

Chapter 30 – Retirement

1997-2005 The loss of my best friend and co-administrator Ken on February 29, 1996, hit me hard. Ken died early that morning after running his car into the corner of a house at 2:30 AM. I was the first to get a call from the hospital asking about his emergency contacts. Extremely difficult time

I found little desire or energy for running the high school without Ken. Linda found that I could retire at 28 years plus two half-years which legally sufficed for the full 30 years needed. I went to the Austin TRS building to see the person's lips move assuring me that I could retire December 31, 1996. I would be getting \$100 per day, 365 days of each year for the rest of my life. I figured I could make it on that. Holiday vacation was to begin at the end of the day on Friday, December 20, 1996. But, Father died on December 18th. I had to leave early to return to Roswell for the funeral. It was a confusing ending to my career.

In 1997, as a retiree, I continued to help with small chores around the school. I was the only one who knew how to change the bell schedules and program the new telephone system. I also tried selling supplements through a website at home. Total waste of time and money.

During the summer of 1997, I yearned to get back into the classroom. SAISD did not want to hire me for the 3rd time as a substitute. I guess I had given them enough trouble over 26 years. TRS regs would not let me keep my retirement and work full-time in public schools. I contacted the Catholic school administration. They offered me a math teaching job at Providence High School for \$24,000. The girls all dressed alike, giggled a lot, and everyone prayed. I enjoyed the peacefulness of being around kids who were not bringing their gang fights into the building for two years. Some of the parents wanted me to apply as principal, but I told them I did not have a habit.

In 1999, TRS changed the rules. I could teach mathematics (a specialty shortage) in public schools and keep my retirement money. I thought about it and applied to SAISD. Personnel sent me to interview at Mark Twain Middle School for a math assignment teaching a very special group of geometry students (I hate geometry). The principal was glad to get me. He gave me a radio to help manage the cafeteria, playground, and the school when he was absent (which seemed to be often).

Part 1 - Times and Places

The next two years were very challenging for me. Of all things, I did not know how to engage unruly 8th graders. The agrarian curriculum was somewhat foreign to this long-time algebra teacher/administrator. I finally found some control during the 1st semester of the 2nd year in a lonely barracks building during the school reconstruction. I received a commendation for physically breaking up a knife fight that semester.

I heard of a shakeup at Highlands High at the end of spring semester 2001. The Mark Twain principal was retiring and one of the assistant principals at Highlands was moving into the job. I also heard that he wanted to bring along his favorite math teacher with him.

I contacted the new principal at Highlands and gave her a deal she could not refuse. She was new and did not know the Highlands building. She had 4 new assistant principals who also did not know the building or the students. I had run the school for 6 years and knew everything about the building and most of the teachers. I told her I 1) only wanted to teach 9th graders, 2) I did not need a conference period, and 3) I would monitor the lunch cafeteria during all three lunches. All I needed was a radio. She loved it. I began my final 4 years teaching in 2001 through 2005 at my sanctuary high school, Highlands. I still lived one block away and rode my bike to work.

I innovated like crazy. Shower boards mounted in the chalk trays instead of using blackboards. Brightly colored markers on the shower boards. Music, computer-projected lessons on the shower boards with videos, and PowerPoints, using Photoshop to write and draw on photographs of lessons, and singing math lyrics to popular songs.

The principal nominated me for the SAISD Teacher of the Year and the Trinity prize in the spring of 2004. I won the former but lost the latter. At the recognition of the award, this gringo sang "Sixteen Tons" acapella with the lyrics changed to "sixteen jobs" in front of the SAISD School Board at west side Lanier High School right after the Mariachi band had performed.

I taught for one more year(2004-2005) and decided it would be a good time to go out on top in the spring of 2005. I resigned, bought a new boat, and went fishing for the next few years as well as building websites for organizations and businesses.