



## Les Bakke Class of 1963

I consider it an honor to write this Continuing Saga memory of my experience at Newfolden High School (NHS). I hope to convey some humor, some wisdom and some memories of how much NHS helped me prepare for life. First, I want to give credit to teachers that made a difference in my life. Ms. Ethel Torgerson, math teacher, gave all of us who took her classes the opportunity to learn. Her teaching was so good that when I arrived at Moorhead State College (MSC), I was placed in sophomore Calculus as a History major. Two quarters later, I became a Math major and was almost done when I took a class called Computer Programming. I stopped taking Math classes, and did obtain the first Computer Science degree from MSC. While in one of Ms. Torgerson's Math classes, we had a test, I'd already finished when I saw that the student in front of me doing a problem incorrectly, so I leaned forward to help. Ms. Torgerson sternly reminded me it was a test. The second significant teacher was Ms. Mae Larson, speech teacher and drama coach. She helped me get rid of my strong Norwegian accent although I can still fall back on my Norwegian accent when I tell Ole and Lena jokes. Ms. Larson convinced me to enter speech contests and recruited me for class plays and one-act plays. I don't know if I was type cast, but I played a counterfeiter in one play and in another I stole the only life boat when our yacht struck a rock and started sinking. Mr. Jack Junker came to Newfolden as a basketball coach and told us that anyone smoking or caught with anyone smoking would not play for him. That was a serious threat but it worked and I am grateful. I never did start smoking, even while in the military.

Athletics was very important to me while at NHS, I played football, basketball and baseball. My coaches were all very good and helped us become better athletes and better people, they cared about us. Wayne Ulferts, coach, teacher and guidance counselor was particularly influential, he encouraged me to go to college. Later at MSC, I was able to work with his daughter, Lori

Ulferts, Hall of Fame basketball coach. There were embarrassing moments in athletics also. For instance in a baseball game while playing center field, a ball was hit to me and I ran so hard to catch the ball I lost my hat. Thinking it was the third out, I went back and picked up my hat. Meanwhile the runner on second scored, it had been only the second out. Luck was sometimes with me too. In a football game in Argyle, our quarterback threw a pass that hit the ground before getting to me, but I caught the ball and I kept running before being tackled. The officials didn't see it but the Argyle players did. We did gain a first down.

Student government activity was an important part of NHS education. I was class president and on student council. I had the opportunity attend Boy's State between my Junior and Senior year and had an eye opening experience, meeting other boys from all over Minnesota, towns big and small. Back in 1963, we did not have a school prom, we had a banquet. Juniors always planned the banquet for the Seniors and while planning for the 1962 banquet, some of my classmates found a nearby town that had a dance the same night, we made plans to go there. Principal Fisher found out and called me as class president to his office and told me if we didn't cancel the dance plans, he would cancel the banquet. We canceled the dancing. Remember back then, it was said that "sex led to dancing". Or was it the other way around?

After a year of college, I enlisted in the Air Force where again my NHS education was a great benefit. I 'aced' the Air Force's language aptitude test and spent a year at the University of Indiana learning Russian from Russian immigrant teachers. The next year, I enrolled in advanced military Russian and Intelligence Analysis. I then spent two years in Japan working as an intelligence analyst and backup linguist. Remembering that some of my NHS teachers were volunteers, I volunteered to help teach English in a Japanese Junior High School. At our noon break, I had a several students wanting to beat the American in ping pong. Volunteering has been important to me ever since. I still volunteer with Veterans groups and non-profits who need some computer help.

My working career has been mostly as the Computer Center director at MSC, now MSUM. Working in the education field has to be one of the most rewarding careers. Every fall, we had over 1,000 students show up with the desire to learn. I had about 25 students working for me, in computer labs, helping set up new equipment, doing some programming and some office work. They were some of the greatest workers one could have. Sometimes I think I learned as much from them as they did from me. All have gone on to become successful and productive members of our society. My other role was VA counselor for all GI Bill students and was able to help over 20,000 student Veterans succeed in college. I taught many Computer classes, but the most memorable and also the most difficult was with students from the Moorhead Alternative School. The students had problems adapting to high school, even though most were very bright. I told them I was going to treat them as college students and adults. It worked, all they needed was a chance and for someone to believe in them as students and not as problems.

Now retired, I have a few words of wisdom. Always encourage and support education at every level. Challenge yourself to do better, coaches are really good at teaching that concept. Volunteer your talents to organizations needing help; service groups, non-profits, faith based and others. They need your help. When in a discussion, try supporting the other side when in a

debate, it is surprising how much you can learn. Embrace change, and most important, continue learning and support learning for all. The MCC Foundation can use your help and donations. You can make a difference.