Theresa Buntain: Educational Insights at the Heart of Education and Teaching

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Christina Norton: Alright, okay good morning Mrs. Buntain. I am here with Mrs. Buntain. Right now she is in Kentucky, Louisville, Kentucky enjoying a break, but she is from Fort Scott Kansas. And I am here in Irving, Texas um and we are here on March 17 St Patrick’s day 2017. Um so I am conducting this this interview for my oral history project at the University of Dallas for my History of American Education class. The purpose of this interview is just to initiate conversation regarding education and educational experiences and I have the pleasure this morning to hear about Mrs. Buntain’s experiences with education and listen to her own unique perspective. Um so this interview will be recorded and transcribed and the final recording and transcription will be housed in the University of Dallas oral history repository. Does that sound okay with you Mrs. Buntain?

Theresa Buntain: That sounds fine with me.

Christina Norton: Alright, how are you this morning?

Theresa Buntain: I am good this morning. Happy St. Patrick’s day.

Christina Norton: Good, thank you. Alright, so we will start with our first question. Um how would you describe your elementary school experience?

Theresa Buntain: My elementary school experience was um between public school and catholic school, because I started kindergarten in a public school, because we didn’t have kindergarten at our catholic school. So I went from there to St. Mary’s and for some reason I knew that St. Mary’s was more special, you know even at that kindergarten age. And I was taught by nuns at St. Mary’s school in Fort Scott, Kansas.

Christina Norton: Very nice, and so were all your teachers nuns in Fort Scott or…?

Theresa Buntain: They weren’t. We had a lay teacher for third and fourth grade. Our grades were combined so I had a nun for first and second and a lay teacher for third and fourth, a sister for fifth and sixth and then a sister for seventh and eighth. But our school closed before I got to the eighth grade. So I switched into a junior high for my eighth and ninth grades. Yeah, the way ours was set up in the whole town was we had an east side and a west side and the public schools went to um they went to sixth grade and then everybody converged at the junior high for seventh, eighth, and ninth. So if you came from St. Mary’s and graduated there from the eighth grade you only went to the junior high for one year, for ninth grade and then went to the high school. But as it happened they didn’t actually close the school but they hacked off the seventh and eighth grades so you know trying to cut expenses. So um I went through seventh grade and those eight graders and seventh graders, we all went over to the junior high and then from then on St. Mary’s school
was, well for one year, was first through sixth grade, and then after that they just closed it for like 15 years, but then it got reopened.

CN: Oh really, well that’s good.

TB: And it only went through fifth grade because back then they had made the junior high into a middle school, so it covered sixth, seventh, and eighth and the high school took on an extra grade so it was nine, ten, eleven, and twelve.

CN: So, is St. Mary’s K-5th now? Is that-

TB: Yeah, well it is preschool through fifth. Yeah instead of adding on to the older grades we started younger.

CN: Oh, yeah that is an interesting trend. Umm so how would you describe your overall, I guess, classroom experiences at St. Mary’s?

TB: Our classes were really small and my experiences were the boys were bad and the girls were good.

CN: Sounds pretty typical.

TB: You know we just kind of let the boys be bad and the girls were all good and the sisters’ favorites. They were tough, we learned a lot. And it was pretty well known in the public school that the St. Mary’s kids were smart. But that wasn’t necessarily true but that’s how they felt.

CN: Yeah, it had the reputation.

TB: I mean maybe it was true for some kids, but not for others. It was also known that we could play ball because that’s what we did every recess. (Time: 5:14)

CN: Oh really. What kind of ball? Like-

TB: We played softball.

CN: Softball. Oh, okay.

TB: We had a big field and if you didn’t play softball you jumped rope.

CN: So, did you have sports teams-athletic teams at St. Mary’s?

TB: We did yeah um they, as the school was kind of waning out, they kind of let that go. And there were other small Catholic schools that we played in the area. We were the St. Mary’s falcons. We had basketball and then in the spring if any other Catholic schools wanted to play we would have baseball too or softball. We play each other, playgrounds is where we played. Yeah we had a basketball team.

CN: Basketball, very nice.

TB: We built the gymnasium in the early 60s, the John F Kennedy Gymnasium. So we had a gym to play basketball.
CN: Wow that’s nice. So what do you think was the typical class size?

TB: Um my class was about seven kids but I think they would be from anywhere from twelve to probably seven or eight kids.

CN: Oh that’s good. So you were still-I guess-so you had about one basketball team-one basketball team. Did you have a softball team or did you just play softball at recess?

TB: We just played softball at recess Sometimes the nuns played with us. The lay teacher-she always-she would be the umpire with third and fourth grade. She kept track of everything on a little piece of paper and we would go out for the next recess and she would say so and so was up, he had two strikes...I mean we continued right where it was.

CN: That’s fun.

TB: Yeah it was fun.

CN: So what kind of classes did you take? What subjects do you remember?

TB: At St. Mary’s? Um well we had religion. And we combined religion and art together or tried to. Um we had well just your basic-we had penmanship. Um and the reading, writing, arithmetic. We didn’t-um I guess we had a little composition you know because we wrote some papers. I remember writing a paper in a composition about the hospital- the doctors and nurses and the school/sisters probably had some kind of mercy healthcare week or something. Yeah, and I got published.

CN: Oh, really! that’s exciting.

TB: Our hospital/Fort Scott used to have a little paper- I don’t remember what it was called, but I think they printed one every month and they had contest winners in it.

CN: Ah that’s fun. That is always exciting to get your piece of writing published.

TB: Yeah, yeah it was cool

CN: Alright so you left St. Mary’s in eighth grade, you said?

TB: I didn’t complete eighth grade there and graduate from St. Mary’s. They just phased us out and I went over to the junior high

CN: Okay, the junior high

TB: For eighth grade-eighth and ninth.

CN: For eighth and ninth, and from the junior high you moved to the high school

TB: Uh huh.

CN: Ok so tell me about the transition from St. Mary’s to junior high.

TB: That was a little different. Um there was a girl in the eighth grade-she had a connection with-she had friends in the public schools and they were having tryouts for cheerleading, pom-
pom, and things like that. So um she asked the rest of us if we wanted to try out, and I did. And so she and I went over there after school, and we just walked everywhere in Fort Scott, you could walk in those days, kind of-laughs-if you lived in town. And we would go over there after school, and we’d practice the routine with others. And then there was a day when they had tryouts. And it was kind of scary because you had to try out in front of this whole- you know seventh, eighth and ninth grade- in front of the school and I got it! So-

CN: Oh good! That’s exciting.

TB: And she did too. So we were in that together which gave- that was a whole new world for me- it made it really great for me because then I had instant friends, you know I had like a team of people. There was drama, you know the usual girl stuff too. But right off the bat, I went to a camp which…for pom-pom. And I also had a uniform to wear which saved me because we were pretty poor. And I wore my uniform so many days a week. You know it saved us on clothes. Nobody would have known but we didn’t have a lot of money. So that was the pom-pom thing.

CN: Ah, well good. So- (Time: 11:12)

TB: Speaking of uniforms, we did wear uniforms at St. Mary’s in third grade and then they just kind of dropped it later on. Yeah, that was probably a complaint of parents or something like that. So, for my last three years there I didn’t wear a uniform. Which was sad to my mother because then we had to come up with clothes to wear.

CN: Yeah it is difficult. Okay so eighth through ninth grade in junior high. And this was just the local junior high at Fort Scott?

TB: Mhmm. The one and only.

CN: The one and only. Was it attached to the high school?

TB: No, it was a separate building downtown. Umm though it was blocks away from the high school. Yeah, I did that and I did pom-pom in my eighth and ninth grades.

CN: Okay, very cool. So how would you compare the class size of your junior high versus your elementary?

TB: Well, they were a lot bigger. Yeah, a lot bigger. Probably you know, two to three sizes bigger. Also, I remember thinking that, um you know, they thought that we were smart but you could also tell that the popular more affluent families- their kids got in the classes that had the better teachers and if you really weren’t known that well then you got the duds. You got into the- the teachers weren’t necessarily duds- they just weren’t popular teachers, but also their classes were with kids that were struggling or were troublemakers and that is kind of where I was put my first year and some of my friends too. We were- I don’t know- it was kind of like we were an unknown to the staff or something and so they just slotted us into classes. Yeah.

CN: So how big do you think the- I guess the whole student body was- if you have like different classes for- sounds like you have different classes for each grade?

TB: Different classes for each grade?
CN: Um like you- well where St. Mary’s, your whole class was like seven, seven students?

TB: Yeah, we had one teacher or unless we had a-if we had a lay teacher, then we had a sister
come in to teach religion- religion and art. But yes, we moved around and that was different. And
our school was three floors so we had to learn, you know, where our classes were and yeah we
moved around for every class. And I remember I started out-and math was not my best subject-
and I had one of the scariest math teachers first thing in the morning. And I had allergies really
bad and my folks-my dad was a milkman and my mom and us girls we delivered papers for the
Wichita. So we would go out in the morning hours in the dew and my allergies would be awful
and then I would have to go to this new school, you know, with this scary teacher. And I just
prayed he wouldn’t call me to the board. But then I was happy because my next hour was right
next door and it was art class and it was more relaxed. (Time: 15:06)

CN: So, do you feel that instruction in your junior high school was any different from that of
your elementary school or do you think it was pretty similar?

TB: Oh, it was definitely different- way different. Yeah, um I noticed that the kids didn’t
necessarily respect the teachers as much- it was more- although I had a scary math teacher I felt
like our classes were a little more relaxed. We had um- hey we would have pop parties
sometimes, you know on a Friday. Somebody would go around and collect dimes and then
someone would get picked to go to the pop ? and pull pop out of the machines for us. And um,
boy we never did anything like that in the Catholic school. And oh, also they had Special Ed
there too which was different for me. They had just one classroom for those kids and um, I was
interested in that for a while and then um- well in fact I think it was my senior year you know,
we have like a work-study class or something and um so I chose to go-at the elementary level
they had a little house connected with one of the elementary schools and that’s where they had-
we called it the little retarded schoolhouse simply because that’s where the Special Ed kids were.
So I chose to go there and help that teacher during a particular hour of the day and work with
those kids. Yeah that was interesting. I kind of liked it.

CN: Ok so that was your senior year-

TB: And I did notice too at the junior high level that the discipline was handled by like the vice
principal or the principal. I mean it didn’t seem that- teachers didn’t have to bother with it at all.
If there was an unruly kid, out you went and you went to the office and they dealt with it. But at
our little Catholic school, you know, there wasn’t anybody to go to- I mean there was a principal
that would be one of the sisters, but the sisters pretty much just dealt with their own problems-
unless it was just really, really, bad um and then I think they would call the parents and talk to
them.

CN: Yeah that’s interesting- the difference there.

TB: Yeah, I don’t recall there being a detention at St. Mary’s. For me- I mean maybe it’s because
I never had it. Um if people got in trouble-if kids got in trouble- they did work. Like they’d have
to clean something. I guess that would be their punishment after school- I guess that was
detention. But heck, if I was asked to stay after school and do something—my girlfriend and I would have loved it. Because we would get to help the teacher. We would think that was fun.

CN: Well let’s see did you notice— you mentioned the building in junior high was a lot bigger—did you notice any difference in like the resources um available to each school or just different resources that were used for instruction?

TB: Yeah um, well there was a bigger library. The science rooms you know they would have— I never saw anything used in science rooms— but I know that they had things there. Maybe it’s because I didn’t take it in ninth grade but um other than that no… oh well they had lunch. They had lunch— the lunchroom was in the library area but we didn’t— we didn’t have cafeteria or kitchen or anything. We brought our own lunches to St. Mary’s. So that was a whole new experience for me. I- it never occurred to me that kids actually got fed at school by somebody else— somebody else fixed their meal. That was different.

CN: Alright, well let’s talk about high school. We’ve already touched on it some. So from the junior high, you went a couple blocks over to high school. And that was from ninth to twelfth grade? Or yes, was it ninth to twelfth?

TB: Yeah back then it was ninth through twelfth. No! sorry it was ten through twelfth.

CN: Ten through twelfth. Okay. Okay, so how was that transition, moving from junior high to high school?

TB: Oh, I just thought of something else about junior high. They had P.E. They had gym class and showers. Yeah and they did have sports teams, yeah.

CN: Yeah, I guess more so than St. Mary’s, for sports teams?

TB: Oh, definitely. They had football, basketball, and um well what else did they have? They had track. Yeah and mainly for the boys. Yeah, back then.

CN: Oh yeah, so what were the main girls’ activities or sports?

TB: Well we were in cheerleading or pom-pom.

CN: Cheerleading or pom-pom. What’s the difference between cheerleading and pom-pom?

TB: Well pom-pom, now they would call it dance, but we didn’t—um it was just different—cheerleading was a smaller group maybe 5 or 6 girls and we actually did cheers and maybe some stunts, but pom-pom was to music and not like the dances today. It was a lot of kicking

CN: Like on the movies you see. Fun.

TB: Yeah, well we didn’t have girls sports, but that was different in having this huge gym— they had a large gym and they had an old gym down below and we played, instead of recess, you know how it is, you go to these other things and I am telling you playing floor hockey with some of those girls— that was a challenge. And then you know the showering. So as far as what was available to us, that was something else too. I mean I guess you would consider that a classroom, right? Okay what was the question?
CN: Oh, okay so moving from junior high to high school- umm how would you- was that a smooth transition or do you think it was still pretty different in regards to junior high?

TB: For me it was pretty smooth. I guess um, I don’t know I had a brother then that was in the high school. He wasn’t with me um at the junior high because he was already in high school like you know for tenth grade. So um he drove me to school and the transition to classrooms was kind of like- it was kind of like um junior high with more freedom. You know and the school was much larger, you would find your way around. Again it was three stories, parts of it. It was three stories um and I liked that I didn’t have to take some classes, I mean I knew that like chemistry, I didn’t even know where that room was. And you know. And so it was just a lot of fun. I guess I was a little socialite or something because I had a lot of friends that was my main thing I didn’t like missing school and friends.

CN: So how- how did the class schedule work for you? Did you have block periods? Or was it just-

TB: No, we just had you know regular um about an hour periods you know and then they gave us maybe five minutes to get to our classes in between-something like that- and uh- oh also there was a big transition going to a locker- St. Mary’s to using lockers- having your very own or actually share a locker- I think we shared lockers yeah and then did so in high school too. Sorry I just keep remembering…(trails off)- (Time: 25:09)

CN: No lockers are so exciting. I remember getting those in school too. Even though like we didn’t even need to use them but it was just an exciting thing to have.

TB: We needed to use ours so, yeah, I liked having my own private little square foot space.

CN: Yeah, that’s nice. So, what high school classes do you remember taking or what are some that stood out to you?

TB: Things that stood out to me were- like I was terrible at geometry- scared me to death. I was very good at accounting. I liked that. I loved my English classes. Um and biology because I had my best girlfriend on one side of me and my soon after later to be husband on the other side of me. And they liked what they were doing so. Got the frogs, the slugs. When they finished their project, they did mine. Um again there was P.E. and um well I remember my English classes a lot. I took Spanish. Our English classes were uh each quarter of the school year you changed it up. You went from say composition, to like a reading class, to a grammar class, and- yeah we did it like that back then. I’m sure that you know how things roll around let’s try it this way now let’s try it this way, that didn’t work or- that type of thing. But that is the way they did it then. So, you knew that if you didn’t like what you were in it would be over at the end of the quarter. And if you did like it, you were mad because you had to move on to something else…(trails off) for last.

CN: So, did they just do that with the English classes or were other classes that way too?

TB: I think it was just the English class because there is so many you know things to teach in English so many segments that- that’s how they did that.
CN: So, did you get- what were the choices like in regards to classes? Were there a lot of different choices you could choose or were you pretty limited?

TB: There were a lot um we- I don’t think we had Latin back then but you could take French or Spanish. Um and then those- like those English classes- you can be in any grade and then choose-like which one you wanted to take. Well of course then we had French II and Spanish II. You know you could continue on that route. Um we had um- I was trying to think of something social like- I don’t remember what- well we had drama. And um yeah so there was theater. We had debate, forensics. Um I don’t know and then of course the math classes would advance you know. You could go from geometry to trig to you know- it’s much like they do now. Some of the kids would take classes because they wanted a particular teacher you know. Oh and we had history and I don’t remember a um geography class. Probably had that during history or something you know. Yeah we had social studies and things like that. Gary would bring current events to our social studies class and they came from Mad Magazine. You probably don’t know about Mad Magazine…(trails off) National Lampoon Magazine. (Time: 30:06)

CN: So, he brought those to your all’s social studies- was that included in your all’s history class or was that like its own-

TB: No, it was separate. Yeah. Our history class at least mine was taught by a coach and he had a spiral notebook that was really fat and he read to us. He would read and we would write what he read. He would read and we would write what he read. So we ended up with a notebook kind of like his and that was how he taught. It was so boring. It was so awful. And he never did anything to change it. It was year after year after year because it was history. His main thing was football you know. And then later he became a principal and he was really bad. You know one thing I forgot to is um music. We had um girls glee and we had a choir that was boys and girls. The girls could only, well, boys could be in the big choir because they needed boys in the big choir. But if you were a sophomore girl, you had to be in girls glee because they didn’t need any more girls in the big choir. You know, you have to work things out.

CN: Figure out that balance.

TB: Yeah and there was band and there was an orchestra at the junior high and I don’t know I guess it was there at the high school too but I didn’t know it existed until we got our yearbook. And then we had woodshop you know. And I don’t know if we had auto mechanics back then or not, but I think we did. And then by then girls could play sports too. So my battery is running low so I’m going to have to plug that in. So…Gary is going to help me get battery-or get the plug. Anyway, yeah so then social life expanded because we weren’t just in you know the cheerleading and pom-pom and all of that and we also had student council which I guess we probably had at Junior high too but I wasn’t in it. But yeah..

CN: So, let’s see. Um so you mentioned with your experience with the history teacher- how did you- (audio breaking up)- sorry, can you hear me?

TB: Oh, I am having trouble with audio.

CN: Yeah let’s see.
TB: Can you hear me?
CN: Yeah. Can you hear me okay?
TB: I am having trouble with audio. Maybe I’ll get Janet to help. Hey, Janet there is a problem. Since I plugged in the battery now it’s a little sketchy. But let’s keep trying. Now what?
Something about the history teacher.
CN: Okay, so how did most of your teachers I guess instruct the class- um can you hear that?
TB: Um how did most of them instruct the class? Most of them um stood at the front of the class, um maybe they would walk around you know kind of walk through the rows of desks. We had regular desks with tops. I know things are different now, they have a lot tables and things in classes-some desks- but um they would walk around and if someone was being disruptive they might you know tap them on the shoulder, knock on their desk, something like that. Um pretty much- of course it depended on what class it was too- how much- how lively they were. The personality of the teacher. We had an English teacher who would get up on her desk if she wanted to make an important point, she would climb right up on the desk and she was real theatrical like and she uh if she wanted to read to us out of something you know she would just do that and you would remember. (Time: 35:00)
CN: Wow. Yeah that would be exciting.
TB: Yeah. Remember when Mrs. E (abbreviated) got on the desk…laughing…you know
CN: So, what kind of-I guess- classroom activities- what kind of classroom activities?
TB: Classroom Activities? Um well like in our biology we had labs that we did um. I think in the regular reading, writing, arithmetic kind of thing the teacher was at the front of the class and you just took instruction you know. I can’t think, I don’t remember. Oh well we had competitions like we would go to the next town where Pittsburg state university was- it was the next college and we would compete maybe in poetry um different things like that and music.
CN: Mhmm, okay very cool. So are there any achievements or special moments that you remember as standing out in your education?
TB: Okay you’ll have to say that again. Any achievements or?
CN: Special moments
TB: Oh, hold on. Oh okay, Janet is saying if it gets real bad we can hang up and call again. Okay so any special achievements or?
CN: Special moments that you remember in your education that’s impacted you through the years?
TB: Um special moments for me in my education. Well there was a time when you know I told you I did really well at accounting and it surprised me because I wasn’t really good at math that’s when I found out I really like organization and you know like I am a lister and all that. Well that teacher made an example out of me if like out of every class period we would hand in our tests
and he would immediately say well I’m just going to read the answers off of my test because I
would always do really well. And I started feeling the pressure that I didn’t like it at all and I
purposely wasn’t handing in homework. I didn’t want him doing that so I just didn’t do it and I
dropped like an A to a C- or something the third semester-third quarter. And then he had a little
talk with me. He asked me what was wrong and I told him I just don’t like that. And he just
knocked it off and I went right back up to an A+. see I wonder now- why do kids do stuff like
that? Well I don’t know if it was just like- I am going to show him you know or I am going to be
like the other kids or what but I started not liking him. And I liked him fine at the beginning and
I was really learning a lot. I was really interested in it, but I could tell that the other kids weren’t
and I felt different so anyway, that’s one thing.

CN: Yeah, that’s interesting. So let’s think about memorable experiences or significant events
either in your community or on a bigger level like national or global.

TB: Oh, you know I thought about this when I saw this question and I was trying to think back
and I remember that in Fort Scott I don’t know if you have ever heard of urban renewal. Towns
were kind of falling apart you know and um Walmarts were coming in. and actually the
infrastructure of the town was kind of just coming apart and so they talked about urban renewal a
lot and so suddenly there were committees you know popping up in town to cover different
things and I think we ended up putting awnings in front of our stores downtown or something
like that and then they always talked about the brick streets that we have and all and then another
thing nationally was um energy crisis. There was an energy crisis so gas was going up like it got
over 50 cents a gallon (laughing) you know how it is now. But you know when I was in third (?)
I would go home and my mom would say there’s a gas war so she would go out and fill up cars
for 19 cents or 18 cents whoever you know because it was by the hour gas was going down in
price. And so when I was in high school it seemed like it was about in the 30s and 40s cents and
then it started creeping up and creeping up into the 70s and I remember a girlfriend saying if it
gets over a dollar, I’m riding my bike because I can’t afford that. And I don’t know if it ever got
over a dollar while we were in high school, but I do remember too that they wanted us to start
turning our lights off at night- not keeping them on. And yeah that was also when I was in school
we had a representative who in Washington who was trying to get our fort as a national park.
And so as you know he got that done. And I remember it was really well lit and during the
energy crisis people would say well they got the fort lit up all night long. You’re trying to save
energy. And they also lowered the speed limits on the interstates to 55 so to save energy and also
save lives.

CN: Yeah, yeah huh that’s interesting.

TB: But it’s so funny because here we are still using energy. They didn’t talk about energy
efficient cars back then until this all started happening. It really hit you when you had a car that
got 10 miles to the gallon you know and some people did.

CN: Mhmm alright so ok so you entered the field of education. What prompted you to enter that
field as an adult?
Okay. Well I had a really good English teacher in junior high. I really admired her. I thought she looked like she had fun teaching and I liked English a lot. And um I thought that maybe I would do that. Well I didn’t go to college. I took some college classes but what happened was I ended up working for the insurance company that was in our town and by that time it employed over 800 people and we were a town of about 8,000. So it was a big company and uh later on that company sold to another and when that happened they gave us the opportunity to um learn more about the company and grow in our income and I did that so instead of just being a secretary or clerk type person I became an underwriter, an insurance underwriter. And I took-they wanted us to get those titles that they have in insurance and so I took a class- actually I would take the classes maybe inside the company and then it was connected with the college so we could earn college credit. And so I did some of those and then our company was bought again by another company and it was dwindling down but it was around 200 people and that company decided to close us. So after 20 years with the insurance company, I was done. And I stayed at home for a while. Our youngest was in-Michelle- she was in pre-school well she was in daycare. We had a pre-school (trails off)…you know so I was kind of part-time stay at home mom type person and wondering what I was going to do and get this story: I was wondering if I should go to college you know and maybe I could be a teacher or um just get another job and by then I was kind of sick of working too. And so I was out on our deck one day and I was praying, telling God you know I am just going to get real specific about this. I don’t want to work full-time. And I don’t know if I should go to school or not, but we need some income and I really don’t want to work in a place- I wanted a good environment, not a toxic environment with gossip and talk and people running around on each other which we had in the company that I was with. I just wanted something different and I was just asking God, can you come up with something like that for me you know. And then these birds flew over and I thought oh God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And then after a day or two, I got a phone call from the principal at St. Mary’s School wanting to know if I could sub-they wanted to put me on a subbing list and he said do you have at least an Associate’s degree and I said no, I don’t so I can’t sub, but I would love to do that and I thought Wow that was all three things answered in one phone call where I could work in a good environment, go back to school and get my Associate’s at least and then substitute teach so all rolled in. I got that answer. So when I was forty I went back-I went to college at the community college in Fort Scott. And it was there that I was getting tutoring for algebra because I hadn’t had that since ninth grade. And the girl that was tutoring me- was actually a class behind me in high school and she said I got two- I told her though, I needed to do something for income. I just can’t go to school full-time and she said well I got two part-time jobs and I need to give one up so would you like to work for the choir teacher at the middle school? We now had a middle school and she said I got two- I told her though, I needed to do anything- I just kind of filled out an application and they’d already decided to hire me and I got on. And that’s how I got in the schools. And I did substitute when I graduated. I substitute taught in the afternoons um or in the mornings and then I would go to the middle school and be a music aide there. And then I quit that job to go full-time substitute teaching and that’s when I found out- boy did I hate that. I did not like subbing. It was awful- the kids were just awful for you know, they see you coming and they’re really not good. And so I didn’t like that very good. But-
TB: Well because I was in the music department already part-time and our son was in band, then the band director was saying hey would you like to work for me like I had for the choir teacher and had quit and I thought well yeah but I’d really like to do it full-time, but they couldn’t. So I continued to sub and then worked for him. And then finally he said hey I can get you on full-time working with the music, so I was still in the schools with the kids and doing that. And I wasn’t the boss, so the kids weren’t bad because the teacher was always there and that’s how that happened.

CN: Yeah, I didn’t realize those were all so closely intertwined there. That’s neat. So with your substituting, what schools did you substitute in?

TB: I subbed in all grades. Um we had two elementary- well we had the St. Mary’s Catholic school, but those teachers rarely missed unless they had meetings to go to or something. And then we have um two elementary schools in town and the junior-or middle school and the high school and I subbed for all those grades.

CN: Wow that’s impressive.

TB: And I’ll tell you, it was pretty revealing who was on top of their teaching and who wasn’t because the classrooms um well it’s kind of funny- I felt like the ones who were more organized, their classrooms looked like it. They were more organized. They were on top of their lessons and all that. And then we had teachers who when you went to go and try to find a pen or something and their desk drawers were stuffed. And then they had file cabinets that were stuffed with things. I thought how…organized you know. They were probably great teachers winging it you know. I’ve also found, Christina, that some teachers especially the elementary teachers, if kids didn’t get it, they didn’t have time- they moved on. You know and I thought it was so sad because sometimes when I was subbing you know they said from this time to this time you are going to do this lesson and it was very, very structured and they had to just keep moving and I felt like, but this little girl- she’s not writing- she’s not done with her paper or whatever it didn’t matter. You just pick it up and you move on to the next thing. And really they just kind of got bull-dozed over you know. So I just felt like a tutoring thing- if they could incorporate that somehow- would be good. And they do- they take some kids out for special reading classes. You know I don’t know if they do it for special- for math, but you know that they try to help them. But they for some reason, they- see we got the lower kids in with the regular kids and the higher kids they’re all in the same classrooms. I don’t think that works very good. Because I just feel like the kids who are low are just going lower.

CN: They’re just going lower. Yeah it definitely is hard finding that- that right set-up there, grouping-wise. So how do you think your experience as both a choir assistant, a band assistant and a substitute teacher- how do you think those experi- (poor reception)

TB: I lost ya. I didn’t get hardly any of that.

CN: Ah that’s okay. Let’s see.

TB: No I want to hear it. Let’s try it.
CN: Okay, um how do you think your substitute experience has impacted your view towards education and teaching?

TB: Um my view toward- well toward teaching- I realized that if you’re a good teacher, they really are a special person because I’ve also noticed that they kind of continue it in their own lives too- it’s kind of how they live their lives, I mean they’re interested in learning as much as teaching. You know they continue to- they’re just that way um and it has to be a special thing you know and you can’t get lazy about it you know. But then I see the ones that are that way and I think that boy you need to- that are lazier or are not interested anymore and I think it’s best that they get out, get out as soon as they feel that feeling because they aren’t doing anybody any favor…I mean if you’re just going for a paycheck, it’s not…(laughing)

CN: Hi! (laughing)

TB: I thought Ginger was going to jump up on me, but she went to the other end of the couch. So and as far as- you said teachers and just education? Um I don’t think the kids grasp why they’re really there you know, you know what I mean. School is what they do (laughing). Until they get a little older and get into high school, some of them know and understand the importance of it. But um, I don’t know, I was fascinated by some of the teachers and how dedicated they really are. And then I am equally fascinated by the ones that are there, I don’t know for what reason you know- why are you here to do this? Because I mean they could go get a job somewhere else and go deal with adults and not deal with kids. You know at some point they must have had the desire to do it but- and maybe it was kind of like with me- maybe they went through four years of college and I am going to teach and all that and they got into it and decided they didn’t like it. Well it was easy for me on a subbing level because I just walked away, you know I could do something else and… so anyway for education, I wish that, at least in our schools, I wish that after- maybe after sophomore year- they started breaking up the usual classes and let kids go do trade school things more you know. Because they’re not going to go to college, they don’t want to go, it’s not suited for them, and it doesn’t mean they’re dumb. They’re just, you know, more suited for something else- things that other people can’t do you know. And we have the woodworking or- they’re actually building houses now and maybe they’ll get a house that is dilapidated and they’ll go in and fix it up or they’re kind of building houses and it doesn’t get done you know in one school year. It continues from year to year and then they sell it. And then they have the auto-mechanics but I think they could offer a whole lot more than that too. You know the other thing, I know of a school that actually had, I doubt they needed so much now, but they had like a secretary thing where they actually did learn the short hand and the…(inaudible) and things like that. I thought wow we should do that. Of course now um we don’t, we used to have Home Ed and they only have it at the middle school level now, they don’t even have it at the high school anymore. But look at all the people making money out there as chefs, you know what I mean, and selling cookbooks, and who knows. And people got to work in restaurants too.

CN: That’s right. I know, we need them. Um how would you describe the role education plays in the Fort Scott community? (Time: 1:00)
TB: Um Education plays a pretty big role there. Um we also have a junior college so yeah uh our junior college brings in kids from all over for sports actually, but, yeah I mean we get kids from all over the United States for football, basketball, and baseball there- and rodeo yeah Janet just reminded me of that and we have a- uh huh- yeah and I keep forgetting at the high school we also have a big Ag group- we have agriculture classes- future farmers of America- I don’t know what they call it now. I think it’s that still, but um that is really big and growing in our area. And so our kids, if they are in the Ag program at high school, they know the Ag people at the college too and they kind of go right on over to that uh whether it is rodeo or farming or meat judging, they have all that. So yeah, and our kids can go there pretty much free. I mean the junior college gives them some money, the high school gives them a little money- in our area we’re pretty poor so almost everybody who applies gets a Pell Grant- gets a government grant and scholarships- you put all that together and you’re not paying for the first two years of college you know. And then they can move on to there, 30 miles down the road to Pittsburg State University. Again the university gives scholarships and with grants and all um, free education. We have a teacher at our high school now who said she didn’t pay anything for her degree. Nothing, that’s how she got through college. Yeah and then we hire these people back you know for teaching. Yeah. Plus, we do take in student teachers as you well know. I don’t know where you went for students teaching, but we take in a lot of student teachers for their you know…

CN: By taking- so the schools take in a lot of student teachers?

TB: Mhmm, at every grade level. Mostly they come from Pittsburg State because we’re close you know so we play a role in that part of education too. It’s kind of like a teaching hospital, we’re teaching…(trails off)

CN: Ok so let’s see. Reflecting on your own experiences, how has education evolved over the years?

TB: How has it evolved? I see that they dropped classes, things they don’t teach anymore. Um I see that they’ve added because of technology. Um they’ve added some things. Um I see to that- and maybe I didn’t know it when I was a kid- but it’s like you know they try programs that like- we’re going to really get into math and then oh wait English is suffering on their tests so we’re going to really throw us into English. And then the math drops- the math scores you know the testing stuff drops. Or we’re going to try a new way of teaching and now it’s like um, key words like they want every classroom to be involved in. Um I don’t know what it- you probably know better than I do- having words up in the classroom that goes with that subject or you know. Also they pay a lot more attention to- or they try- it’s like the bullying thing you know- let’s educate on that and let’s educate on this and that and then it kind of rolls around again uh where oops we’ve been paying too much attention to that we’ve got to cut some of that out you know, because another area is failing and- I think the teachers- they’re kind of getting um- well like in the music department- that doesn’t pertain to them, a lot of the stuff that they’re wanting them to work on. Um the teaching styles you know doesn’t pertain to them at all. Um but I do see that that seems to be a big deal you know teaching styles. And I think that, that’s kind of silly to me just because like every kid learns different, teachers teach different you know so you can’t just slot it into this oh we’re all going to teach this way I don’t know. I mean- I guess to answer your
question is- teachers in education, it’s like they’re constantly trying to educate the teachers to teach and so what’s happening with the kids? The teachers are being taught to teach, but are the kids learning? You know, because if the teacher always has this hanging over their head, that they have to use this style. And so now I see emails from all of them saying hey I found this model that I am using and it worked pretty good and I found such and such and I’m incorporating that into my classes you know and um I thought if you- and I know that some of the teachers that I am around- that is their big deal, that selling themselves to the administration by emailing that saying hey I’ve done this, hey I’ve done that, so I’m you know jumping through all these hoops doing this kind of thing, but I don’t know if they know what the kids learned doing it, I don’t know. But they did it, you know…(laughing) (Time: 1:07:55)

CN: Um what direction do you see education moving towards uh in your community and on a national level?

TB: That’s a tough one. Hmm. I see- well I see them always trying to improve you know. I can’t see that it is going to go down. They’re improving. National level, well we have a new secretary of education now, so I guess I’ll just have to say I am not qualified to answer that question.

CN: Yeah. I am not either so- It will be interesting to see what happens. So, uh what hopes do you have for education in the future?

TB: My hopes for education in the future, um for Fort Scott- well like what I was talking about is uh letting kids- having kids see where they’re best, you know what they do best. And what they really, you know, want to do and if it’s not college, if it’s not getting a degree, then show them other things, you know. And uh, I mean a lot of people- I would like to see them offer more uh well like I said the trade schools, but with that business so that when they do learn these trades they may open their own business and you have to know how to do that you know. And I’d kind of like to see that happen. And then hire more people…(laughing) you know. I just don’t want all kids to feel like I can’t do anything you know, why am I learning this? I get that but if they are in a trade school, they know exactly why they’re learning that and they can use it hopefully.

CN: And they enjoy that I’m sure too, that- if that’s for them.

TB: Right, mhm. I’d like to see that.

CN: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add?

TB: (sigh) I would really like college to be more affordable.

CN: Amen.

TB: I don’t know how- yeah- I don’t know how that can be, um, I guess that’s probably the most thing…(trails off)

CN: Uh huh, alright, well thank you so much!

TB: You’re welcome! How long have we been on here? Is it enough time?

CN: Yeah, let’s see I’ll go ahead and pause this. (Time: 1:11:45)