



John Rokke, Class of 1966

“EDUCATION AS A LIFESTYLE”

When Mark Knutson asked me to write this article, I quickly said I would be honored to do so. However, it has surprised me how difficult it has been to come up with words that will interest current Marshall County Central school district residents. I feel so fortunate to have grown up in the Newfolden community. My parents, Arnold and Alice Rokke, were so important in helping me realize how vital it would be for me to be serious about my education. In my adult years, I realized they were just carrying on the feelings of my grandparents and great-grandparents. I spent the first 12 years of my education in the Newfolden School District and have always been grateful for that. It is very hard to come up with just a few teachers that I could mention as being extra important to my development. I respected them all, but I have to admit I did not always like everyone of them. However, many years later, I came to the realization that teaching is not a popularity contest but the total commitment to each student is vital. In my elementary years, Miss Huglen and Mrs. Sollum were instrumental in cultivating my love for reading, an attribute that continues to this day. In high school, we had many very good teachers and administrators. I am still amazed how Mrs. Craig, our vocal music instructor, could put up with the mis-behavings of the male members of the choir and still produce such quality music on a regular basis. Mr. Mounger, our incomparable Industrial Art teacher, touched the lives of many of us in multiple ways. Many men of my age and older still have items built in his classes. He insisted on quality work and incredible projects are still talked about today by a lot of us. Several of us have been talking seriously about funding a scholarship in his memory and maybe the MCC Education Foundation can help this become a reality. I know several guys my age who credit him for the success they have achieved in their lifetime. Miss Torgerson was and is a true inspiration. She handled all students in her typical manner that stressed success for everyone. Mr. Kohoutek was such a gentleman and was a tremendous coach. I have had the opportunity to talk with him in the last few years and have been able to thank him for his influence on me. Mrs. Dyrud is still the finest teacher I have ever come in contact with, and that includes many top quality instructors I worked with in my career in multiple school districts. She was ahead of her time with her ability to reach students of all levels. I cannot thank her enough for what she

meant to me. The Newfolden School District provided us with a quality education and the extra-curricular activities still influence me in a positive manner.

After graduating in 1966, it took me a while to really focus on what I wanted to do. Eventually, I graduated from Moorhead State College with a degree in History, a minor in Coaching and being certified as a Driver's Education instructor. I was very fortunate to teach and coach in Halstad, MN, for 4 years. I learned many lessons quickly, some the hard way. My first principal, Harold Larson, said something at the first faculty meeting I attended that still resounds in my mind today. He said, "Remember every student deserves your best every day, so when you are having a 'burnt toast day', it is your duty to not let whatever is causing your problem to affect the way you do your job". I used that comment many times in my administrative career. I really enjoyed my time in Halstad and was blessed with some young men who loved baseball as much as I did and we enjoyed success. I still interact with some of them today and that is a thrill. In 1975, I came home to farm with my dad. A week before school started, the Strandquist superintendent came to see me and convinced me to teach and coach "just one year". It was a good decision. After one year, my professional life changed forever when Phil Dyrud, the new superintendent, asked me to be the K-12 principal. It was something I never planned to do but I am so glad I did. Phil was so intelligent and experienced and he gave me a firm groundwork to begin an administrative career. Coaching girls' basketball in its infancy was a real thrill.

After farming for a few years, I returned to graduate school and earned a Master's Degree and Principal/Superintendent certifications at Moorhead State College and NDSU. It was a big step but my family's commitment to lifelong learning was the main impetus. I had the privilege of working as a high school principal in Warren, Tracy and Waseca for a total of 23 years. It was difficult to move my family each time but each district provided more challenges and the opportunity for professional growth. In 2006, I took a step I never expected to take, spending the last 4 years of my educational career as superintendent of the Waseca School District. I have been so blessed to have a supportive family, including my wife Denise, and children Brendan and Kristen. I have had a lot to live up to as each of them are summa cum laude college graduates. In each district, I continued to learn constantly. The emphasis on professional development is something I took very seriously. It remains one of the two most important parts of an administrator's job. The first is security for all individuals connected with your school and the second is hiring quality people at all levels and giving them all the tools they need to excel. The last 3 districts I worked in have active Education Foundations that are absolutely essential to help all students gain the tools to succeed in today's global society. Even though I am now retired, I try to stay current with all aspects of education. Things have changed a lot since I started teaching in 1971, but the students still must remain the focus. It is so easy to criticize teachers, administrators and school board members, but my mother's oft-repeated slogan to me still is pertinent today: "Don't criticize your neighbor until you have walked a mile in their moccasins".

Thanks for the opportunity to write this document. I am proud of our Marshall County Central School District for their continued success. Just think how fortunate we are that our school board and community in the late 1960's and early 1970's supported the need to build our new high school. Towns and districts around us who did not follow suit with a building program, are facing tough decisions today. I am very proud to remain active in our school in a small way with my involvement in the MCC Athletic Hall of Fame and the MCC Wall of Honor. There are many more deserving individuals that deserve to be recognized. Go, Freeze!

