job as guidance as well. Ah, were dealing with social problems almost as much as we're educating.

me: um, okay! um, during your career were you involved in any special projects, programs, or extra curricular activities?

Mr. T: Well, um, yes! In the beginning we used to, ah, most of us used to work with the, the men at least used to work with the coaches. We would do such things as take care of the clock at games or collect tickets or in some how or another, ah, partake in some activities also, ah, I put on many class plays or assisted other teachers when they put on their plays. By the way all these things were done gratis. ~~Used to be~~ ~~paid~~ ~~for~~ ~~things~~ ~~they~~ ~~were~~ ~~just~~ ~~part~~ ~~of~~ ~~your~~ ~~job~~. That's quite a change from today.

me: um, hu, okay.

Mr. T: One other project that was quite proud of is, ah, we had classes that used to sell magazines, and each year we would have some ~~extra~~ surplus money, we would buy things for the school, perhaps it would be, ah, something for the stage and so forth and ah, One particular year we decided that we would start putting money aside for lockers.

me: uh, hu.

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Mr. T: And, uh, this is a project that we started and it wasn't received to well by some of the administrators people. ~~they~~ they think, they thought that we shouldn't do this. Prior to this time we used to have a, ~~like a~~ cloak, cloak racks in the hallway and quite often students would run into them, so, the lockers that they have at National Mine now was started by a group I had. In the a, In the junior high.

me: um.

Mr. T: Selling magazines.

me: um, okay? Did you receive any special training for your job?

Mr. T: (chuckling) well, yes, Uh, I went to Northern uh, for, well actually ~~for~~ ^{for} roughly ~~5~~ 5 years I graduated in 49 and uh, becoming a teacher, but I continued my training right up ~~to~~ in through 60. So, uh, I did, but not for any additional work. The uh, training I took after I got my degree was, ah, my masters and also for guidance and course as well as for administration.

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me: um, okay. And, could you describe some interesting or humorous events that happened during your career?

mr. T: Well, I guess there's, there's been an ~~awful~~ lot of them through the years. As, as I stop to think about them. Uh, I remember one real interesting one with a girl on a Q. test, I won't mention her name - I don't want to embarrass her, but, um, in the science class we had been studying snails and a mollusks and things like this. And I had given an objective test and, uh, this girl was having a little difficulty, well one of the questions was - a slug is a snail without a blank. -

me: uh, hu.

mr. T: And uh, what she should've put down of course is a shell. but. She put down was ~~down~~, a snail, a slug is a snail without a doubt. And of course she is quite right in what she said, but it

me: (chuckle)

Mr. T: wasn't the answer we were looking for. And many other instances as well.

Me: um, Can you describe what your coworkers were like?

Mr. T: well, in the beginning all teachers worked together, very much so, ah, A teacher from one grade will, would give out a additional information besides the records' how to handle a particular child who was having difficulty, what would help them, and things like this. And now it seems that, a, teachers₂ are more in they're own sphere of a study, they, they don't, I want say their not cooperative, but they don't transfer information from one to the other, like possibly they should.

me: um, um, At any time did you feel like changing careers?

Mr. T: Well I did, I changed careers myself a couple times. Uh, I changed careers in '53 when I left and went into the mining industry as a chemist, and uh, I um then I did it again in '57. But at that time I stayed in ~~teaching~~ teaching and worked the other career to. Both of them. So um, I have had two careers at once.

me: um, okay. How did the community feel about National Mine school?

Mr. T: Very supportive. The community in National Mine have always been very supportive of their school, and very proud of the school.

me: um, hu.

Mr. T: And uh, rightly so. Uh, I think sometimes there is a great, a large element in National Mine that wish they had their own school vet. Independent of a the consuldies of the schools.

me: um, Do you still feel that way?

Mr. T: No, I don't. I think the consuldint school is better.

me: okay. Did any of your family members or relatives work for the school?

Mr. T: they didn't work, my relatives didn't; uh, I have many of them in schools, but they didn't work for National Mine, but I have many relatives who are in the Teaching field I have a son in Ishpeming who is the principal in Ishpeming, I have ah, many cousins who were teachers in Negaunee, Ishpeming I have a cousin who used to be a teacher at National Mine.

me: um, okay! And, How has the building itself changed over the years?

Mr. T: Well, when we first went to National Mine, it was a (clear throat) self-contained building, I can't say how many rooms without, ah, taking a lot of time counting.
me: um, hu.

Mr. T: but, ah, The gym has altered. The gym used to be a stage. And, ah, seats were, where the seats are now in the kitchen. That used to be all seating.

me: um.

Mr. T: and the stage was low, the seats was lower than the stage and, uh, the basketball team played on the stage as well. We had a big curtain they used to go, or a ~~big~~ net they used to go to keep the students ~~from~~ from falling of the stage.

me: (chuckle)

Mr. T: In addition, ah, they have replaced all the old windows in the school with new ones, which was real good, because many of the old windows used to leak air during the winter

me: um

Mr. T: So if you stood by a window, you could feel a draft. Also some of the radiators leaked which all have been changed and approved. And they have added on a number of rooms.

me: um hum, where was the cafeteria before when the gym was the stage area?

Mr. T: Uh, actually what we did was we had a cafeteria, the uh, just as you, along side the shop there's a little small room that we used to there the feeding out of. And directly across from that room was a lunch room, which I think now is the Art room.

me: yea. okay um. Have you maintained contact with former students of co-workers?

Mr. T: Yes, I have contact with many of the student. It seems that they, the students that you have first begin teaching, you establish a close relationship with, as you get into the field more, after many a years, it gets so that, a, alot of people become faces.

me: um, hu

Mr. T: And though you may recognize them and see them, you cannot put the name to them. But the ones you first meet, the first ones you had, a parently made a more deep impression on you because you remember them. For example, right here in National mine there is, you have three people in this system that I had a students. And that is Mr. Keto, uh, Mrs. Johnson and, uh, Mr. Pietro down

me: uh, hu

Mr. T: in the, uh, in the Janitorial service. And of course theirs others. Um many of the teacher that I worked with, like Mr. Ogea or Mr. Tomp, Tompkin. And uh, Mr. Bendzie. And, uh,

Mr. T: Mrs. Magnuson, who was just honored just, uh, short while ago. As well as Mrs. Gleason, and Mr., and Mr. Gleason. All these were co-workers of mine.

me: um, Did you like working with them?

Mr. T: Oh, yes, they were all very good. ~~Many of them~~ Many of them rode with me to school. We rode in a car pool and, uh, mostly women I forgot Mr. Polman of course, and, uh, Fanny Milamaki as other teachers I worked with. And Mr. uh, Mr. Limbrig. Both of them ~~as well~~ Austin as well as Mr. Kennis Limbrig.

me: okay, um, If you had to do all over again would you choose the same career?

Mr. T: I think I would, because there was an awful lot of satisfaction in it. I think I liked it for that reason.

me: what were the greatest challenges you faced during your career?

Mr. T: well, in the beginning of the career of course, uh, the biggest challenge would be to, to um, be able to get all of the work done, uh, and to be able to adequately give enough assignments that the students were gaining from it and have the time to really

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Mr. T: work the papers over correctly

me: um, hu,

Mr. T: and correct them. For example, uh, the class sizes we had at, back in the fifties, we used to have for example, any where from thirty ~~to~~ five to sometime forty five and, uh, I remember one ~~really~~ ^{reaching} class with sixty-five students. In it, well if you give many written assignments, you either never going to get them all corrected or if you do correct them you aren't correcting them intensely enough to do justice. So, this was a problem I had. And I used to devise means by which I could correct them fast and still be accurate. And now with class sizes down around twenty-two and twenty-five it's, it's no where near as hard.

me: um, hu, um, what were your biggest responsibilities?

Mr. T: well, I think the biggest responsibility is to realize that when your working with people, young people, like students, no matter what age, your probably working with the number one natural resource we have in this country. It's not iron or steel, or something like that, it's the well being of the future of the people. And how well their informed, how well their trained, to adjust into society is very, very, important to me.

me: Did you ever win any special rewards or
be recognized for your job performance?

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Mr. T: Well, when I retired, I was honored as a master teacher, thirty some years of work and, uh, I was given a portrait of myself ~~and~~ along with some of my ex-students in it. And, uh, every now and then I survey those students and still can see them in my classes.

me: um, Um, what are your fondest memories of National Mine School?

Mr. T: I guess, uh, the parties they used to have. We used to have parties regularly, different classes and of course all the students were invited. All the teachers were ~~called~~ invited and their spouses and we used to have a very, very good time. Very friendly time.

me: Where were these parties held?

Mr. T: In the school.

me: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Mr. T: Off hand no. Other than a, I found, uh, either teaching in National Mine, teaching up in Champlain where I was later on or out in California, students are the same all over. Their all as far as discipline is concerned, I was very fortunate to be in a situation where there is very little of it. We hear the problems, sometimes they magnify them, but there only about 3% of the situations. Things have change however though, uh,

Mr. T: we don't have as much support from home as we used to.

me: okay, I have one more question, Is there much competition between Champion and National Mine School? Have you seen it since you were also a Principal at champion?

Mr. T: I think there is considerable competition, healthy competition, that is where ~~they~~ they each trying to beat the other. I think this is good.

me: mhm, hu.

Mr. T: Uh, however there is not competitiveness to the ~~fact~~ ^{point} that I'm better than you, because actually there both the same.

me: okay.

Mr. T: And I have taught in both. And, I can speak from both areas, that they are the same. Not one better than the other one, Not one worse than the other.

me: okay, Is there anything else you would like to add?

Mr. T: Well, I might mention a few more people, uh, that I missed before, and probably still missing some, as, uh, other teachers I had were I worked with was Mrs. Hory, ~~Ms.~~ Ms. Wornberg, Um, Mrs. Ward, as long as Superintendent Mr. Barn, and, uh, Mr. George Annala principal who was to me a

Mr. T! tremendously outstanding teacher.
me: Okay, Thank, You!

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