

NORMAN OYLER : TEACHER
Recorded March 13, 2001 by Shirley Ewart

Norman Oyler, now well over fifty years old, is tall and good-looking with a mass of curly hair. He is still track-star lean and his eyes hold the passion of the dedicated teacher who could overawe his students into silence with a single glance.

A native Oregonian, born in Grants Pass, Norman was raised on a dairy and hog farm in the Applegate Valley. He says: "My parents had never seen a flush toilet till my third year in college." That was Southern Oregon College, now Southern Oregon University, where Norman was a four-year letterman in both track and cross country.

In 1965, immediately on graduating, the young man was hired by Twalaty Junior High School in Tigard, where he taught Social Studies, that is History, Geography, Law and Economics. For twenty-five years he team taught with Ken Lester. He says: "We saw eye to eye, believing that all kids should learn and that all kids will behave. You cannot teach anybody till you have their attention." The rules were simple. Be on time. Bring the required materials to class. When the bell rings - quiet. "From Day One" he says, "I told them that I love eighth graders. I will be the first to defend you if you're treated unfairly, and I'll be the first to correct you if you're doing something that is wrong." Norman feels strongly and repeated twice, the teacher's goal should be what's best for the students so that they can cope in society and be successful. That was his goal every day, year in and year out until he retired on June 19, 1995.

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TAPE SIDE A

I'm curious, when did you retire then?

June 19, 1995. That was my last day in the classroom, officially. I was in the same room for twenty-five years. There was a lot of history down there in that room. You could see the whole in the floor where we chopped the tile with an axe re-enacting the Boston Tea Party. They wouldn't let us bring axes to school now. We brought the axes to school and chopped a hole in the floor. It's covered up by carpet now but I can tell you, I know where the body is.

I want you to tell me again, for the tape, the story of the slug.

This was in the late winter, early spring of 1976, and after fourth period I stayed in the classroom and my team teacher Ken Lester had gone to the cafeteria. And, some students came up to him and, they had heard on the radio, or had read somewhere in the paper where this one person, individual, had eaten a slug. And, so they said to Ken Lester, they said: "Can you imagine the worst thing in the world, how can anybody ever eat a slug?" And, he says: "No, I would eat a slug. It wouldn't be that bad to eat." And so they asked him if he'd eat one, and he said: "Well, yeah, I would eat one." And, so from there, I don't know what transpired from there, the next thing

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I know, within probably ten minutes of that time, I had two students in my classroom, before I went up to lunch, and they said: "How much would you pay to see Lester eat a slug?" And, I says: "I'd give you twenty bucks" and they said: "Here". They pulled out a clip board and had me sign up for the first person, \$20 for Ken Lester to eat a slug. And so they sold tickets for this event, 25cents apiece. Of course, they wouldn't let the money go for anything other than the School District, and he donated it all to the Dad's Club for the sports and so forth for the District. And it raised \$126 or something like that. So, we take my \$20 out, that'd be about \$106, so about four hundred and some people had paid. Who knows how many had crashed the gate and got in free?

But, anyway, to entice it, we offered \$5, which in 1976, for a kid was, you know, considerably more than today @ \$5 to the student who could bring in the biggest slug. And, this girl in my first period class, I remember her name was Mary, a freckle faced girl, and she brought in this slug that was the biggest, green, slimy slug, I mean it was huge, even when it was @ before it extended out. When it extended out and crawled it was between eight and ten inches long as it was crawling. And, so she got the \$5 and we took that slug and we'd got the slug that we used, and first of all Ken called the OHSU to make sure that, you know, what harm could come to him if he ate it, and they said: "Well, as long as you get the slime off a slug, there's nothing there that'll really hurt you."

So, we had four glasses of water set up, and I was his second for the occasion up on the stage we had four glasses of water set up with salt in them - real heavy and salt. And we put the slug in the first glass of water and we pulled it out in the slime, and we held it up in the air and the slime went from the slug clear down into the glass still, and it wasn't till we got to the fourth glass of salt water that we finally got the slime off of it. Of course, by that time the slug was pretty well shrunk up as the salt caused it to do. And, to give it a little bit of appetite he had a piece of bread and he wrapped it around the slug, and then he salted it very heavily, very heavily with salt to make sure that the slug would stay short. And, he took it in two bites, and swallowed, and then chugged a Pepsi. And, I felt my stomach came right up in my - you could look down my throat and see part of my stomach! But, I kept everything down and, you know I -. Some kids cheered, some kids gagged, there was a lot of them went back to class, it was done during study period which is between second and third period, about a half hour long. I'm sure they went to third period a little bit sick. And, the only thing that Ken felt later, he felt that because of all the salt he put on, yeah, he felt a little bit of nausea in his stomach. And, of course, the pun of the day was "Lester's feeling rather sluggish today!" But he did keep it down, he had no ill effects after the salt

got through his system, and he took a lot of liquid in and washed it out. I don't know when the slug made its exit but that was in 1976.

Another one?

Well, earlier in the seventies, we had a lot of problems with students who would pull the fire alarms and then they would get one of their friends who wasn't in school to call in for a bomb threat, and to say there was a bomb in a locker. Or in fact, so @ it was about '72/'73, in that time period. And, we had several of them in one year, and we had a teacher named Hal Dyal who was about a third, fourth year teacher and he was a wrestling coach, a football coach and a real disciplinarian. He had missed his calling, probably, for not being a sergeant in the Marines, but in any case he was a very neat individual but very disciplined and he expected a lot of discipline out of the kids. Well, in any case, when they would pull the alarm, or when the bomb threat came in, we had, you know, a matter of two to three minutes, in maybe two minutes we had to clear the school. We didn't even have coats, we couldn't even go to our lockers and get coats, and some days it'd be forty or forty@one degrees and spittin' rain and we would have, well, we had approximately a thousand students, close to a thousand students at that time. And we'd all be out, we'd have to be inside the track, and the teacher could line around the track. Well, some of the students, the minute the alarms went off, they would take off and run and leave the school grounds. Well, unbeknown to the parents, you know, we were responsible for them, and they'd be anywhere from Safeway, they'd go down towards the High School, they'd go over Canterbury, they'd go wherever. And, they'd go into the woods, which is now housing tracts, but it would be to the northeast of the track and north of the track in that area. It was all wooded area and cow pasture at that time. And, I was a runner and I was training about 80 to 90 miles a week. Well, it was fun to run the students down, so I would chase the students till I would catch 'em. And then I'd march them back and give them to Hal Dyal who would then make them do sit@ups and push@ups and stand at attention inside the track. And, that was their punishment because they ran away. And so, one time I literally had to chase someone clear to Safeway. And then I made them run and walk back. I chased them to the High School. I chased them as far as the freeway to the east, which is over a mile away and over Canterbury, and that's what I spent my time doing. In that way, I kept warm, I was running in my school clothes and good shoes. I would find them hiding up in the trees out there in the woods and make them come down out of the trees. And, there was one though, with a very high tree and that kid was so far up and, I saw him, but I didn't act like I had really seen him, I just saw him out of the corner of my eye way, way up in that tree. And, I thought, if that kid wants to

stay in that tree all day, he's going to be miserable! He's going to be hurting! So, I didn't say anything to him. The last day of school, he came to me and he confessed, he thought he was going to surprise me, and he confessed that he'd avoided my Sherlock Holmes finding him or seeking him out of the woods and so forth. And, I told him: "I know you were up there." But I said: "I figured your punishment was that you were going to stay up in that tree." He agreed that he would probably rather have come down than have to stay in that tree. Just about every half-hour to forty-five minutes, I'd run back to the woods and I would see from the distance out of the corner of my eye that he was still up in that tree. He suffered greatly, that kid up in that tree, and he had to be up there probably close to © I'd say close to four hours he'd be up in that tree.

Let's see what we've got here.

The red light should come on.

Yeah. There we are.

This was in 1985 to be exact. I remember the class and year. Don't ask me why, but I do. Anyway, it was actually probably in the winter of '86 and '85 -'86 school year. This is a transfer student in, and he was having a tough time adjusting to Twalaty and Tigard and so forth, but he was basically a good kid. So, he had a habit of coming in every day at the beginning of class and he'd say: "Mr. Oyler, what are we going to do today?" And, I would say: "Lloyd. Sit down." And, he'd say: "But I want to know what we are going to do today?" And I'd say: "Well, just sit down, and I'll tell everybody." He did this every day. And, every day I'd tell him. And finally, I said: "Lloyd, I'm going to tell you something. I'm tired of you coming up here every day and asking what we're going to do in class." Now, I says © we were team teaching, so thirty students were © Ken Lester would come in thirty and mine, the curtain was one big room, I said: "I will tell everybody at once, you understand? And, I'm tired of it, so I don't want you come in here and asking me. That's one question you may not ask me again. O.K.?" So, I go to take roll, and I go, "Lloyd. Where's Lloyd?" And, this other student, sitting back in the back of the classroom said: "He went to the office." And, I said: "The office, why?" "Well, he's pissed off." And, I said: "I think you could use a little better choice of words." And, he said: "O.K. Mr. Oyler. But he's really pissed!" (Laughter) A little humor from a kid in the classroom. You know, I never let anything shock me in the classroom, like that. And, of course, I never allowed them to say, you know, a humorous thing, funny, you know. And the kids © and they understood you know, and I'd go: "O.K. I don't want to hear that any more." And that was the end of that.

As I said when I taught history, why I taught it by story telling, pretty much. Never used a text book, although the students had a text book, it was only for a guide, and I told them, I said: "Text books are boring," I said: "Text books leave all the good things out of history.

There's very little in a text book that's really interesting. You've got to do a lot of research, and look into things." So, I would, in the law classes for example, I would take a list of sixty words, law terms and it would take me three or four days to get through these sixty terms, and half of the words I would re-enact them out, things that happened, for example "temporary insanity". The best example, I had some other examples, but one of them was that I had an uncle in Bakersfield in the early fifties they had a real bad earthquake, and it was probably a 6 to 7 on the scale, probably a 7, close to 7. It broke windows, dishes fell out of the cupboards and everything. And everybody rushed out into the street at 2 a.m. in the morning. And this one guy was up running up and down the street naked. And, his wife says: "Good God man, go back in the house and get some clothes on". So he ran back in the house and put on his hat! He came back out and ran around naked. Well, I had clothes on, but to illustrate temporary insanity would have meant I would have had a hat in the closet. I'd run over and grab the hat out of the closet and ran around the room, ran up and down the aisles in the room and back and forth in the front of the room. These guys were going: "Oh, my God! Oh my God!" back and forth "Oh, my God!" Well, that's kind of an illustration of how I would use a term, and it would take me three or four days to get through them.

There's a lot of illustrations and law. You act like you was firing a pistol at somebody. Would climb through a window, all sorts of things, the students - so one day, it was the first part of March and we had an unusual snow late and we had a two hour delayed opening, and my second period class came in and they said: "Let's don't do anything today, let's just - you just tell stories to us. Just tell us stories." And, so I kind of chuckled and I said: "Well, you have to understand, people, you have to say things, words make me think of stories and I may know three or four stories to a word or to an event or whatever." So, they went and got the Webster's Dictionary, opened it up and started reading words out of the dictionary to see if it clicked with any stories that I could tell to them. I said: "That's not the way it works!"

One of the units that Ken and I put together and is very practical. We called it "Life", it really was an economics unit and it was on checking and banking, investing in the stock market, they had to buy and sell stocks, they had to be able to read the New York stock page and we would graph it. And, they would have to do their own math, we wouldn't let them use the computer,

excuse me, I mean a calculator, and then what would really make them mad, those of them who'd use the calculator and they got the wrong answer, or their parents used the calculator and got the wrong answer, because they pushed the wrong button, or whatever. And sometimes they thought we were geniuses because all the stock, first of all, when you buy them in eighths it has to end in one of the eight combinations, 0, 1, 2, 5, 25 cents, 375 and so forth, and we could grab a problem, they had to prove it before they could put in on their permanent sheet, and we would grab it, and we could glance at it in one second and we could tell if the decimal was wrong. We would hand it back to them and say: "It's wrong", and there'd be about two students per year who would figure that out, the rest of them thought that we were some type of psychic genius. And all it was, was looking at that last number.

One of the things was @ what was I going to talk about

Banking?

Right, oh yeah, O.K. So, in the banking part of it, then we had checks that were made out we used the check, in fact it was "First National Bank of Olester", and that was Oyler/Lester put together. And we gave our room numbers as the address and so forth. Part of the balancing of the check book and understanding just living with it, we'd give them all the checks to write what they were for, and they'd have to write in the stub or check register, you know, what the check was for. And one of them was to Roth Sanitary Service, and they always wanted to know what Roth Sanitary Service was for. And, so Ken and I would tell them it was for garbage delivery, and some of them would write it down on their stub before they realized what they were doing @ garbage delivery! You know, we had fun like that with the kids and it kept things lively.

O.K. now. Certain units there were jokes, or certain people in history we would have a joke or very interesting details we would re@enact out and tell about. And, of course, after a number of years we'd tell the kids, you know, that one of us could start the joke and the other one could finish it. But, to save time, well, we told jokes by the numbers. And so, Ken would say, you know: "Number seventeen", and I'd stop, laugh, throughout my - and say: "Yeah, but what about thirty@two?" and he'd just laugh like crazy, see. And so, there's always somebody within the six classes a day, there'd always be one kid that would say: "Let me try it", and so we'd let him try it. And so, he'd say: "Seventy@eight". Ken and I would look at each other and he couldn't understand why we didn't laugh. And he'd say: "How come when you say a number you guys laugh, but when I say a number you don't laugh." And, we'd say: "Well, some people know how to tell jokes and some people don't!"

And, another thing we did with the kids was interesting. To get a point across, we played Congress and broke the classes up into the House and Senate and so forth. And, to illustrate filibustering we would either get a book, it could be on sports, or we'd talk about a fishing trip and to filibuster, to illustrate that. And, kids would get up and try to stop us, and of course, you know we © we always made sure at the time that one of us had taken over and was running the Senate or the House or we would stress that they couldn't stop us from filibustering and we'd tell this tall tale, or we'd read out of a book. We'd do anything like that. And, so we'd always get the kids to get up and leave. We'd say: "If you don't like it, you know, leave!" And they'd look at us, like, so they may get up and so if they don't walk out of the class into the hall, some of them would go out onto the track just outside the door, and when we'd have maybe four or five students left in there, that hadn't left the room, why, I'd call for question and we'd vote on the bill and get it passed! They got the idea of filibustering. And we mentioned about, you know, the longest time ever for filibustering was Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, and so that kinda hit home with them they understood what the filibuster was and then we'd explain to them and so ©. You demonstrate a word. You demonstrate a word and, if you can do it. The same thing with our government unit on law © I mean on the Constitution. If you can relate any words like that in stories then act them out it sticks with them. And so, that's what I think made the kids able to learn and you could spend a whole day on vocabulary and the kids were never bored, because we would come up with stories and examples like that.

Something I started doing during the last seven or eight years in my teaching, was learning styles. And, left brain, right brain. And so forth, and if you're a "Concrete Sequential", or "Abstract Random", those would be the two extremes. And I had one kid, he was so far right brained that he was almost off the scale, and he would - there's kids that, some of those kids that were so far out they were lucky if they could find the classroom. And, if they dropped their material for the classroom, they could never find their assignments. And, they knew they had done it and that it was somewhere in their room in two feet of garbage or in their locker, and those are the type of kids © the kid didn't understand why he was like that. And, once these kids, sometimes they just got this light, like someone who maybe got this so fast, no problem that's what I am. We would go into visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner, and I would - oftentimes I could tell the kids what they were to start with. They couldn't understand - they would say: "What am I?" and I would say: "Well, you're this, or this, or this". But we had all these different little short tests and things to take that determined if they were auditory, visual or

kinesthetic learner, or if they were left brain, right brain, how they learned, how they did things.

Some of the examples. One of the kids said, at home, to his mother © they understood their parents, and their parents understood them. They were home, they said: "So that's why my Dad is like that! He's totally non^aauditory, he hates music and he yells when I turn music!"

But at least they understood. There's one kid went home and he said: "Mom, I am never going to tell you to do something for me again." He said: "I'm going to write notes for you." Because he knew his mother was visual, she was totally non-auditory. And she came to school for one of the back to school, or open houses or something, and she goes: "We get along just great, he has all these little stickems all over the house." She says: "We never have a problem, never argue or anything."

And then I had this other girl my last year, and I remember her name was Sharla, and she was so abstract and her room was unbelievable. The bad part was that she'd had a brother and a sister that were concrete sequential probably, and so structured, and she was abstract random. And her mother told her to clean her room and she'd go and take the top drawer of her dresser out and start playing and sorting through it and pick all the garbage back up throw it in it, and close it and the room was clean! And, it drove the mother crazy and they were always fighting and arguing. And, I said: "Mom," I said: "Why don't you just leave the room alone? And she said: "I can't, we have company that comes to the house." And, I said: "Does the company go into Sharla's bedroom?" She says: "No, but- " And I says: "But, what? If they don't go in there, then they don't see it. They don't know what's in there." I said: "If you want a relationship with your daughter," I said: "Leave the room as it is. I know you may not like it, but © " I said: "You'll have a much closer relationship with your daughter." And, a couple of months later she said: "You know, we have gotten along so well since I don't say anything about her room. And, the only time she doesn't clean her room, because it's too deep or she has to find something for herself. But it helps if the parents get along.

One kid in my classroom, it was a sixth grade class, and the kid would never, ever finish a test. And the kid was a - he was a fairly sharp kid, but he was pulling out, he couldn't get his assignments done and he could only get about half or two-thirds of the way ever through any quiz or anything. And he probably was a failure. And, I demonstrated to the kids, and gave them all the characteristics of auditory, visual and kinesthetic and I used him as an example. I said: "For instance," I said, whatever his name was, I don't remember his name, I remember it was a sixth grade class, I said: "You, are a kinesthetic learner. You don't learn auditorial or

visual." And, I said: "He's an example. He's a smart human being, he's quite smart, but because it takes him so long to do anything and so long to learn, he doesn't get things done and maybe he thinks © or people think he's stupid." And, I said: "He's smarter than half of you in here." And he just sat there and smiled and his eyes lit up, because, all of a sudden he realized he wasn't a failure he wasn't stupid. It was because of the way he learned." So, learning style and how people learn, I did that. It would take about a week to do that, and it was well worth the time, and the understanding. The kids understood each © and it was better to wait until maybe November. I always tried to do it some part around, maybe the first quarter, and then they understood their parents, their parents understood them, they understood each other and so forth.

One time a kid came in, he was in my TAG class, and he threw the books down on the desk in disgust, and he says: "Mr. Oyler, your totally visual student cannot find any such answer on this page!" And, he was using it © they really used it to an advantage so that they © they understood why they were like they are, and the parents understood them a lot better once the parents were informed how the students learned.

In 1992, when we were getting ready to end the Junior High year and go to the Middle School, the principal we had at the time, a lovely lady, I loved her dearly, but, we were in her office, or we were talking one day, or whatever about up and coming things in the Middle School and she said: "Norm, you understand now," because she had read research and books and things on this topic, and she said: "When we become a grade school, she said: "You will not be able to teach the same curriculum to the eighth graders that you teach now to the Junior High." And I said, I looked at her puzzled and I said: "Why?" And she said: "Because eighth graders in a Middle School, according to the educational experts, quote, unquote, have different needs and learn differently than eighth graders in a Junior High." And, I looked at the principal and I said: "You, are full of shit! An eighth grader is an eighth grader, is an eighth grader." And, I said: "You've got a lot of learning to do." And, so the following year, after about half way through the '92^a'93 school year, it could have been in the spring of '93, she was at the High School in a capacity of vice^aprincipal or something capacity, or a leadership role, and I saw her, and she said: "Norm," she said, "You're right!" I said: "What?" "I am full of shit!" and I said "O.K." She says: "An eighth grader is an eighth grader, is an eighth grader." And I says: "See, I told you so!"

I started teaching in Tigard at Twality in 1965 and also additionally I was coaching track. I started that in the Spring of 1966

End of Tape

12050 SW Lincolnf
Tigard, OR 97223
April 1, 2001

Dear Norm:

Enclosed is the transcription of the tape I made of your fascinating stories, plus a little "preamble" to let people who use the tape know who you are.

As a courtesy, I like people to be able to review any tapes I have made, but with one warning. Unedited tapes have lots of non sequiturs. Most of these are illustrated by a single dash. Also, there may be a word (or even a phrase) that I have failed to decipher. That is illustrated by a series of dashes. I don't attempt to correct anything that I hear. In other words, if someone says "Yeah", I don't change it to "Yes". The idea is to transcribe exactly what is on the tape. Later, of course, if someone used the tape, or part of the tape for a book or an article it would be up to them to edit if they wanted to.

After you approve the preamble and transcript, please drop me a line (or call me at 503@684@2643) and let me know it's O.K. and I will then place the tape cassette plus a copy of the transcription in Tigard Library in the Tigard School Project archives.

Again, thank you so very much for sharing your time with me. I wish my kids could have been in your class!

Sincerely,

Shirley Ewart