



Tom Levin – Class of 1971

“Two of my most memorable experiences since high school (other than my wedding day and the birth of my daughter) were being asked to speak at the funerals of William Herron and Marvin Brooks, two of the mentors during my administrative career. I was also humbled and honored by the request from my class to be the banquet speaker at our 40 year reunion this past June.”

The Early Years

We lived at 3211 E. Meyer Blvd. We were so close to the school, I remember being exposed to Southeast life as a child, especially the football games. My father took me to my first Knights football game soon after we moved into the neighborhood when I was in the fourth grade at Pinkerton Elementary School. We could hear the roar of the crowd from our house every time there was an exciting play on the field. Lisa, my younger sister, attended Southeast Junior but not Southeast High School. She is four years younger; she attended Sunset Hill for high school.

High School Memories

In 1970, the school board decided to move William Evans from Southeast to Van Horn. Mr. Evans succeeded Harry McMillan as principal in 1968. It was a time of racial unrest, and Dr. Edward Fields, principal of Central Junior, was assigned by the school board to be Mr. Evans' replacement. William Herron had been a vice-principal under Mr. Evans since my freshman year, and many of us wanted Mr. Herron to become our principal. Renee Bennett ('72) and I drafted a petition calling for the appointment of Mr. Herron as principal. Gertrude Keith was on the school board at the time, representing the area including Southeast High School. We arranged a meeting with her at her home and presented her with the petition which she, in turn, presented to the school board. The school board reversed its decision, and Mr. Herron became the principal of Southeast my senior year. Mr. Herron had a different administrative style. He encouraged students to get involved in the decision making process. A few of the faculty members felt he did not support them, but the students loved Mr. Herron.

In my 36 year career as an educator, I saw a lot of administrators come and go. I cannot remember anyone, though, who was more loved and respected than Mr. Herron. I'll never forget the night of the visitation held after his death in the Rotunda of Southeast High School when it was estimated that more than 8,000 people came to pay their respects. My parents waited in line for more than two hours waiting their turn to enter the building. He had a tremendous influence on me, both while I was a student and as a young administrator. He was my boss in the first three jobs I held after high school.

I had Joy Clumsky for journalism. I was the Editor in Chief of the Tower. My freshman summer, I attended a conference sponsored by the Mid Continent Regional Education Lab at the University of Nebraska. Faculty, parents and students attended. The Kansas City area was represented by attendees from Southeast, Paseo and Westport. The conference focused on student participation in decision making. We were encouraged to get involved in leadership and decision making in our schools and school districts. Influenced by that experience, I wanted to address challenging subjects in the Tower. Mrs. Clumsky was not always comfortable with some of the topics or my editorial opinions. Mr. Evans, who had also attended the conference, sometimes found himself intervening in these disputes. Although we disagreed on editorial subject matter, I learned valuable writing skills from Mrs. Clumsky. The writing style used in journalism, listing the most important points in the first paragraph and writing in a concise manner, served me well in my professional career.

Robert Breshears taught photography. He was a professional photographer on the side. He took many historical photos of Kansas City and Kansas Citizens, especially African-Americans, and had a studio at his home. I was on the Crusader staff my senior year, and Mr. Breshears allowed me to audit his photography class during my study hall. He also recruited a few of us to serve as volunteers when the NAACP hosted a dinner at the Muehlebach Hotel. Julian Bond was the keynote speaker and we got our picture taken with him.

I had Theresa Bauman for chemistry and physics. She was the science department chair at Southeast when I returned as a science teacher in the fall of 1974 and served as my teacher mentor. I have always appreciated the strong background she gave us. Two of my classmates, Larry Wissel

and Paula Jacoby, even tested out of the first semester of general chemistry when they got to college, as I recall.

I participated on the Tower and Crusader staff; marching band, stage band, and orchestra (I played trombone); cross country and tennis (Mark Bryant ('68) and I played on the tennis team together when I was a freshman); Round Table and class officer (for some reason, I was usually the treasurer); Beta and Spanish club. I was the president of our chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes my junior and senior years.

My junior year, I was elected student mayor of Kansas City and served in that capacity during my senior year. Illus Davis was the mayor of Kansas City at that time. He and my father were in ROTC together at Central High School. In my capacity as student mayor, I led the KC Youth Congress, a city-wide student organization with representatives of every one of the 26 public, private and parochial high school within the city limits. We hosted City Hall High School Day-- one day student exchanges among the high schools, and held mixers in the basement of the Swope Park Methodist Church at 63rd and Swope Parkway.

Events of the Day

The Vietnam War, civil rights issues, the assassinations of JFK, Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King. My first two years at Southeast were tense. During my sophomore year, when the racial composition of the school became approximately 50% white and 50% black, polarization between some of the students frequently resulted in disruption and violence. I remember being herded into the auditorium one day when Clarence Kelly, Chief of Police and later FBI Director, came to address us on these situations. There were a few days when it got so tense, school was dismissed early and we were sent home.

My junior and senior years were completely different. The conflict quickly dissipated when "white flight" resulted in the relocation of the families of some of the white students who had been willful participants and instigators in the racial conflict. Relationships among the remaining student body grew stronger. I consider that whole experience to have had a profound impact on my life and I cherish the memories of my high school experience. Among those classmates who are still in contact with each other, our class is very close. We are still basking in the memories of our recent 40 year

class reunion and are already talking about a fall picnic and a birthday party when we start turning 60 next year.

Outside of Class

I spent a lot of time studying in order to stay on the honor roll. I did not have a regular part-time job in high school, but I mowed grass and shoveled snow. I ran around with friends and went to parties. I took piano lessons. We had a band that practiced in my parents' basement. Although the first band I played in was made up entirely of Southeast musicians, eventually we had other members from Paseo, Central, Westport, and even Sumner in Kansas.

After High School

The summer after graduation, I got my first real job with the National Summer Youth Sports Program. It was connected with the President's Council on Physical Fitness, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and UMKC. I recruited students to participate in the program which was housed in the John Thornberry Boy's Club at 43rd and Cleveland. Mr. Herron was in charge of the program. I also started classes at Penn Valley that summer. That fall, I began my studies at UMKC, eventually majoring in elementary education with an emphasis in science. I went to classes year round and got my bachelor's degree in three years. Because of my science background, I was also certified to teach some high school science courses.

I spent 36 years in education in the Kansas City area, primarily as an administrator. In the fall of 1974, I taught general and physical science at Southeast while I was working on my master's degree in secondary administration. Mr. Herron, who was still the principal at Southeast, and Marvin Brooks, the Director of Secondary Education, arranged for me to begin an administrative internship the second semester of my first year of teaching. I continued to teach in 1975, and applied for an opening at Paseo for vice principal.

When I did not even get an interview for that position, I became frustrated and impatient and decided not to return to the school district the following fall. Instead, I returned to one of my college jobs working in sales at Eddie Jacobson's Menswear on the Landing and also began working for Maurice Herron (William Herron's brother) in an adult basic education program. Dr. Robert Wheeler, father of Robert Wheeler, Jr. ('68), was Superintendent of

Schools during that time. He added a new position in each high school - a one-year appointment for temporary vice principals. I returned to the district as a building substitute in the spring of '77.

That fall I signed a teaching contract, and in December became the temporary vice- principal at Southeast. (I was offered the same position by Thomas Kipp, the principal of Southwest, but recognized that no self-respecting Knight would have to give the choice between the two more than a split moment of consideration!). A variety of assignments followed:

- I spent three semesters as a vice-principal at Van Horn;
- For nearly twelve years, I was the hearing officer at the central office. In that position, I replaced Nathan Roitman, former Southeast High School basketball coach;
- I was principal of High School Prep for two years. It was a program for over-age middle school students located in the Southeast Annex, the former Interdenominational Home for Women at 63rd and Swope Parkway, next door to the junior high building;
- When funding for the High School Prep program was threatened and it looked like the school was going to be closed, I left the school district again and worked in home repair for a time;
- When it came time for my daughter to begin college at Florida A & M University, I returned to education and served as an assistant principal for two years at Ruskin High School in Hickman Mills;
- While I was at Ruskin, I was offered the principalship at DeLaSalle and served in that position for a year;
- I returned to High School Prep (which had not been closed after all) as principal for 2 more years;
- When High School Prep actually did close, I went to Westport as vice principal. I was there six years;
- I ended my career with the school district at Manual Career & Technical Center. I was principal there for six years until being “put out to pasture” in June of 2010.

I was one of the founding board members of the Southeast High School Alumni Association, Inc. Through the Association, its Facebook Page, and the Class of 1971 Facebook Page, I am in touch with many alumni and some former faculty. There are some whom I see or talk to on the telephone on a regular basis.

I used the following quotes when I spoke at our 40th class reunion. They are from Jimmy Townsend, a mountain philosopher and personal friend of former President Jimmy Carter:

1) "Anybody who can still do at sixty what he was doing at twenty wasn't doing much at twenty."

2) "You are old when regrets take the place of dreams."

Keep on having dreams and making memories!