

**Justin Swenson
Narrator**

**Mildred Skugrud
Interviewer**

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**Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Moorhead State University Livingston Lord Library
Audiovisual Studio
Moorhead, Minnesota**

MS: This will be an interview with the Moorhead educator Justin Swenson as a part of a 1984-1985 Oral History Project of the Minnesota State University, Heritage Education Commission, and the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center. As interviewer, I am Mildred Skugrud of 1712 Sixth Street South, Moorhead, and I presently teach fifth grade at Riverside School. The time is four thirty on the 26th day of August, 1985. The place is the audio studio in the MSU Livingston Lord Library. Justin Swenson is now retired, and he and his wife live at 716 First Avenue Southeast, Elbow Lake, Minnesota in the summertime, and at Paradise Park, 1501 West Kelly Avenue, Pharr, Texas, in the winter.

Thank you, Mr. Swenson, for coming and agreeing to do this interview with us. And I wonder if you would start out by telling us a little about your family background, where they lived, and what your father and mother did for a living, and so on.

JS: Well, fine. Hmmm. Thank you, Mildred, and it's nice to be here today, and meet you again after several years of retirement. I might say that I was born near Battle Lake, Minnesota. My father was a Lutheran pastor, and my hometown I consider as Warren, Minnesota, where I went through the elementary school and high school. Then I went on to college and graduated with a bachelor's degree from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Later, I continued my education, and I received my master's degree at the University of North Dakota, and have completed the coursework for the doctorate at the University of Minnesota, although I have not received the degree, because I did not complete all the other requirements. Ah, and so that's my educational background as such.

And my teaching background began in a small town in the extreme northwestern part of Minnesota by the name of Badger, Minnesota. When I graduated in 1930, there were no specific requirements for principal-ship in a high school, so I was hired as a principal and science teacher, basically, probably because I was the only other man on the faculty. The superintendent was the other man, and I happened....

[Recording interruption?]

JS: ...groups like that. Ah, then I had a rather unusual thing happen to me. I don't know how important these biographical items are, but...

MS: Very important.

JS: ...they can be cut out. [Chuckles] But I had an interesting experience. And I taught and acted as principal for four years, and at that time the superintendent came to me and said, "Would you be interested in the superintendency here at Badger?" Well, I had been taking summer classes preparing myself for that, so I jumped at the chance. And he said, "I'll recommend you to the board." Which he did, but he said, "I would like to stay on as a high school principal, because I have a farm, and I want to take care of that." So the incident happened like this. And I stayed on there for eight years as superintendent of schools.

Then moving on to a small town in the southern part of the state near Minneapolis, Henderson, Minnesota where I served as superintendent of schools. And then at Mountain Lake, Minnesota, I was there for three years. And then I went to Pipestone, Minnesota, in the southwestern part of the state, where I remained for eight years. Moving on then next to Moorhead; where I was superintendent of schools for fourteen years. Then I left Moorhead and went to Elbow Lake, where I served as superintendent of schools for four years, retiring in 1973.

I might say, in addition to my work as a superintendent of schools, I also taught summer classes at the University of Minnesota for a number of years. I taught in the graduate school there, teaching school finance and personnel administration. And I taught two summer sessions here at Moorhead State University as well. So that, in a nutshell, is my educational background. Other than to say that we enjoy retirement, and I haven't been too actively engaged in too much in the way of education since retiring, although I still am very much interested in it.

MS: Thank you, very much. It sounds as though when you first began being principal and teacher you had a busy schedule. Not too many openings during the day!

JS: No, not at all. [Chuckles]

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: And the salaries were very, very low in those days.

MS: Yes.

JS: My beginning salary was a hundred and forty dollars a month for twelve months.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: Then after being there two years they...the board cut our salaries ten percent.

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: And that happened for three years straight, ten percent. So when I took the superintendency, my salary was one hundred eight dollars a month. So it's a...bit different. [Chuckles]

MS: That's unbelievable, isn't it? Oh, my goodness. Ah, you said your father was a Lutheran pastor?

JS: Yes.

MS: Were there any other educators in your family besides you and your father then?

JS: Oh, yes. My mother taught school. She was a graduate of the Ypsilanti Normal School in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and she taught elementary classes in schools in Michigan. Then our children have all...we have four children, and they have all been trained in education. Our one daughter, our older daughter is substituting in the Fargo system, and then sometimes in the Moorhead system. She is raising her family. Her second daughter is a teacher at the Mound School District, near St. Paul, teaching third grade, although she is on a five-year leave of absence to bring up her youngsters.

And our next child, the older boy is a fourth grade teacher in Baudette, Minnesota. And Warren, our youngest...by the way, Warren and Sheldon both received their degrees here. Warren went through the elementary program here, and also through the media program, but he is employed in business now. And that is just a...and our daughter-in-law, one daughter-in-law is teaching school up in Warroad, Minnesota. So we have quite a group of teachers in our family.

MS: You really do. You must have left a good impression, as far as education is concerned. For them all to go into education!

JS: Well, I don't know about that! [Chuckles]

MS: Hmm. When did you first consider going into education? Is this something you've always wanted to do?

JS: Well, that's an interesting question. Actually, I was quite interested in chemistry, and biology, and mathematics in high school, so I took all the mathematics and sciences that I could. And I had the idea that I would go on to medical school. And I entered a college taking as much of the pre-med work as I could, thinking that I could teach a couple of years, and then probably finance my way partially some way or another into medical school. However, with the salaries of a hundred forty dollars, and going down every year, I found that impossible. And I really became very, very enthusiastic about staying in education, and especially in the superintendency, trying to keep up with modern developments and challenges that occurred.

MS: That's very interesting. Let's go back to your first teaching position now, for a minute. Ah, you said...Did you go right from high school into teaching? Or did you have some training first?

JS: Well, I went from college.

MS: Right from college.

JS: From college and...

MS: You did have some college.

JS: I had student teaching as the...the...

MS: Okay.

JS: And they require...and also, I took a...I actually took a summer class in student teaching, taught plain geometry at that time, and that oriented me a little bit toward the teaching part.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Do you remember your very first day in the classroom?

JS: Yes, I...I really do. I was very anxious to get started in it, and I was...oh, I don't know just what I should say...but we had such a large group of students in the junior and senior high school, in the junior and senior class, I should say. They were all in a chemistry class. And I came into the room, and there were about forty in the class. And I was wondering what was in for...for me at the next step there! But I think they changed the classes around a little bit. But I do remember my first year.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: I was very young. In fact, I had some students in the senior class who were older than I.

MS: Did you feel adequately prepared for this?

JS: Well, a person's never adequately prepared for anything.

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: There's always something additional that could be done.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Right. You had a lot of students then. Did you have enough supplies for all these students?

JS: Well, we did, although a poor...a rather poor district like that, financially...And coming out of college, I wasn't aware of many of the frills and luxuries that maybe we should have ordered. But we didn't have much in audiovisual aids in those days, and we didn't have very sophisticated equipment in the laboratory, although I did improve it some. But the budget was very, very small.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: I might say, speaking about audiovisual materials, our first exposure to audiovisual materials...that is, I'm talking about projected equipment.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: Projection equipment like moving pictures. We would get a box with a film...with films and a projector, like on Monday, and we would use it. Then we would put it in the mail, and the next school would get it on Tuesday, and that school would send it on to some other school on Wednesday. That was the first type of audiovisual work that we had. And that was rather interesting, and we began to realize the importance of audiovisual work. And soon we bought a projector, and we got into the program.

MS: Were you informed ahead of time what was going to be in those films, so you could plan around it, or was it a surprise when you got it?

JS: Well, ah, some of both. We had a certain amount...I think there were six films, and usually, we knew most of them. But there might have been one or two once in a while that were put in there because of the...some difficulty, maybe the film had been broken or something like that.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But it was interesting. [Chuckles]

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. [Chuckle] When you first began teaching, were there any students who arrived late in the fall, because they had to stay home for harvesting, and leave early in the spring?

JS: Well, there were...yes, there were some. Ah, we were in a farming community there. And some of them would come a little bit late. But we tried to catch them and make up the work with them. I would get to work on chemistry or whatever it was with them, and we tried to get them caught up, so to speak. But there was some of it. Ah...but not a great deal, because it wasn't as great a farming country as some of the areas farther south. It was in a sort of a...oh...marginal farming area.

MS: You taught chemistry. Did you teach any other classes then?

JS: Oh, yes. I taught chemistry, and physics, biology, plain geometry. I taught ninth grade social studies. I think that was my assignment for one year.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. And that was every day you taught all of these subjects?

JS: Every day. Every day. Mmmm-hmmm. Yes.

MS: You had quite a few preparations then for every day.

JS: Oh, yes. We had...I did.

MS: Were there any special duties that you were asked to perform at that time as a teacher? Were you expected to live up to a certain lifestyle?

JS: Well, I think so. A small town like that looks upon the teachers as somebody to whom they can look up to. And I was quite active in music there. I directed church choirs, and things of that sort, and I helped with commercial club activities, and various things like that. And coached a play once in a while, whatever was necessary. And if no one else would be available, I would take it upon myself to do the best I could. And the results weren't always a hundred percent...

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: [Chuckles]

MS: Did you have custodians that would take care of your room, or did you have to do your own cleaning and sweeping?

JS: No, we had custodians take care of them. In the smaller schools, where I was, we only had one custodian and...yeah, and they were all...those smaller schools were one building only and...

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Do you remember way back then what the public's attitude toward school was and toward teachers?

JS: The public's attitude in those smaller towns was excellent in those days, and they looked up to the teachers. And they gave support to the school, support to the school boards, to the faculty, and it was kind of a two-way street. The people in the community looked for help from the faculty in various things, and the faculty would help the community. So the attitude of the public was excellent.

MS: How about the students themselves? Do you feel they were quite receptive to education?

JS: Yes, they were. But I think they needed direction, which we tried to give them. But they...they respected the faculty members, and they were there because they wanted to do the best they could. And the results were very good, I would say.

MS: There were several teachers in the building then with you. How was the relationship between teachers? Did you feel there was a lot of companionship? And kind of...?

JS: Yes, very...very much so. In this particular school at Badger, we only had eight teachers at first. We had four high school teachers, and four elementary teachers, but we worked together as one unit. And the superintendent was very helpful on that...in that respect, too.

MS: Mmmm. So there did seem to be a good relationship between teachers and administrators then?

JS: Yes. Oh, yes. They considered the administrators as part of a...group.

MS: Uh huh. Anything that stands out in your mind about those first years of teaching?

JS: Well, hmmm, one thing that stands out was I directed the girls' glee club one year and we won first place in the state contest. I felt that that was an accomplishment that I liked very much. [Chuckles]

MS: I should say. Yes.

JS: And the thing that I appreciated very much is the attitude now...we go up there quite frequently. My wife...incidentally, I married one of my students...ah, not while she was a student.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But I married her. And we go up there frequently. And I see people, and they talk about the days when I was there. And it makes a person feel happy that he chose...teachers. As a superintendent in a large school system like Moorhead, we didn't get to know the pupils as well, and there wasn't a close relationship at all.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Did you miss teaching after you went into administration? Did you ever wish you were back in the classroom?

JS: Well, yes, I really did. But of course, if I were to go back, I think I would still go into administration. I like that. And I enjoyed a system like Moorhead, where we had so many problems of expansion. We were very, very, very busy. And that is really very, very interesting, I thought.

MS: You considered that a challenge then?

JS: Oh, yes.

MS: It was, I'm sure, very much so. Now when was your first position as superintendent again?

JS: Well, hmmm, it...1934, at Badger, Minnesota there.

MS: At Badger. Mmmm-hmmm. That's right.

JS: After I had been there for four years.

MS: Okay.

JS: So I put in thirty-nine years as the superintendent of schools, plus the four years of a principal-teacher position.

MS: Combination.

JS: Mmmm-hmmm.

MS: And you came to Moorhead in 1955, is that right?

JS: Right. Yes.

MS: And during this time, Moorhead was really in a period of rapid growth. There were a lot of schools being built at this time. And there were quite a few built before you came...or right before you came. How were these schools financed?

JS: Well, they were financed by bond issues. The voters voted as to whether they would be willing to have the district bonded to pay for the buildings. And the finance was all set up in a fifteen-year period or twenty-year period. When I came here, they had just completed two...the elementary...four of the elementary schools.

MS: Yes.

JS: And then we built more. I counted up one time that during my experience I had twenty-five separate building projects, and they were all financed by bond issues. That's...that was the legal way to do that.

MS: Did you find much opposition to this?

JS: Well, not very much. Except here in Moorhead for the senior high school, we...the board and the rest of us were working, trying to get a very economical package, because the district here was rather hard-pressed financially. And we proposed, as you probably remember, several different smaller packages.

MS: Yes.

JS: But the public didn't go for them. Yeah, they...finally gave us more less a mandate: we want a new high school, senior high school. So we built this beautiful senior high school at the edge of the city, and that...at that time cost...I think it four and seven-tenths of a million dollars. The first bond issue was passed, and I don't remember the exact amount at this time. But when the bids were open, we didn't have enough money to do it, so we had to have another bond issue to complete the building. Alternatives at that time would have been to have eliminated the swimming pool, and the auditorium, and so on. But the public told us that they wanted those, so they passed that second bond election without any problems at all.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And then the building was opened up in 1967, and it's been one of the outstanding-est high school buildings. I have seen many of them, and this is really an outstanding building.

MS: Yes, it is. It really is. In 1958, the schools at Georgetown and Sabin were added to the Moorhead district, and new schools were built there also. Do you remember those days? Was there a lot of controversy? And were there some promises made to these communities?

JS: Well, this was a problem. When I came here, the school district...to go back up a little...back up to 1955.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: The district had had reorganization...all...so all these districts voted, and they voted to turn it down. So I came here after this had been turned down. So our first job working with the board and others was to propose another reorganization vote. And we had meetings and worked hard on that. So they passed this reorganization vote. Georgetown and Sabin, of course, had schools of their own, and they felt that they should have a school in each of their towns, which was planned, and the buildings were built. The Georgetown building was a small building of only four classrooms, and the Sabin building had six classrooms. Both of them were rather small buildings, you might say. But it met a need in those communities, and I suppose a person might say it also helped sell the reorganization vote. And I don't want to say that there were exact promises given. There have been many problems of this same type in other areas.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: In fact, just this last year, I know of one case where one town had been promised, they said, an elementary school, but they built it in the other town. So they even had a lawsuit there.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But they ruled that the board had the right to do it. And different board members, of course, couldn't promise for all of the future. I wouldn't say that they promised that there would be buildings there forever. But they said, "This is the plan that we're offering." And it met the needs. And then, as enrollment started to go down sharply...that was a few years back, as you know.

MS: Yes.

JS: Then, apparently, the most feasible thing...I wasn't involved in it at this time.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: Ah, was probably to close those buildings, rather than to try transport many people from Moorhead out to those places.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. The population had not begun to decline when you were here at...?

JS: No, we were right about at the maximum there, as I recall. And I don't have those figures, but I know there was one time when we had more preschool children on the school census than we had pupils in the entire school system.

MS: Is that right?

JS: But now, I'm not sure what the enrollment figures are. I haven't kept up to date with Moorhead figures on that. Ah, another thing that I might mention briefly here, that really is a big plus for the community and for the students, of course, is the area vocational-technical school.

MS: Yes.

JS: That was begun without too much opposition at all. And it's been going along very well. They've added on to the buildings, and I see that they're planning a new addition to the building now, too.

MS: Right.

JS: Tremendous program.

MS: And that was in 1967, and you were here then, too, weren't you?

JS: Yes. I was here until 1973.

MS: Yeah. Yes, that's...

JS: No, pardon me, I was here until 1969.

MS: Yes, right.

JS: I'm sorry.

MS: And you retired...

JS: I retired in 1973.

MS: Right. Okay.

JS: Yes.

MS: With all this building going on, and all these new developments, did you ever feel overwhelmed by all of this? Did you feel as though, oh, I don't know if I can handle all this?

JS: Well, I had some good help, and they...we all put our shoulders to the wheel, or grindstone, or whatever the saying is.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And we...we realized that there were challenges. The first challenge, really, was what should we do? What shall we do as the first step in the secondary program? And we came up with the idea of having three junior high schools. First, having two junior high schools.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: One in the north, and one in the south, and those were filled. But first, before they were filled, we had some elementary students in those buildings, too, as you probably remember.

MS: Yes. Yes.

JS: Maybe you were one of them who taught there?

MS: I did. I taught at South Junior.

JS: Yes.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And then the next step was what to do with the senior high school afterwards. Up to that point we had three...then we organized it for three junior high schools, and then the new senior high school, of course. At one time, we had the senior high school in two buildings, which was quite a problem. It wasn't so much a problem for me, but it was a problem for the principal and the faculty, going back and forth between the buildings, which were only about two blocks apart. But it wasn't the best plan. And then the three junior high schools evolved out of that. But, hmmm, we had to just face the problems as they came, and we were...planned to do that. I would say that I spent some sleepless hours, probably.

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: Thinking about...well, whether we were doing the right thing. And as it turned out...as it happened then, we felt that we did the right thing.

MS: Yes, you did an excellent job. How many were on the faculty, do you remember, at that time when you were here?

JS: Well...I...

MS: I don't remember...

JS: About five hundred, probably.

MS: I don't remember either. I was trying to think back...

JS: No, wait, because I...or was it eight hundred? I just...I didn't come prepared with these figures...ah, so I'd better not...

MS: No, I'm putting you on the spot here. Okay.

JS: We had...we had some eight thousand students at that time.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And...frankly, I'd better not say.

MS: Hmmm, I remember one thing in particular. With all of your other duties, and with all the faculty under you, you came to visit every classroom at least once a year, and we really appreciated that. I remember you stepping in the room at least once a year.

JS: Well, thank you for those remarks. I felt that I wanted to get to know the teachers as individuals, and I think I could say that at that time I knew every teacher in the whole school system. And I enjoyed meeting them and visiting with them.

MS: That was quite a challenge in itself.

JS: Well...

MS: There were a lot of teachers.

JS: And we had an excellent staff of principals in the buildings, too.

MS: As far as Moorhead is concerned now, as you were here, and the years went by, did you see many changes occurring as far as the curriculum load, and different things that had to be taught?

JS: Oh, yes. There were many changes. Special education was coming into its own. We established quite a good beginning for special education, which has expanded tremendously.

MS: Yes.

JS: We hired psych...full time psychologists, for instance, and other part time people.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And then our science program was improved. We offered the science for some of the less advanced students. And the foreign language program, especially when we had the new building, we had this language laboratory, and we offered a very fine comprehensive course system in several different foreign languages. And the elementary programs, we got into a little bit more team teaching and so on. But our principals, more or less, followed a sort of a semi-conservative program, not going off the deep end, if I might use that term.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Were you here when sex education first became required? Or they...there was a lot of talk back and forth about the sex education.

JS: I wasn't aware of any big controversy about that when I was here. Probably it had been discussed more afterwards.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But I know some of it was taught. Although not a real curriculum or course of study was established at that time.

MS: How about the public attitude toward teachers? Did you see that changing?

JS: No. I think the public appreciates good teachers, and they want a job well done, I'm sure. That's the feeling I had. Our PTA...PTAs here in Moorhead were very active during the time, and I presume still are.

MS: Yes. Most of them are.

JS: And they...they backed the teachers. And I felt that there was a good feeling between parents and teachers, and the public and teachers.

MS: Were there opportunities for professional growth for you at this time as far as workshops and college courses?

JS: Yes. I...while I was here, you mean?

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: I attended several seminars at various places. I attended two seminars at the University of Chicago, and I attended two seminars at Columbia University Teacher's College in New York, and I also attended one seminar at the University of Washington in Seattle. And then, of course, I attended many state and national meetings of different kinds. I would usually attend our national superintendent's meeting, which is a week's meeting. And then we had many state conferences and so on. Those were the main ways of keeping up with the changes.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. I believe you were here in Moorhead when collective bargaining went into effect. Did you see that...a change in the feeling between teachers and administrators at this time? Did you get a feeling of a little bit of an estrangement?

JS: I should probably ask you that question!

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: [Chuckles] Hmmm, the superintendent is kind of caught in the middle of it. And, ah...this is one of the areas that was not as pleasant as most of the other work, I'll say that, frankly.

MS: You talked a little bit about your salary during your career. And it wasn't good. We all realize that to start with. Did you have any fringe benefits at all to begin with?

JS: Not to begin with at all. We didn't have any insurance or anything.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. No insurance.

JS: I might say, along that line...I don't know whether I'm getting too lengthy on some of these things, but...

MS: That's fine.

JS: Hmmm. One of the years when I was teaching, probably about the third year of teaching, I contracted scarlet fever. There was an epidemic of scarlet fever. And I was out of school for a month. And those days they quarantined me, and I was out of school for a month. So another teacher came in to take over my job. She received the same salary as I did. She was a daughter of one of the board members. But she didn't have any background in the subjects that I taught. She was more or less of a custodian, and when I came back, I had to catch up and try to revamp my courses to cover the materials. And, ah, the fringe benefit thing that I'm coming to was I didn't receive any salary at all of my own. No sick leave of any kind, and no insurance of any kind at all. Then, of course, later on we received, as you know, insurance programs, and sick leave, and various things like that. That's come up in the last forty years or something like that.

MS: We really have come quite a ways, haven't we?

JS: Yes. Yes. They haven't reached the pinnacle yet, though. [Chuckles]

MS: No. No. [Chuckles] How about World War II? Were you affected in any way by that?

JS: We were affected mainly because of the shortage of teachers at that time.

MS: Were you? Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: We had a difficult time getting teachers. And I was in Henderson, Minnesota at that time, and I even had to coach basketball, because the basketball coach went into the service. Well, I was glad to do it, but I'm not a coach. So I did that. And our shortage of teachers was very acute. And we had to hire...sometimes hire teachers who probably wouldn't be considered otherwise. But there was a certain unity among the faculty and among the communities that it was no serious problem.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm...

JS: Our...our men were drafted into the service, many of them.

MS: Yeah. Mmmm-hmmm. Maybe more of a feeling of patriotism at that time, too, then. There was quite a lack of that for a while.

JS: Yes. I think that's true. Patriotism was very...a very prominent part of this society.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. How about the event of the Sputnik? Did that cause any changes?

JS: Well, I was at Moorhead at that time, and we really didn't make any changes due to Sputnik that I can...am aware of. Hmmm. Ah...I felt that our science teachers, especially, were doing a good job. The one thing that resulted of Sputnik was a tremendous amount of money available to schools from...on a federal level to buy equipment. So we had "X" number of dollars, and we could enrich our program by buying extra equipment, which aided the teachers, and we did that as much as we were allowed to do.

MS: So it was a good thing for all...most cases?

JS: Yes. It was.

MS: Yeah. How about censorship?

JS: I haven't been...hmmm...I haven't been in any situation where censorship has been any big thing. There have been a few cases where some person might have come into my office and said, "I don't like the textbook that he's using," or something of that sort, but nothing serious at all.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: Lately, we've seen censorship in some of the schools, the taking books out of the library and so on. One of the large school systems out east had a very, very serious problem, which resulted in a great deal of difficulty.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. There were a lot of protest groups in the 1960s and early 1970s. Did we have any of that in Moorhead?

JS: No, not any groups as such. The only groups probably you might say who protested, they protested the fact that we didn't ask for a senior high school...a new senior high school, you might say, something of that sort.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But I wasn't aware of any real protest groups that were organized.

MS: We're a pretty conservative group in Moorhead, I think.

JS: Well, I...I presume so. Although they've gone ahead and rapidly...ah...I am speaking about something entirely different. It's just unbelievable, the way they have built homes, and apartment buildings, and other types of buildings in the two cities here. And now we thought we'd reached the saturation point fifteen years ago.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But it...whereas...so...but it's changing all the time.

MS: They still keep building, don't they?

JS: Right.

MS: How about ethnic education? Were any classes added to the curriculum to teach about the different ethnic groups?

JS: I don't...I am not aware of any specific classes. I suppose they did some of that in their own classes, the social studies classes and so on. Maybe you have done some of it yourself?

MS: Yes. Yes.

JS: I think that...ah...there is opportunity for teachers to do some of that on their own, too.

MS: Okay. How about discipline in the schools? Have you seen any changes from the time you first began?

JS: Well, when I first began, we ran...ah, the teachers and we ran a very tight ship, as far as discipline is concerned, and the things we did then probably wouldn't be tolerated now. Pupils are allowed a little bit more freedom, which is good. They're allowed to participate in some of the activities. I might say, I just finished reading...let's see...yesterday, I guess it was, the latest bulletin, the latest booklet by the National Education Association. I'm a life member of that, of the NEA.

MS: Great.

JS: And they mentioned the things that we have now, and how we should look toward the future. And they mentioned that students should participate more in what's going to be done. And you have seen that come up the last years, too.

MS: Oh, yes.

JS: But the teaching years ago was more or less dominated by the teacher, and not allowing too much...too much planning by the pupils.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Makes for a better environment in the schoolroom, I think.

JS: Oh, yes. Yes.

MS: Right. How about lawsuits and things like that? Were there any of those when you were here in Moorhead?

JS: I was never involved in a lawsuit in Moorhead at all. Hmmm. We were involved in one case at Badger, Minnesota. We didn't have unemployment compensation insurance, and we had to pay a claim there. It wasn't a lawsuit, but we were issued a statement from the industrial commission, and we had to pay...hmmm...something on that. A plumber was in the building who was hurt. But I haven't been involved in any lawsuits at all. I am not aware of any as far as Moorhead is concerned.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: Maybe recently there have been some of them.

MS: Been very few, I think.

JS: But every now and then you read about some case of a student hurt on the playground or something like that.

MS: Yes. Mmmm-hmmm. I think it has been a factor as far as discipline and the type of discipline that you're allowed to use.

JS: Yes.

MS: So we're very careful with that. And that's a good thing, too.

JS: Mmmm-hmmm.

MS: In most cases. How about dress codes? First, as far as the students are concerned, were there dress codes when you began teaching?

JS: Well, when I began teaching, I always wore a suit, and a tie, and a coat...ah, well, it's a coat, suitcoat, I should say. And everybody was really dressed up, and...teachers didn't wear slacks in those days.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And in fact, I might say, hmmm, well, my daughter was at the Riverside School, came in slacks one day, and the principal sent her home and said, "Girls don't wear slacks."

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Right.

JS: Yeah. I don't know just how...well, my daughter was in second grade, so I know how many years ago it was, but...

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: Hmmm, of course, we were glad to abide by the decision that she made.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: But dress code has changed somewhat. Hmmm. And it's more acceptable, apparently. I know going into a classroom nowadays that you probably don't see so many men with suits. They are more or less in just a shirt, and more comfortable, more relaxed.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: And the ladies, many of them wear slacks, and probably feel more comfortable that way. I wouldn't take issue with it. I have seen a few instances where pupils probably weren't always dressed in good taste, but I think that's improved considerably, too, now.

MS: Yes. I think it has, too.

JS: Especially in colleges and universities, too, I think.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Right. But I feel that the teachers are still well dressed, even though we're allowed to wear a different type of clothing.

JS: I don't mean to infer slacks are not dressy.

MS: No...no.

JS: Ah, a good pair of slacks for a lady is...can be very good.

MS: I...in fact, I remember my very first pantsuit that I wore to school.

JS: Yes.

MS: That was quite a change. How about religion in the schools, as far as prayer is concerned, and religious music, and this kind of change?

JS: It's never been a problem where I have been located. We had religious music, our chorus...choirs sang religious music, and we had Christmas programs. And the Christmas programs in Moorhead in those days when I was here were tremendous. They...and they were all religious in character.

MS: Yes.

JS: And probably still are...probably not so much.

MS: Not so much.

JS: Not so much.

MS: No.

JS: And as far as prayer in school is concerned, hmmm, it never was a problem wherever I have been.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. The school programs have changed recently.

JS: Yes.

MS: But it's just been in the last few years that this has come about. Now that you are retired, would you choose education again as your life's work? You almost went into medicine. Have you been sorry at times that you didn't?

JS: No, I'm not sorry at all. I suppose if I would have been a successful doctor, I would have done...have been able to do things that I haven't been able to do. But I have been well satisfied, and as I see the pressure that the doctors are put in and so on. I can see where it's...ah...that profession has its problems, too.

MS: Would you advise young people today to go into education?

JS: Yes, I certainly would. And I see a future in education. The salaries have improved considerably, although they are lagging behind. But we're attracting many fine people into the teaching profession, and I would recommend that they do go into teaching. The enrollments are going to increase, and the demand for education...more educational programs would be increasing, too, so there will be slots in the educational program for more teachers, I'm sure.

MS: Do you feel that the need for teachers will be greater in a few years?

JS: As I look at it, and as many other authorities—not saying that I am an authority, by the way—but they seem to feel that way, too.

MS: I guess it was...hmmm...an unnecessary question to ask you about advising people to go into education, since all of your family seems to be in education.

JS: Yes.

MS: That's good to hear. Not everyone answers that question that way. Hmmm.

JS: Well, I had friends of mine, some of them were a little bit downhearted and said, "I'd never advise my child to go into it." I have heard people say that.

MS: Yes.

JS: But I can't agree with that statement at all.

MS: Looking back again over your years as a teacher, what did you find most fulfilling in the teaching part?

JS: Well, that's a difficult question to answer. I felt that their attitude toward me was that I was helping them, and they appreciated what I was doing. That is probably the most fulfilling part. I met one of our former students from Badger last year when I was up in Badger. And she just made a point to come over to me and said...said like this, "Mr. Swenson, I want to thank you for all you did to help me in music. I've been singing in the Messiah Chorus now," for I think she said twenty-five years, "And I...that's the reason that I did that, is what you helped me with."

MS: Isn't that...?

JS: So...something like that, that...that can't be measured in any other way.

MS: And you still are involved in music. If I remember right, you play piano?

JS: Yes. Yes, I do. I have an electronic organ and a piano at home there, and I play them. I occasionally have been serving as a substitute organist in church, too.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. How about as a superintendent? Can you think of anything that stands out in your mind as most fulfilling? I know it must have been very fulfilling to build all these buildings that you have been a part of.

JS: Well, education isn't only buildings. I think the fact that the students were learning and getting the things that they needed were...those...those are factors that are very important, too. And the fact that we could provide adequate and good facilities, and equipment, and teachers for them, that is the most important part.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. Moorhead has always been noted for that and still is, I think.

JS: Yes.

MS: How do you feel about...hmmm...being retired? Are you enjoying your retirement?

JS: We are enjoying retirement very much. Hmmm. We keep busy. In fact, like one person said, "I'm so busy; I almost feel I have to hire somebody to help me!"

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: But the thing about it is, we can look back and...relax. And like one person said, "The salary isn't so good, but the hours are terrific."

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: And we spend about half the year down in Texas, and we play a great deal of golf, and participate in activities down there. And we play golf up here, and we do a great deal of traveling. Hmmm, since retiring, we have taken major trips all over the world. We've been to Europe nine times, and we've been to Israel, and we have been to the Orient, all the way from Japan down to Singapore. And we've been to Australia, New Zealand. We've taken six trips down into Mexico, and so on, so those things keep us busy.

And we do attend programs, especially down in Texas, in the schools there. We attend their concerts, and their programs, their plays, and we enjoy that. They have some very outstanding choirs down there. And we're next to a...only eight miles from a university about the same size as this, a university of about eleven thousand students, called the Pan American University. And we get up there for several of their programs, and we've attended some educational conferences there, too. So whereas I'm not actively engaged in education as such, I am still looking through the keyhole a little bit.

MS: I would say you're quite actively engaged in education.

JS: [Chuckles]

MS: Once a teacher always a teacher, I guess!

JS: I think that's right. Mmmm-hmmm.

MS: And you are a life member of the NEA, is that...?

JS: Life member of the NEA, and I'm a life member of the American Association of School Administrators, and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, and the Phi Delta

Kappa, an education fraternity. I've been a member of that since 1938. And some others, too, I guess.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm. You receive periodicals then quite often on education?

JS: Yes. Yes. Right.

MS: I think that's marvelous. Do you feel that your retirement pay is adequate then? You feel enough security with what you have?

JS: Well, I was never in the high paying era of school administration. When I left Moorhead, my salary was not great at all. Any teacher with a few years of experience is getting a great deal higher salary than I received as superintendent of schools here. So compared with that...And with what I'm getting with my teacher retirement, and Social Security, and we don't have any big outstanding bills of any kind. Our children, well, have all been educated, and we have a home paid for and everything. So we don't have any financial pressures at all. And that is the real fine thing about retirement. And you people who are going to retire in the next few years, you're going to be in the same situation, only you're going to get much higher retirement allowances than I am getting.

MS: Mmmm-hmmm.

JS: So I think that many people are looking forward to that. And some of them are taking this incentive pay, retiring earlier.

MS: Yes.

JS: And getting a good retirement. So I would answer your question that I'm getting along very well. Our standard of living is attuned to the income that we have.

MS: And that's an important part of retirement.

JS: Yes, is it.

MS: Yeah. That's great. Can you describe your most memorable encounter with a student? Maybe that's a hard question. Either as a teacher or as an administrator?

JS: With the...with the students?

MS: I know you have said that some come back and talk to you...

JS: It's...it's difficult to pick out any one thing to point to...that...in a general way, the most memorable things are the ones that I've already mentioned, you might say.

MS: Yes. Mmmm-hmmm. It is a thrill when they come back to talk to you, isn't it?

JS: Yes, it is.

MS: It's...it's a nice feeling that they remember you.

JS: And I have had many teachers come up the same way, and that's very, very thrilling, too. We meet teachers we haven't seen for years, and they always are very cordial to me, and thank me for what I did. Not that I expect thanks! I thank them for what they did, too, for that matter.

MS: [Chuckles] Well, I would like to thank you again for coming and doing this interview with us. And I can tell you're enjoying your retirement. I hope you have many, many more years of good retirement.

JS: Thank you very much. It's been a real pleasure visiting with you this afternoon.

[End of interview]