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Oral History of Shelby McNutt

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Recommended Citation

Harrington, Peggy and Springston, Brad, "Oral History of Shelby McNutt" (1997). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 269.

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Oral History of Shelby McNutt

Presented by
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Fort Hays State University
Spring 1997

CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH SHELBY McNUTT

Shelby McNutt, 1994 winner of the National Forensics League Distinguished Service Award, based his twelve year teaching philosophy upon a rich Indian tradition in Oklahoma, where Shelby was born, raised, and educated.

To be a well-rounded individual, the Indians believed that a person needs to have some type of academics (reading/learning), be physically fit, and mentally ready to do whatever needs to be done. These three things emerged as Shelby's philosophy: be ready to learn, be physically fit, and be prepared.

Shelby was born in Sandsprings, Oklahoma, in 1959. Shelby was raised by his father and had no siblings. His mother passed away when he was only a few months old. Other influential family members included his paternal grandparents.

Shelby attended school where all twelve grades were taught in the same building. Lasting friendships and being able to participate in numerous activities made Shelby value the early school days.

After high school, Shelby attended Southwestern Oklahoma State University and majored in education courses. The fields of studies chosen were Physical Education, Speech, and Mass Communications. Several other education programs were also studied as minor choices.

Shelby was hired in 1985-86 to teach at Woodward High School at Woodward, Oklahoma. He taught speech and communication classes and was hired as an assistant football coach.

Shelby decided to quit coaching football when one of his players was injured and temporarily paralyzed from the neck down.

Shelby remembered the turn of events that highly influenced his decision about coaching sports:

"The head football coach and I stayed at the hospital with the young man for four days, not knowing what the outcome would be. His parents and other family members were out of town, so we were the only ones there. It was very traumatic, not knowing what to say. I remember how I felt when I had to carry him off the football field on a stretcher. That's what changed my mind about athletics."

From Woodward, Oklahoma, Shelby moved to Garden City, Kansas, to experience working in a larger school district. In Kansas, Shelby was certified to teach speech, health, physical education.

All of the awards and honors he received had basically come from being a member of the Western Kansas District Forensic Committee. He felt that the membership had been a fortunate experience.

As the district chairman, the one who is elected to lead the district committee, Shelby had received the Bronze Award, the first award level that a chairman is eligible to receive.

After winning this award, Shelby received a Silver Award, and eventually the Gold Award. "When serving as district chairman, and you are awarded the Gold Award, you are considered one of the to top," stated Shelby. He, however, considered himself to be "just a chairman."

At the National Forensic League Conference, summer of 1996, Shelby was one of the top contenders for the Gold Award. As a surprise honor, when he was at Nationals, the executive secretary for the National Forensics League said, "You are one of the elite group." Shelby had qualified for this award by earning a total of 15,000 points over his eleven years of involvement with speech education. Only three forensics coaches in the United States were recognized last year by the National Secretary of the Executive Council. These coaches qualified from a total of one hundred one districts. The National Forensic League offers coaches incentives to complete deeds that are considered out of the ordinary to help the advancement of speech and communications programs. Shelby had felt that he was instructing students to do what was necessary in order to communicate well. The National Forensic League placed value on his successful methods of teaching students. The NFL awarded Shelby with the first and second awards for meeting the criteria requiring one hundred citations. When Shelby received notification of the awards he responded by saying, "I'm not old enough to get this! This is something for a twenty-five or thirty year teacher, not a twelve

year. I felt it was a very prestigious honor to receive that award."

Under Shelby's guidance, Garden City High School had started to build a very good reputation for its speech students. Some of the tributes earned by students include some state and national qualifiers.

In 1992, Jason Meyers qualified for the nationals. Since then, Shelby had qualified four students to three national tournaments before he stepped down as head coach of forensics. In those three times, Shelby had an excellent record with the performances of the students. All the students who attended had qualified for extra rounds. The students were guaranteed six rounds and after that, with high scores, they qualify for additional rounds. All the students who had completed the first six rounds continued on and scored high point totals on the additional rounds.

The team finished twenty-ninth in the nation, in 1995, with the Lincoln-Douglas debate. One of the students earned a position on the United States team, then debated for the World Championship, and achieved the ranking as being the World's runner-up.

Shelby noted, "I knew he could do it, but I was very surprised to have a student become a world runner-up."

Another student received a seventh place in the United States finals in 1995. As Shelby expressed, "He and the other students did really, really, well."

While serving as a forensic and debate coach, Shelby created the Student Congress Program which is part of speech and debate activities.

Another activity that Shelby participated in at Garden City High School was that of producer for the television broadcasting courses. The network was entitled the Buffalo Broadcasting System (BBS), and was created to function like a news room. Learning to meet deadlines paid dividends for students who had completed the communication program and prepared them for college. In 1997, at a state competition for the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, three former students received honorable mentions in broadcasting for newscast journalism at the college competition level.

Many high schools attempted to produce live broadcasts. Garden City High School is one of the few schools that has the professional equipment for live broadcasts. Other schools are using camcorders and VCRs instead of state of the art equipment that is available for students at Garden City High School. In the last two years, the Buffalo Broadcasting System gave tours to approximately forty visiting high schools and colleges. The tours provided them with information about the GCHS communications curriculum. The Buffalo Broadcasting System had produced films and aired live broadcasts.

"Years ago," Shelby recalled, "I thought that live broadcasting was how it was supposed to be in high school television production." When Shelby attended a vocational

conference in Denver, he found that only a hand full of schools were doing what the Buffalo Broadcasting System (BBS) was doing. At the conference, Shelby thought he would be learning about wonderful new programs, but was he disappointed to find that the production equipment and technology at the Buffalo Broadcasting System was more advanced than what was accessible to the guest speakers. When others discovered this, Shelby was asked to lecture about the Buffalo Broadcasting System at Garden City High School.

The Buffalo Broadcasting System's class has greatly influenced the Garden City High School. However, a lot of the projects that the BBS classes complete are taken for granted because the students have become accustomed to the broadcasts being so readily available. Many students from other schools say, "Wow, you produce live broadcasts every day, news and everything else?"

"That's the top of the line" said Shelby. "One of the top rated high schools for broadcasting in the United States had not thought of doing that. They acknowledged the accomplishment of GCHS in broadcasting and stated their intentions for development of a similar system."

In tape delay broadcasting of school events, the students did the announcing, ran the cameras, and highlighted videos. These videos were aired on the school's news channel or viewed at events such as the National Honor Society and Awards banquets scheduled later in the year. As a money maker, the videos are

available for sale as mementos for parents, students, teachers and advocates of the community.

The classes have collaborated with local television stations, shared personnel and equipment during the last two years (1995-97). Shelby recalled that one local TV station purchased a new computerized video-editing system, but the station wasn't familiar with how to set it up. Shelby and two students were able to assist and get the television equipment up and operating. This professional equipment was similar to the equipment used by the Buffalo Broadcasting System. The only difference was that some of the buttons were in different locations. Shelby commented, "That made the GCHS students look pretty good."

An added benefit of operating such professional equipment is that students are prepared to go directly into college broadcasting or join the work force. Ten years ago, only a few of the students would have chosen a broadcasting career. At that time, radio broadcasting was the main choice for the students. During the last few years several of the students have chosen the television side of broadcasting and have done very well. During 1997, there were nine students on the junior or senior college level, who were studying for careers in broadcasting. They were working either in front of the camera or in more of a technical engineering capacity. There were several GCHS graduates in Texas schools who were studying the radio broadcasting curriculum. One student, for example, was a station manager, while in college.

This was unheard of--being in college and having a professional career at the same time.

Shelby explained that the cost of equipment is exorbitant, but with the broadcasting department already in place for twenty-seven years, the annual cost was manageable. Now, having national cable access, the department can realize profits, not just expenses and costs.

Shelby mentioned that most of the equipment was in place when he first came to Garden City High School in 1986. It was becoming outdated and needed to be replaced. Shelby recalled that the GCHS has been very fortunate because the board of education has been funding the department as a line item budget expense. The department also had some state and national grants that have been approved. The funding for the department was a combination of both and probably will remain so.

By the year 2000, the department strives to be a self-funded program. Annually, a telethon was broadcasted live to raise funds. Video sales that highlight graduation were also marketed.

The Buffalo Broadcasting System as well as the speech and debate departments have received honors and recognitions. Shelby explained that some of these awards aren't a plaque or a trophy. Recently, a principal telephoned and explained that their school was starting a broadcasting network. Shelby and the students felt great satisfaction in knowing that their reputation as successful broadcasters had become well known. The Buffalo Broadcasting System had been recognized highly enough that the

department was sought out for advice. A school in Utah recently called and wanted Shelby to fax information about Interactive Television (ITV). The school wanted to be connected to the network that Shelby had implemented in the high school.

This year, 1997, had been the first year that students from the Buffalo Broadcasting Systems department had participated in the Kansas Press Photographers Association. "For the contest, one of our students had sent in a video documentary and finished second, as a state runner-up." As a first attempt, everyone was pleased. Documentaries require research and video editing and other time consuming procedures.

When Shelby was asked about the future direction for the Buffalo Broadcasting System department, he explained that a continuation of live broadcasts such as school board meetings, sports events, and other functions would hold public interest. He noted that in the upcoming years, the Buffalo Broadcasting System may be hosting evening newscasts or interviewing other schools on live broadcasts.

Shelby noted that for a period of time, the Buffalo Broadcasting System was running the Friday evening news segments. The KSN network at Garden City, the NBC affiliate, "was taken back that we were able to do that and they were a little upset about it." The KSN network felt that the Buffalo Broadcasting System was taking away news stories that the station wanted to cover. A compromise was reached by both parties agreeing that

the Buffalo Broadcasting System would send the news footage that the station requested.

In the past, the Buffalo Broadcasting System had aired statewide footage that students had filmed. The footage was sent to Wichita via microwave towers through ABC or NBC and was aired on the 10:00 evening news or the sports edition. Shelby noted that he was thrilled that his students had the knowledge and talent to produce such professional footage.

Shelby shared a story about having a television personality, Larry Hatteberg, an anchorman from Wichita, visit his classroom. Mr. Hatteberg was in town for the Garden City Chamber of Commerce banquet as the key-note speaker. Through the business partnership with KTN West, a broadcast company in Garden City, the Garden City High School broadcasting classes were invited to watch a live microwave link from Garden City to Wichita. Later that day, Mr. Hatteberg visited the studio of the Buffalo Broadcasting System. He told Shelby that he was "very impressed." Mr. Hatteberg mentioned that only one school is broadcasting in Wichita; and that is with radio, not cable television.

It was difficult to have guest speakers share professional career accounts with the students because of the fees that celebrities demand. Usual fees can run in the thousands of dollars.

Shelby noted that he finds himself involved in a lot of consulting work. He commented:

"I did some work with Hutchinson High School about two summers ago. The KSN network in Wichita ended their KSN studio in Hutchinson and gave the Hutchinson school all the equipment. They had to tear it out and take it up to the high school and set it up. The problem was that the technicians that took the equipment, cut the wires, and left the connectors hooked up. Hutchinson High School didn't know what equipment they had nor how to wire it. There weren't any manuals for instructions about installations. I had enough engineering knowledge to assemble the components. They don't have cable access yet; but, at least, they have something going."

When interviewed, Shelby shared his views and philosophies of education. He noted that only a few consistencies exist in education. He felt that grading is always going to be there. He stated that if you are going to be a teacher, you have to grade papers.

The need for lecture time by the instructor has remained consistent. Shelby believed that lecturing has always been there and will probably always remain. The teacher conveys the knowledge initially, and the students take note of the information. "There will be variations in the format, but lecturing will always be with us," noted Shelby.

Because of inconsistencies of the number of students in classes, predicting the enrollment from year to year is almost impossible. Down time will result in the fall of the year. The older students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, have more consistency because their programs are progressive from one year to the next.

Shelby stated that there are many new educational trends. In the spring of the school year, administrators and teachers recommend a new educational philosophy. In August, the school district requires that it has to be implemented. In December, the district states that the new practice wasn't such a great idea, so we are dropping the program. The trends just come and go.

In the future, there could be a classroom of two hundred students, with three or four assistant teachers, and one master teacher who does the lesson planning and lecturing. The other three assistants would do the testing, and provide the study groups. Large lecture classes probably is a trend that will be here for awhile. At the college level, and at some high school, classes meet via Interactive Television (ITV).

With students that run the Buffalo Broadcasting System, the format is very "hands on." It is the most effective method for teaching students of the broadcasting classes, for getting the students to be the most cognitive learners. Much of the lecturing Shelby does, results from projects being assigned. It may be a short lecture, just to get things going. With the

second, third, and fourth year students in the broadcasting classes, a short direct lecture is all that is needed. The students, however, must have the background knowledge for this mode of instruction to be effective. With the emphasis on hands-on, the student will know right away if what they are attempting is successful.

Shelby's classes require creativity and inventiveness. Shelby said that he assigns projects and the students come up with their own creations. Or, as Shelby recalled, if a student had seen a neat graphic or computer animation which he would like to recreate, then the student attempts to recreate it by himself. Amazingly, often the student can recreate a project that was originally created by thirty to forty graphic artists working for a couple of weeks. The student completes the program within a ninety minute class period. "That's creative," noted Shelby.

"Motivating students should be achieved by consistent recognition of projects that they have created," Shelby added. "If the student does a good job, you tell them they did a good job; if they make a mistake, you tell them they made a mistake." Shelby noted that in this broadcasting industry, when you make a mistake, you need to know it now. If the student gets a job at a college or a local television or radio station and makes a mistake, then management might fire that person. For most projects and sound learning techniques, the student needs to know if a mistake was made and the reasons why it happened. Shelby concludes that the role of the teacher has changed. With hands-

on work, a mistake provides as much learning experience as the successful completion of projects. The key to effective learning, Shelby advised, is communication with your student.

Shelby reviewed how teaching has changed during his twelve years as a teacher. He responded with this reflection:

"Technology has forced changes in how schools address education. When Shelby started teaching, his equipment included one camera (a camcorder); now the Buffalo Broadcasting System uses equipment meeting the standards of the industry, similar to the equipment used by local television stations. To master technical equipment, a sound understanding must be acquired."

Technology has changed a great deal. Even in the regular classroom, overhead usage is nearly obsolete. With computerized equipment, power point is used for presentations and research. Computerized grading maintains constant evaluation updates. Use of computer software programs provide instruction for building skills. For emphasis, overlays change imagery impressions for emphasis.

Shelby believed that technology will be the learning process in the future. Formerly teachers used an overhead, a chalk board, and duplicating machine. Today's technology provides opportunities for communication with electronic mail and modification of tests or worksheets within seconds. Why have national test scores dropped? Shelby believes part of the reason is that a teacher may have a computer and it may be for teacher

use only. Without students having the hands-on experience, the computers are not used for optimum benefit, or it may be that there are a limited number of computers for students. Shelby believed there should to be a computer for each student or one computer for two students, allowing frequent hands on experience.

When asked what advise he would give first year teachers, Shelby responded with three suggestions:

1. Organization
2. Participate in inservices to broaden knowledge
3. Get to know your colleagues.

Shelby explained that organization during his first year of teaching played the most important role. In order for Shelby to be ahead of the students, he often stayed up until one or two in the morning reading a chapter or two ahead of the class assignment.

The second important area that would enable a first year teacher to be successful would be to take any inservices available that would broaden technological abilities. Shelby recommended attending any inservices that might be offered, even if you pay for some of them yourself.

The third piece of advice Shelby offered was getting to know your colleagues. He said, "Learn who the teachers in the building are, and who can offer advice. Each of the teachers had been through different experiences. All teachers and peers have had different situations from which you can learn."

When interviewed about what awards and recognitions have meant the most to Shelby, he replied:

"With Garden City High School, Holcomb, the Christian schools, and the community college consort to select the three Crystal Apple winners. It was a very big honor to be nominated."

"First, nominations are made to the committee who forwards an application form. You are not permitted to write any information about yourself, any personal experiences, or what you have taught. After reviewing the completed application papers, the committee narrows down to their choices to twenty. Each one who had been selected participates in an interview with people from the community."

"When was narrowed to the top six contenders. Each qualifier had two sets of interviews; a group of six people visiting the classroom to see you at work and the lengthy interview, six interviewers against you! This group was composed of out-of-district teachers, community leaders, and professional business people. Those six people chose the three crystal apple winners."

"My most memorable moment of all time was last year when I received this Crystal Apple Award. The year before I made the cut to one of the six nominees. This year when I won it, I was flabbergasted. I see a lot

of people with whom I teach, who do the same thing I do or more. They deserve it, too, if not more than I do. I was just fortunate enough to receive it. The national award was just an award. But the local award meant the most. I was nominated by one of my peers. For me that means so much more than even the national award. They thought I had worked hard enough, did the right things, whatever, to earn the award."

With the recognition of winning awards, Shelby has had the good fortune to meet individuals whom he felt are influential people. He shared the impressions that he had when being able to shake the hand of the Executive Secretary of the National Forensic League. "It was truly a great feeling, knowing that what I had been working hard to teach to students was being well received, not just by the students, but by leaders in the field in which I taught."

Shelby noted that at a conference on communication, he met the governor of Kansas. They shared thoughts about the importance of communication and the skills learned from participating in contests.

In concluding the interview, Shelby was asked what he foresees for himself in the next twenty years. His reply:

"Twenty years from now I see myself still being at Garden City High School sitting at the Buffalo Broadcasting System saying, 'Focus that camera, hit that tape, don't do that.' Ten years ago, I thought I'd

come to Garden City to get established in a larger school. Today, I see myself retiring here. I don't want to go to a college to do this (broadcasting). I don't want to worry about budget cuts. The cuts are hard enough at the high school level and even worse at the college level. No, I want to stay right here and do it. Why strive to be the best at the college level, when I am the "only one" at the high school level?"

Challenges in the profession of teaching are innumerable. The parents and community members seek to have only the best teachers guide their students in the quest for a better understanding of the world as it is known. The students at Woodward High School and Garden City High School have had the opportunity to entrust this quest for knowledge in Shelby McNutt.

A gift such as Shelby McNutt comes into our lives so infrequently. The students who have had Shelby as a teacher know rewards untold. Peers working with Shelby have expressed their astonishment with his drive, his talents, and his accomplishments.

Thank you, Shelby McNutt.