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Interview
with
JOHN JESSUP

January 11, 1991

By Goldie F. Wells

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOHN JESSUP

By Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: This is January 11, 1991, and I am in the office of Mr. John Jessup who is the personnel for Winston-Salem/Forsyth School System. Mr. Jessup, I would like for you to introduce yourself and say that you know that this interview is being recorded.

Mr. Jessup: I know that this interview is being recorded.

Goldie: Mr. Jessup, I am doing some research and I sent you a questionnaire that you responded to. I am interviewing Black principals who were principals of high schools in 1964, and Black principals who were principals in 1989. Back in 1964, there were over 200 Black principals of high schools. When I sent to the State Department last year to find out how many Black principals were principals of high schools in 1989, I received a list of 41 and of those 41 some of them were principals of alternative schools and not what you would call the traditional high school. You are on the list as being a principal here in this system. Now you have moved to another position but what I want you to try to do is to move back into your principalship role back in 1989, and give me some information about your principalship there. First thing I want to know is how did you become a principal?

Mr. Jessup: This is the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System and we are consolidated. The other thing that is interesting that you would introduce to 1964, because that was the first year I taught. I taught in 1964, so it is ironic that that would be the case.

Goldie: My first year of teaching was 1965. I want you to tell me how you became a high school principal?

Mr. Jessup: Does that go back to how I got into administration?

Goldie: Yes.

Mr. Jessup: My first job was in Martinsville, Virginia. I was there for five years then I moved to Roanoke, Virginia and I was there for five years as a teacher in both systems. When I was in Martinsville, Virginia I started graduate work and my major which was English. Then I decided since Virginia paid you for your Master's degree regardless of what it was in that maybe I should increase my flexibility which would give me the option of changing directions if I desired. Therefore I went to Radford University and received a Master's degree in guidance. At that time I was scheduled to become a counselor at Stonewall Jackson Junior High School but I was informed that the need at the high school which was

William Flemming High School, that they needed me to return to the high school. I was aware of the fact that I was the only minority in the English department so for that reason I imagine they wanted me to return for one more year. I was somewhat discontented at that point and time and anxious to get into the four years of the newly acquired skills. Therefore, I applied for a job opening at Hickory High School and I learned later that they were trying to find a person who was a good prospect for administration who had a guidance background. I just happened to have the degree in guidance therefore, I was selected to be an assistant principal at Hickory High School.

Goldie: So you never did serve as a counselor, did you?

Mr. Jessup: I never did serve as a counselor. In fact that was my dream when I was in Roanoke just to be a counselor. But when I went to Hickory instead of being a counselor, I became an assistant principal of the school, coordinating guidance services so I became the coordinator and I had a chairperson who served under me for two years and after that with his death I became the coordinator and we eliminated the chairperson for the last two years in Hickory. So that is how I became an assistant principal. After being there for four years I received an opportunity to come to Winston-Salem/Forsyth School System to work as an assistant principal at Reynolds High School. I was there for a year and a half and was selected to become principal of Kernersville Junior High School. That is how I got into the principalship. I was in that position for four and one half years with the school reorganization I became principal of Mt. Tabor High School. I served in that capacity for six years with the last year being this past year.

Goldie: What is your present position?

Mr. Jessup: My present position is the title that was given me, Division Director of Personnel Services. That title is a replacement for Assistant Superintendent of Personnel Services. I may be in line for some of the titles that had been advocated by the State but at the same time most assistants have not followed through with that change.

Goldie: Now I want you to tell me something about Mt. Tabor High School. The responsibilities that you had and how you dealt with them and I will give you specific areas that I want you to address. First I want you to tell me just about the school and how many students you had, how many teachers, etc.

Mr. Jessup: I think it was a beautiful campus and a beautiful school and a nice facility. One main inadequacy was lack of storage. Beyond that I would say that it was adequate almost in every way especially with the additions

that were made while I was there. We added about twenty classrooms during that period of time. Ten were completed probably during the first year and then about two or three years later another ten so it was as I said a very adequate facility and appearance-wise a very beautiful school. We had a total of fifty-six staff members including myself at the school. We had approximately seventy-eight teachers; that includes, of course, media center and I suppose if we talk about adding guidance counselors and we are talking about professionals then we are really talking about around eighty-two people on the staff excluding the administration. I had three assistant principals, two secretaries in the office, I had one secretary to work with the books which made a third office secretary. We had one lady clerk worker who worked with the SIMS operations and we had one lady who served in the capacity of teacher aide all the way. We had two clerical workers, one was our receptionist and the other was our registrar, and we had a clerical worker in the media center. We had approximately eight maintenance men and women. Incidentally when I went to Mt. Tabor the enrollment was slightly over 1500 and a couple of years later we were right at 1585 starting and by the time I left we were at something like 1350 which shows you the significant decline in enrollment. Mt Tabor started I suppose-- when we started we knew that one school that we had to compete against academically was Reynolds High School. Of course, we had clientele from the Wake Forest area and in other sections of Winston-Salem and the people in that area had high expectations academically. In some instances we were able to fulfill those expectations and in some areas we were not.

Goldie: How did you go about supervising?

Mr. Jessup: I guess two or three ways I did that. First of all we developed job descriptions for the assistant principals and especially when it got to evaluations. We developed that in the beginning. We developed job descriptions for our secretaries so they would know their role description more than anything else. So we all had our roles with the realization that in many instances we overlapped and at the same time we had specific responsibilities. So that was the initial thing. We try also to provide a handbook for staff members that basically covered most of the major things that would take place during the year. Of course we had our student handbook. When I left we had a sheriff on campus. That was the second year that we had had one on campus. All the high schools have them and have a liaison office on campus so that of course helped but after you get beyond the paper work it is a matter of responding to needs, responding to different situations that are brought to your attention and a matter of just walking around just looking at things and giving directions.

Goldie: In your assistant principals job descriptions were

they assigned any evaluations of teachers?

Mr. Jessup: Yes. In fact we basically divided the staff from one to four. The last year I evaluated more than they but there were probably other years when I didn't evaluate as many they. One unique feature that I had the first five years that I did not have the last year was that I had a Black assistant principal for five years and I did not have one the last year. I had to work probably harder to compensate for the fact that I did not have the Black assistant who was in contact with the Black students and when I say compensate, I just had to work harder on getting to know the students myself.

Goldie: What was the ratio of Blacks in your school?

Mr. Jessup: Probably ranged somewhere for thirty-one to thirty-three percent.

Goldie: So the Black principal had been the one that made them feel a part.

Mr. Jessup: Yes, and of course I worked to do the same thing but you can't get around it he was out there more than I, had closer ties than I, with many of the kids and as problems arose we can always consult about those problems and work on those areas but with him gone it was necessary for me to win the confidence of enough minority students that either by directly or indirectly they would feel comfortable if they didn't feel comfortable with anybody else coming to me to talk about their problems.

Goldie: What about your teacher selection?

Mr. Jessup: I would say that in most instances I made the decision concerning staff members. When we reorganized the staff members who were already there, that was in '84-85, who were at the school remained but we also had to bring in I imagine we doubled the staff almost at least within the three year period we probably doubled the staff. The first year we did not have a senior class. We had 9-11 and the main reason being students who became seniors and thought that they were going to be at any given school were grandfathered in. So most of the students at that time rather than go to little ole Mt. Tabor went back to Reynolds High School or wherever they could go. Nobody wanted to go to Mt. Tabor. So we did not have a senior class. But by the time I left they didn't want to go anywhere else.

Goldie: But you would get your applications from central personnel?

Mr. Jessup: In most instances they would make recommendations and they would give me people to consider and

I would call them or they would call them and send them out to be interviewed. Sometimes I would come over or if I had time I would look over all the applications that I wanted to look through and select some people and go from there.

Goldie: What about curriculum and instruction?

Mr. Jessup: Well, curriculum and instruction--I guess my basic philosophy was you're probably not aware of the fact but in this school system we have five different levels, for instance in English. That is how many basic courses you can be in--average courses, advanced courses. You can be in honors courses and you can be in advanced placement courses. So all of those are possibilities. I guess you could call it homogeneous group--some people call it track. Right now it is very popular to talk about heterogeneous grouping and it is a very popular subject in this school system and we are moving toward that thank goodness. But I talked about it some when it was not popular to talk about. My basic philosophy I guess in regard to what we already had in place was that we should be as anxious to move up kids as we are to move down kids and working toward creating fairness in the placement of kids, especially in the placement of kids and the concern about the minorities, so many of them, being in the basic classes and average classes but especially basic classes and the desire to have as few in those classes as we could. We eliminated one year a basic class. We did last year on an experimental basis, eliminating a basic class in biology. We hadn't had any basic kids who passed the state test and last year we eliminated it as a basic class and gave them a new name. They were average students, studying average stuff and most of those kids passed and I don't think anyone failed that class. It was a small class. Just that the name change made a tremendous difference. We had a situation in regards to social studies. The lady made a mistake and told the kids that they were in an average class and then she discovered later, the kids discovered before she did, that it was not really supposed to be and she said it was amazing the difference that it made in the way those kids responded. So therefore, we changed the class to an average class. So we tried a number of things like that in regards to curriculum but we had an established curriculum of course that you just couldn't change so the main thing that you had to do was to work toward young people being treated fairly in regard to placement and to work toward young people having the same opportunities when it came to quality teachers. Another part of my philosophy is that basic kids deserve the same quality teaching as higher level kids. Therefore, they deserve teachers with the same level of experience, same level of education and everything else so rather than having a basic class and a basic teacher, we let everybody share and the teacher who teaches the AG kids should also have a class of basic kids. Therefore nobody is going out with basic kids but everybody can come to that class with freshness and at

the same time we hope with high expectations. Somehow it seemed that when you teach only basic kids sometimes your expectations can get lower and lower and lower.

Goldie: Discipline.

Mr. Jessup: We try to be tough. Dan Pickett was a tough disciplinarian and of course I try to be tough.

Goldie: That was your Black administrator?

Mr. Jessup. Of course he was the main tough man and I try to be the second tough man. The main thing that we emphasize-we try to emphasize two things. You are going to be treated fairly and secondly we are not going to tolerate a lot of stuff. Those two things we try to establish. When I say that you are going to be treated fairly, when I went to Mt. Tabor teachers didn't appreciate my coming and asking what happened. They didn't appreciate my saying, "Would you explain the situation. The student said this. What do you have to say? Tell me about the situation so that I can understand it better." They felt that I was questioning their integrity but after a little while they realized that that was my way of doing things. I believe that when you are fair in working with people you are always going to have somebody who is dissatisfied with you because the teacher is not always right and the student is not always right and the parent is not always right. So therefore, with that being the case there were teachers in some instances who didn't care for the way that I dealt with the situation but I felt that I was dealing with it fairly. I never tried to embarrass a staff member at any time in conferences or so forth and I think that they would say that was the case. If it was obvious that they were wrong, then the way I look at it we ought to just apologize and say look we are going to try not to do it again and if there were uncertainty then I would say let's compromise and if it is obvious that we're right then I'm going to say we're going to stand on it so that is the way I try to deal with the kids. Try to treat them fairly and I believe they knew we tried to do something. The other thing in regard to discipline. You can't beat personally contact. When I went over there, the kids wouldn't let you touch them. They probably don't do that in Statesville. The kids didn't want you to. They'd say, "Don't you put your hands on me." By the time we left I could walk up them and put my arm around the guys and chat with them and then have my little private conversation with them and it didn't bother them at all and I really appreciate that fact. Another thing too we had a policy against wearing hats in the building. For instance, the last year that I was there we had problems and we encouraged them not to wear hats and they would take them off and put them back so I let them know that we have reminded you so from this point on I will take your hat and I basically told the staff that I would

deal with the hat situation.

Goldie: And you would keep the hat?

Mr. Jessup: What I did was the first time I took a hat I would take the hat to my office and write it up and he had to personally come to get his hat. I'd say, if you ever repeat, that is my hat. You might get it back at the end of the year. So I collected hats. Teachers didn't like it too well because in many instances they felt that they didn't get the respect that they deserved when they worked on that particular policy but what I never could get them to understand that what I was doing was disciplining them in the hall before they got to the classroom. As Dan Pickett and I said once as we stood in the hall and some kids were trying to get to class and they were talking, some of these kids don't have to be on time anywhere except school. Some of these kids never experience any kind of discipline except school. So what I strongly believed in was the fact that every time that kid responded to me whether it meant him walking down the hall and my grabbing his hat off or whether it meant that he handed the hat to me or whether it meant I had to take him down to the office with me and deal with that situation. Every time I did that it was breaking a little bit of the resistance that he would have when he got to the classroom. That every time the person made me it was developing that discipline in the classroom. People didn't understand what I was talking about--most of them didn't. Also, it gave me an opportunity to get to know my kids. A couple of years ago, I said, he's one of my football players, a Black boy, I said I want to talk to you a minute. He said, what, Mr. Jessup. I say you know something-- the way you walk and the way you look and the way you talk you try to be tough. He started laughing and I said you know something, I believe that you really think that you can intimidate some of the people right here. He just laughed. I said, I tell you one thing there is just only one bad dude on this campus and that's me. I said, there is only going to be one and I said do you understand what I am talking about. He said, yes. But you know at that point in time I could talk to the kids in that particular manner. I can think of one situation last year. I try to make it very clear to them concerning discipline. Why I was doing things. An example, a kid threw something--a piece of candy or something and hit me above the eye. Four guys were standing there. I took the four down to the office and told them. Look guys, just tell who it was and I'll deal with it and that will be it. Nobody would tell. I said I'll tell you what, I'll give one piece of paper in front of you and let me tell you something, you're not going to leave here without a name on that piece of paper. I said it can be your name or somebody else's name but I want a name on that piece of paper and when I have my name you can go. It was the guy that I suspected. So I sat down with him and I told him, look I'm going to suspend you

from school for three days. I'm not suspending you because you hit me with a piece of candy. I'm suspending you because you wouldn't tell me the truth. That you wouldn't step forward and say I did it. Not because you hit me because accidents happen but because lying to me and all of this investigation I am going to suspend you. The toughest situation was last year preceding the Christmas holidays and I had two groups that fought one another. Some people want to say they were gangs, one kid was cut a little bit above the eye. It really caused an uproar in the community and a loss of confidence that we really had control of the situation. The ironic thing is that you can have a great situation for five years and one incident can happen and everybody forgets about the fact that this is the first time that we have had anything like that. But anyway I personally dealt with that situation myself. Just put aside everything else and dealt with it and the final analysis was suspending about ten kids. I made up my mind after the investigation was completed that although I couldn't get details and we had about three or four fights and although I couldn't get all the details that I needed I made up my mind the kids had to go and as the situations came up within the week or two they went. I learned that basically from a principal in Hickory. They had dealt for a number of years with human relations techniques talking, talking, talking it out but it doesn't work. Sometimes you have to root out the people.

Goldie: Tell me about transportation and how you dealt with it.

Mr. Jessup: I delegated it to my assistant principals.

Goldie: How many buses did you have coming to the school?

Mr. Jessup: We may have had about twenty or twenty-five.

Goldie: Utilization of funds.

Mr. Jessup: Oh, that is a biggie! If you want to be fired you can be fired quicker over that than anything else. The first thing I had a tremendous advantage and then I had a lady who was probably one of the most honest people I've ever met in all my days. She used to give me strength when she felt that I was going in the wrong direction when it came to applications or policy. But if I had a million dollars I think I would trust her to carry it to the bank and deposit it and that is the truth. It's a tremendous advantage to have a person you have that much confidence in when it comes to handling finances. In addition to that she was a person who really worked hard so that to me in regard to finances that is the key thing. To have a person that you can really have confidence in. But beyond that when I came to Mt. Tabor we had fund-wise probably less than \$10,000. When I left Mt. Tabor we were in much better shape. I left with about

\$15,000 working capital--that's in non-restricted funds that the principal can use at his discretion. But at the same time we didn't have a lot of the bills that I had when I came. It wasn't a matter of starting even. You had to take over the bills that the school had as a 9-10 school. So it was always a battle financially to try to catch up and get ahead. There were major expenditures always and I guess you could say that was one of the things that troubled me most-- inability to purchase, having to watch what we had, trying to determine how we could get additional resources. So we purchased--for instance we had a football field. We had to purchase all the equipment to make sure the football field was taken care of. We had to purchase equipment for--now the school board donates to athletics about \$13,000 so that really helped. There are so many other things that need to go beyond that \$13,000 and we had to work on the equipment because we were starting out. We had some things left over from 9-10 but still it was not the equipment you wanted for a high school so we had to deal with that. We needed vans; we didn't have vans. We purchased two vans which put us in very good shape for a while transportation-wise and I had dreams of getting a smaller one. These were fifteen passenger vans. We had when I went there one copier for that school. At that time we probably had around 1200 students and all those teachers who went without it and of course the second year we had 1500. They only had one copier. When I left we had five copiers. I consider that progress. One of those was a high speed duplicator. You put that thing on and you just set it where you want it and whereas it would probably take your other machine an hour to do something it would do it in fifteen minutes so we bought one of those high speed duplicators. It cost \$10,000. That thing was expensive. In addition to that we had to buy computers and one of the high priorities when I left was to catch up with others in regards to computers. We were not as far along as I wanted to be there but we made progress but still we were not where I wanted to be. We had gone basically in the IBM direction which was the best direction to choose. Basically we had a choice from the beginning to go IBM or go Apple but we went in the IBM direction--something that was not as popular at that time but the school system has basically gone into IBM. So that was a good decision for us. As far as management of funds, two things made the biggest difference in my life that I feel really made me successful in dealing with funds. There are those who feel otherwise because they feel in the end we should have had more. But the two things that really made the difference is that I got an athletic director the second year who kept up with the equipment and our objective established from the beginning was not to spend a lot of money in replacement of uniforms. So you can lose a lot of uniforms every year but you just replace them but we did not want a major part of our resources to go into replacement. So if we really keep up with our equipment and keep everything in good condition, then we will buy new uniforms

but we will not spend every year replacing them. That made a tremendous difference because in athletics there is so much money spent in athletics. So that made the major difference. The second best thing I did I think was that I decided to bite the bullet and sacrifice. The aide who had been working basically in the office and helping teachers I decided to sacrifice and use that person as a teacher aide all the way. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. Her job was to keep up with instructional equipment, run off materials for teachers, help them any way that she could, maintain equipment, keep it going, inventory to determine whenever the equipment needed to be replaced and keep up with it--don't just be letting it go to waste and people abuse it and everything else. One of the wisest decisions I ever made and the underlying objective being I was familiar with the fact that in some instances people get supplies for the year. Sometimes we did it at Reynolds High School. We tell people that we are allocating \$50 for what you want. People offered the school supplies but I told them we were going to allocate the funds. We'll make materials available any time you need them. Those were the two best decisions I made. The best idea I ever had in regard to fund raising, we were unsuccessful as a whole in fund raising endeavors but there was one that I took much pride in. Two or three other schools have already caught on as well, was to work with the PTA in a fund raising endeavor and the attractive thing about our plan was to inform parents that we are not going to have a candy sale or any other fund raiser. What we are doing is asking you to make a contribution to the school. The first year we raised about \$7000-\$8000 for the school. We sent a letter and of course I signed, the president of the PTA signed and some other people signed. That reminds me I have to send \$50 to Mt. Tabor, my contribution for this year to continue it. This year they had a telethon calling. That was one of the best ideas I've ever had and the most successful endeavor that we have ever had. So that ended our finances that was a major thing. Let me make one more comment in regard to discipline. We were the first school in the system to use walkie talkies. When we came there, started the school up going on seven years ago. We didn't have equipment where the coaches could go out on the fields and put those things on there ears and talk to one another so we decided instead of getting those ear phones and all that equipment we would get walkie talkies where they could talk to one another but we also decided that what we are going to do is let them use them in administration. So we continued buying until we got to the point where all of us had them and we also gave the maintenance person one. We had them in the office area where they could call if an emergency came up or anything else. It can really help in a wise use of time and the thing is if you came upon a crisis situation you could call for help just like that. One of the best things I ever did. They've forgotten where it started. I heard someone mention another school one day but I could tell you that it started

at Mt. Tabor. And right now every school in the system has walkie talkies.

Goldie: Well good, that's good. You're a Trail blazer.

Mr. Jessup: Well, I wouldn't say that we did that much but we did a few things.

Goldie: Cafeteria management.

Mr. Jessup: I had two good managers. The main thing I tried to do was establish a good working relationship with the managers and I did that. I tried to emphasize our support of them because they are basically an independent identity of the school but at the same time I realize that I am responsible for the overall facility. I'm responsible for the overall program. We had excellent relationships. If I saw them right now we'd have to hug. So relationship is a key thing. I'm a strong believer in that you have to develop good working relationships with those with whom you work. So that was a key thing. We also made it as attractive as we could. We were able to get booths and of course we were one of the first schools to do that. The Food Services Department worked with us, we had tables in the middle of the floor and on the side which would make you think that you were at McDonalds so that was nice. But we tried to do what was required of us maintenance-wise at all times and we tried as much as possible to deal with the students when they broke rules and regulations and when they misused their meal tickets those who were on free meals. One thing I used to do very often that I hope is an indicator of my support is that I would come in during the morning and stand there in the cafeteria while the students were eating breakfast but what disturbed me very much was that we had students who were on free breakfast and they would leave their cartons and plates on the table. That really bothered me but they would do it. My standing there of course made a difference but what would bother me again was when maybe one day I couldn't get there and they would do the same thing and I never really corrected that situation. Maybe I didn't have the creativity to correct it.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds.

Mr. Jessup: Now in regard to the buildings. We did have a responsibility because I know the school system also had the responsibility. We projected needs and certainly we indicated that we needed more classrooms and as I said from the time that I first went to Mt. Tabor the first time and I had gotten the job we completed about twenty classrooms. So we projected those needs. In addition to that we tried to influence where the building took place. Right now I feel that we should have placed the last addition across the street. Also we tried to project future lab needs. We told

the people who were in authority that we needed to buy the land across the street but at the time the school system didn't see fit to do so. So we have done and of course one thing we tried to do was to place--at the end of the day we had an open campus for the 11th and 12th graders until last year when it was only seniors. These students would go off campus during lunch and of course they would come back and eat and drop whatever out there on the grounds and we had a couple of maintenance people who would go out there and work on the grounds during that period of time. Also I was a strong believer in us being conscious of what neighbors would see as they went up and down the street and the campus was spread out so we tried to work on that. We tried just being conscious of the outside appearance. A couple of things that we did as part of our overall plan for improvement. We purchased the last year that I was there--we have two driveways as you come in--if you go all the way down the driveway if you go a third of a mile or so or whatever but they are pretty big driveways. It is not as bad as pulling into the school. You go down a driveway--so down the driveway the one that carries you right by the office we got trees, we planted those trees all the way down the driveway. The second part of the plan was to put trees on the other side where when you come in you go right down between a row of trees and that was a part of our beautification plan. We would have worked harder except the fact that we needed more land. Since we knew that it wasn't likely that we could get any more we tried to get as much use of what we had. For instance the stadium--we really talked a lot about the stadium. We placed it in a place where we thought we could get the maximum from the other. We had a softball field and other things we figured out where we could get the maximum from the land mass that we had. But as I stated it is a beautiful campus especially in the spring and in the fall and the summer and one of these days you have to go by there and see what I am talking about.

Goldie: What was the relationship that Mt. Tabor had with the community?

Mr. Jessup: Overall we had a good relationship. At least I had the impression that we did. I tried to cultivate the relationship that we had; we had our enemies but I guess everybody has those. As I said, if we can believe in fairness you're going to have some people who are going to be displeased with your administration. But overall I think people would say that we were sensitive to their desires. We can always respond to desires but as a whole I would say that when dealing with problems I would say--let me point out what one principal said. We have the most difficult job among the high school principals. He was White. Because Reynolds West and Mt. Tabor had a clientele, a very demanding one and he said you have the most difficult job though because you are Black. I think my strongest suit probably is interacting

with people especially when it comes to dealing with problems that they had and so forth. And at least coming out of the situation where people feel that they are dealt with fairly, I think that was probably my strongest suit. I don't know how true it was but my secretary used to say that there were situations that came up where parents came to the school and she would be afraid for my well being. But I went behind closed doors and she said what I can't understand is how you come out talking and laughing. I can't understand that. But I guess one thing that I always kept in mind in working with people in the community I guess a couple of things, two or three things that are essential for public relations and that is what we are talking about. Number one is keeping in mind the fact that you could be the person sitting across the table. You could be that person. How would you want to be treated? The second thing is having the ability to listen. That is a key thing--listening to people. So many problems are solved and I just listen to people. All they want you to do is just listen to them. Just give them an ear. So I don't know how many problems I solved just giving them an ear. The next thing is you've given them an ear and you've really listened to them so often they will give you the answer that you need to give to them. They have already told you what they need and often it is not more than you can give. So a lot of times if you listen to people you can solve your problems, a lot of times if they are wrong, they will give you the ammo that you need to show them that they are wrong if you just listen. So that is the key thing--one main thing that I do well although I'm running my mouth very much now--I do listen to people and I did listen to people and I think they really appreciated that fact. I think as a whole we have a good working relationship with the community. I was told by the an assistant superintendent who had a lot of influence at that time that that was the main reason I was chosen that I could work well with the community.

Goldie: Do you think Mt. Tabor had become a part of that community that 9-12 school is now a part of that community and folks feel that it is their school?

Mr. Jessup: Yes, there are two reasons that I would say that. One is that right now you see advertised in the paper and basically you don't see it many times for anybody else you won't see it almost for anybody else. You might see it once in a while for Reynolds but not often. But you often see it's in the Mt. Tabor district when it comes to realty. The second thing is that it would be hard at this time we are talking about redistricting. Boy you start drawing those lines you are going to have an uproar. The same kinds of problems you had when we became Mt. Tabor--kids not wanting to leave Reynolds. Boy you are going to have an uproar if you start cutting up Mt. Tabor. It's going to be all right now if you keep Mt. Tabor in its place and add some to it but if you want problems, you start sending them back to Reynolds

or sending them to West or to North.

Goldie: How much administrative power or control do you think that you had over that school site and your responsibilities?

Mr. Jessup: It is very questionable as to how much. I was in a position to influence decisions and I was in a position to make decisions but I was fully aware of all the uncontrollable factors that existed around me. When I made decisions there were two or three things that I used to think about when I made decisions. One, underlining discipline and everything else--is it fair, is it the right thing to do? The answer was yes. At the same time I realized that interpreting the rules and regulations I could go up to a certain point beyond that then I depended on somebody else to support me. Often I would go up to that point and not go beyond. A couple of times I went beyond one and it was in regard to grading policy. Our grading policy is so bad so I created a grading policy for our school. The teacher's organization thought it was a fine plan but in a final analysis I won. Another situation was in regard to clubs trying to make things fair for all kids. I tell you these clubs are very clickish. I worked hard toward that and that is one thing I can say right now that in spite of my best effort the job is still undone and I worked hard on that. Those are a couple of things that I really went out on a limb concerning that nobody else did and really those two situations are still undone. I can't sit here and say that--right now I can show you that in spite of my efforts those years the results didn't change. But I knew it was the right thing to do.

Goldie: You do feel that you had as much power as any principal today has. Do you feel that?

Mr. Jessup: Well, I think of it in terms of this. There are some principals who have a lot of contacts. They have clout--they have contacts. I've never had clout or contacts so naturally that puts us to a disadvantage but I never moved up nor have I moved from one place to another due to contacts. I don't know if it has anything to do with my ability or not but I would dare say this that I think probably overall I've done probably about as much if not more simply because I've tried things and felt that it would be difficult for somebody to say you're wrong. I felt that it was in the best interest of kids and school and that it would be hard for anybody else to say you're wrong and therefore I probably have done a little bit more exploring than some of the other people even thou they may have had the contacts. Certainly on the surface they have not but maybe they were satisfied also with the way things were.

Goldie: How did desegregation of schools affect your role as a principal?

Mr. Jessup: Desegregation has not taken place since I became principal.

Goldie: No, it hasn't taken place since you became principal. Do you think this goal desegregation of schools has affected your role.

Mr. Jessup: Oh, the principalship role. Well, one thing for sure you don't have as many Black principals. That is for sure. Therefore, Black administrators on the high school level do not have the influence, the contact, the networking, young people do not have the role models. All those are factors that they've lost and that description is representative of basically every other category in teaching positions, student positions, all the way down the line. It is interesting. When I was in Hickory I was asked to speak to an all White group. I was the only Black there. They asked me to speak on the advantages or disadvantages of desegregation. And I wrote my speech and when I got there and looked around and I was the only Black one there. I said to myself maybe I ought to change my speech.

Goldie: Did you have enough courage to go on and deliver?

Mr. Jessup: I went ahead and delivered but it was work. Now just think about some of the things that you're about that one problem with desegregation that came was the fact that for some reason Black cheerleaders could not cheer loud enough to be a part of the cheerleading squad. And students who used to be good in the band can no longer play well enough to be part of the band and only the exceptional athlete can play on the football team. Principals, people who were principals, became directors of federal programs and teachers who were hired on the high school level became elementary teachers. Of course, I ended by saying that there is still room, there's hope, better use of funds, better use of facilities all these things we have going for us.

Goldie: I want you to tell me, I think I already know the answer, did you enjoy your job and why?

Mr. Jessup: I enjoyed it very much but I reflex on the relationships that I dealt with the staff members and the students. When I think of the hard times and the kinds of problems and difficulties that we had to jointly overcome as a team like considering the fact that we started up a high school 9-12 and when I think of the trials and tribulations that we went through and as a team we were able to overcome them it is just a delight. I don't think about Mt. Tabor very often because I am so busy here but when I see a staff member or when I see a student it just warms my heart.

Goldie: What do you consider the major problem of your principalship?

16

Mr. Jessup: If I could say, I'd probably say the stress level. The stress level is very high and the ironic thing is I was in a human relations workshop where we had some principals talking about the stress level like administrators. I learned that we had one thing in common. Very frequently I think many--often in our position we feel that we can't afford to make a big mistake and that really makes it a stressful situation. Maybe that's without cause or for some reason it's almost like you feel you have to be the superman and so therefore that can really cause a lot of stress on the job trying not to make mistakes.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding about your principalship?

Mr. Jessup: The most rewarding thing I suppose was watching the school develop and grow and we had many outstanding achievements that really made me feel good. Such as we started, I suppose about three years, academic competition teams and the first two years we won the playoffs in the school system. We beat Reynolds both of those years in the playoffs. Last year we won the regular season championship and then won the playoffs. The preceding year we placed second and then won the playoffs and I take much delight in that. Another thing our Quiz Bowl team or IQ Team, one of the two, went to the state, played in the state finals and won. We were state champions so we are very pleased with that. We had tremendous academic achievements overall and we just prospered. That's is all I can say. We prospered academically. Athletically we prospered but we did not go as far as I desired in football but I would say almost in every area that I can think of we and I don't know how others perceive me or my accomplishments there but when I look back on what we accomplished at Mt. Tabor I know what I found and I know what is there now. When I think about all the achievements that we made and the recognitions that here again were impossible to mention--all the recognitions that we received while I was there I would probably have to say were at the hand of God.

Goldie: Did you have any problems with the supervision of your Black teachers? Did you find that you had a unique problem with the Black teachers. I had one administrator that brought that out.

Mr. Jessup: The amazing thing is that is actual reality in many instances--Black principals having problems with Black teachers. No, I did not. I had no problems with my Black teachers. In fact I felt that some of my Black teachers were some of my strongest supporters. I talked a little bit about that in a seminar back in the fall. I thought I said some good things and now I can't recall what I said. But I said I felt that the key thing was simply the fact that I felt that Black teachers didn't really expect any special attention as

such but they expected to be treated like everybody else. They expect involvement, they want respect, they want to feel good about themselves and I think that is the principal's role to help people to feel good about themselves. And they want someone who understands their needs where they are coming from but the main thing is that they want to be involved. They want to be in a position to have some influence and I think as long as we are conscious of those facts I don't see Black administrators having problems with teachers. The point that I made was the fact that that reminds me of Black administrators maybe not getting along with Black students. In some instances Black administrators get a lot cussing. I've gotten my share too but I think it applies you can't get--the main point I made in that meeting is that first of all you have got to have enough sensitivity to realize that when you are in the minority you feel less secure so you must make people feel secure and when you are working in a school--yes, I know I'm an objective administrator I love people I don't care if they're Black or White I want to see them do well. I want to see them do well. Well, I have to realize that my minority kids are not going to feel as secure as my White kids when they are 30% and I have to realize when maybe my staff is 20% that they are not going to feel as secure as the others so two things that I would do, one thing I would make sure minorities were included in everything whether it was one or whether it was more than one. I'd make sure they were included and I'd make sure that I talked to them from time to time as I go down the hall. I'd kid around with them but in the final analysis they were being treated just as others. I'm not one who would cater to people just because you have more votes. Again it comes back to my philosophy, people need to be treated fairly. If you are going to meet the needs of children, it would be different, if you are going to meet the needs of staff members it would be different.

Goldie: So you are saying that fairness does not always mean equality. So you're saying that Black students need a little more. It's being fair to them to give them a little more.

Mr. Jessup: That is exactly right. Fairness isn't just cutting it down the center. Sometimes somebody just might need a little piece of that just to make it fair. But I don't know why and that bothers me. But I hear that and sometimes I hear talk about it but that is a reality.

Mr. Jessup: Just point out one thing. The fact that when you see things that you know are unfair, you don't have to make it a Black and White issue. There is a time and place for everything. I can see clubs that are clickish. I can see that but I didn't make it a Black and White issue but I moved on the situation. There was a White student who came to me and told me, Mr. Jessup, I have applied for the Anchor Club for three years. I had all the qualifications that

everybody else has had and yet I was not selected because I am not a part of "the click". It was time for me to move. I was not responding to something that was Black and White. I was responding to a need for fairness in the administration of clubs and organizations. And I knew before that came up that Blacks were disadvantaged but the thing is there were other students who were so therefore by using this particular situation it goes back to what I said--there is a time and place to fight a battle. And you have to know when to fight your battles and when not to fight your battles.

Goldie: Since we have such a small number of Black administrators at the high school level in the State of North Carolina if you knew of an aspiring young Black who wanted to be a high school principal, what kind of advice would you give to that person?

Mr. Jessup: I suppose the advice I've given to most is that you should try to get all the different experiences you can. New experiences--it worked in our King Burger place. Somehow that experience can help you in life. It is probably helping you right now in the classroom. If you played on the football team, you learned something there that is helping you right now in the classroom. So try to get a piece of as many experiences as you can, volunteer for things, and help out with things whereby you are learning, make it as continuous as possible. Develop as much background as you can, and the other thing is be sensitive to the needs of people. You have your own needs but remember other people have needs also. Try to see to their needs even before you see to your own needs and then the other thing would be try to be fair. Use the question as often as possible, is it right or is it fair. And be honest with yourself in your response because if you are not fair eventually it is going to catch up with you and those are probably my main recommendations. Get as many experiences and I'm talking about first hand experiences by educational experiences, and work experiences and all those kinds of experiences.

Goldie: I really appreciate you taking the time. This has been a really good interview and you've shared a lot with me and I appreciate you taking the time because you are a busy man and I know it but this research will hope someone I hope. I know that it is helping me to achieve one of my goals but I think from what I have heard from the different persons that I've interviewed there is going to be something in it that is going to be of value to administrators, especially young Black administrators who are coming behind us. Thank you so much.

Mr. Jessup: You are welcome.