 Dee School Oral History Project

**Date: May 13, 2018**

**Interviewee: Travis Pate**

**Interviewer: Richa Wilson**

**Transcriber: Michael Ballif**

RW: Today is Sunday May 13th, 2018. This is Richa Wilson and I am speaking with Travis Pate at the Eccles Community Art Center. And today we’re going to be talking about Dee School, which no longer exists. Travis, you went to Dee School, and I know you also have done a lot of research on the building itself. So, could you start by telling us about the building, when it was constructed, and anything else you might know?

TP: Yeah, the building was built with an open floor plan. And that, I believe, was the – at the time, it was called team-teaching that they were coordinating. They had built two schools in the area: Jefferson Elementary and Dee Elementary. And Dee, it was an open floor plan, so there weren’t classroom walls. It’s roughly a decagon. It was built as a spaceship and it was basically – we didn’t have kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade. We had Mercury Pod, Venus Pod, Mars Pod, Jupiter Pod. It was pretty unique in the sense that it was built by John Piers. [He] was the architect and he was a graduate of USC. I believe Neil Armstrong also went to USC, managed his landing on the moon the year before, so I think, much like the Egyptian craze in the ‘20s, there was a space race craze for buildings and themes with aeronautic aspects. It sat up on concrete pilasters so it literally floated and looked just like a spaceship. It had a ramp up one side and a squiggly staircase down the other as a fire exit, but as you looked at it from a distance, you’d think, wow, that’s a UFO.

RW: Which actually leads to a question. Maybe you could describe how it really was just in the middle of the block. Was there much landscaping?

TP: It was mid-block and there was minimal landscaping on the east side of the building. It was into a slight hillside, which lended itself to winter sledding. They had toboggans you could check out during your lunchbreak, so it was really nice during the winter. It was a cantilevered building in the sense it had the legs that stuck out, but the center of the building, the core where you’d enter, was all red brick, so it didn’t take away from the illusion of the whitish-grey concrete. So you just saw it look like something was floating. And the great thing was, it had a year-round playground, because it was cantilevered. It didn’t matter what the weather was. You could always be outside. There were four squares drawn out. There were yards and rulers and, just a lot of things already painted on the pavement, so they lended themselves to play.

RW: That’s great, I didn’t know that. Can you tell me a little bit more what these pods were, how were they formed, was it by age?

TP: It was grades. K through 6 is how the school was designed, so there were actually two pods for each grade level and they were around the perimeter of the building. The center of the building on the second floor was the media center. And so towards the center on opposite sides were restrooms. You’d just walk past the restrooms and access, and there were also some utility classrooms. If you just needed a quiet time for an interview or test, there were a few utility classrooms on the inside. That’s the second floor, which was the academic space. The main floor recessed into a, basically to an arena type look, as you came in the main floor. It was risers that were in a, just a little bit larger than a semi-circle, because it was about three quarters of a circle. That was the multipurpose room, the cafeteria, the music room. We had singing, assemblies. It was the auditorium. I think the new term is cafetorium, which I don’t care for, because it was just our center of business I guess. On that same level was the art room, as well as the music room.

The music room was always fascinating to me, so any time the door was left ajar, adjacent to the cafeteria, we’d sneak in and find the harpsichord,[[1]](#footnote-1) the – I think it’s called an auto-harp. We could dink with those and the xylophones, so a lot of music, acoustical music and string instruments, that were in the accordion-sliding closet off the music rooms.

RW: So, with the actual learning space, can you describe maybe a typical space? I understand there are no walls, and so, how were those spaces configured for individual pods?

TP: Okay, yeah, so it’s roughly a pie-shape and if you cut the center of the pie out, there’s still some small partitions that come out from the windows. And those were separate from the pods. They were just adjacent. They were almost the buffer zone between classes. And each room, you were just in the top corner of a pie-wedge, on either side. They typically had two kindergarten classes, two first-grade classes, two second, so forth. There were two classes for each grade. Also, the middle classrooms provided –we had some individuals that had special needs, and so that provided separate, almost classroom space for them, even though they were still part of the pod system.

RW: Okay.

TP: The classrooms themselves, we had to be very respectful of all the other classes, because you couldn’t be too loud. You’d obviously echo into the other classes.

RW: Did you ever find it distracting to hear other classes?

TP: I don’t believe it was distracting. The carpeting and other aspects of the design, it – you would stand in one spot, similar to like the tabernacle in Salt Lake. You could stand in the front and it would echo outward, but it never really echoed back into that corner from the pods because of the carpeting on the walls, or the wall treatments, as well as the ceiling pattern. There were big circles in the ceiling that just kind of allowed the sound to go up, but then not bounce back down. The ceiling tiles and the ceiling treatments.

The teachers, if they stood in the right place, could project their voice through that entire classroom, or that pod, and not necessarily distract from anyone else. And we were always particularly cautioned to be quiet during the breaks. For any type of recess or lunch or any of those things, you had to be quiet as you would pass any of the classes.

RW: And when did you attend?

TP: I attended from 1975 to 1981. So K through fifth grade. We were going to go K through 6, but they started the middle school system just as we were going from fifth to sixth grade. So my twin and I, were going from fifth to sixth, my sister was going from sixth to seventh, so three of us went to middle school at the same time. That was fairly unique. But there were also a lot of privileges allotted to the sixth graders that we as fifth graders weren’t going to get, such as like playground patrol, and help the crossing guard help kids across the street, so safety patrol with a reflective banner, not even really a vest.

RW: So you were cheated a little there.

TP: Correct. They recognized that so they actually rotated that year, for the fifth-graders to help share with those responsibilities.

RW: Oh, good.

TP: So they were pretty mindful of that. I think the open classroom also lended itself, because you’re so mindful of so many other people that you, you kind of tended to yourself. And I crack up because later in life, we had blocked classrooms, and then the first thing they tell you with city planning or any other field of planning, is think outside the box. And yet, with academic education, they put you in a box. So we were never in the box.

RW: And let’s see, you said you started in 1975, so that would have been just five years after it was built?

TP: Correct.

RW: It was built in 1970, okay. How do you . . . do you have a sense of how the design of that building may have influenced the teaching? I know that’s probably a question more for some of the teachers we’re going to interview, but, as a student, did you, perhaps, see things there that when you transferred to middle school or boxed classrooms, were very notable?

TP: Yeah. I, I think the thing I thought with regards to the teaching, it was still a team effort, and that was – everyone that came to that school was like, “wow, we’re part of something great, we’re part of something new.” Rather than just the open floor plan, I think the fact that it had the space and aeronautical themes – they talk quite regularly now about STEM education: science, engineering and mathematics – we started with that. That was our understanding. We did not have to have – before it had a name or a title – is how we started. And, part of the team teaching, occasionally we wouldn’t even need to leave our pod. The teacher would come over and teach us the sciences and the maths. So sometimes if they had a guest teacher or a guest lecturer, they would make the rounds, and we weren’t required to.

RW: So it was a little more fluid for the teachers.

TP: Correct, and I think for me the most unique thing was that I grew up half a block away from the Weber County Library, and that was the first county-wide library system in the state of Utah. They actually had to change state law in order to get a county-wide system, because all the municipalities could tax. So, only city government could tax, not county government. And so they had taken the Carnegie library collection from the downtown area and brought it out to this branch. The library was already very much a portion of, a center of my life, prior to going to school. So the fact that the library was the center of the school really made a difference because it was accessed from all sides. We jokingly said that if we were the planets, that was the sun, and you had to be specially privileged to go into that area. But then, once you got there, the sky really was the limit. And the librarian followed us, really, through the different schools, from Dee to Central, to Ogden. And she later retired from Ogden High. Mrs. Taylor.

RW: What was her first name?

TP: I’m trying to remember, I’ll have to look that up, because it was always just “Mrs. Taylor.”

RW: Yeah, okay. I think as children we never, we didn’t always know the names of our teachers. So, speaking of people, are there any people at Dee School, whether they were fellow students or teachers or administrators, who are particularly memorable to you?

TP: Yeah, starting actually just with the administration, Milt Kendrick was our principal, and Santiago Sandoval, I think he went by Jim Sandoval, was the vice-principal. They made us just feel like this was our building, this was our place, and they were happy to share it with us. And I think the administration’s unity really was the driving range behind the teacher unity. And so, I would start with the administration – actually I would start with the greeting, and that was, I can’t remember Mrs. Hawkes’ first name, but she also was at Dee Elementary and then retired from Ogden High School. And so, when Mrs. Hawkes was there, we would get our school lunch tickets from her. She was the secretary and she would always make sure we were welcome in that building, because she was the first face of the school. And as we later got someone else that assisted her, it was a fairly unique thing, because in ‘79, we’d come up, we started paying for our school lunch with Susan B. Anthony dollars, and so that was fairly unique, because people are like, “What is this?” and we’d say, “They’re dollars.” They’d never accept them as dollars, and they’d try to do four, and we’d say, “no, that’s the dollar,” and so that was always pretty unique. So they recognized us immediately because our mother avidly used those.

RW: Try to get them into circulation.

TP: Yes, singlehandedly. Because she had worked at a grocery store, and she said, “I could have told them that Susan B. Anthony dollars wouldn’t work, because even when Eisenhower dollars were genuine silver I couldn’t get people to take them as change.” So if they want to get those coins circulated, then they got to get rid of the paper money, or the paper dollar, and that way we would use the coin. I think it was nicknamed the Carter Quarter, because it was done during the Carter administration, had just the same perforations around the edge and everything else. So that was a unique thing, but the greetings from the school.

Kindergarten through first grades, my twin and I had separate teachers. I think that was kind of standard practice, they didn’t want anyone conspiring against the teachers, nor the teachers necessarily conspiring against the students. And so we rarely had a class together. He was in the opposite pod as me. Mrs. Savage, which is Phillis Savage, Carol Reese, and then Mrs. Howell, were the three first-grade teachers, so it was actually, I think, three classes in that one because it was big enough that they were three classes. And so we each had different instructors.

RW: Okay. Did you feel like any teacher in particular maybe influenced you in your life, in how you view academics or any particular subject?

TP: I think a continuation would be both Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Reese. Mrs. Howell, we lost track of her, and then I think she later just passed away while we were still closer to elementary age. But, Mrs. Alan, she was the fourth-grade teacher, she later died in an automobile accident, but she was very disciplined in how things happened, and she was not afraid to discipline other grades. So, I think the discipline of growing up already working for an elementary school educator, which was Edna Hardy at the Eccles Community Arts Center. She was a retired school teacher that had retired to live at the Eccles Arts Center, so I had already seen a lot of discipline, and so Mrs. Alan kind of reflected that. But I think Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Glenn, which is Alice Glenn, sing-ins, and a Brotherhood Assembly.

There was always a lot of music brought into the school life. And I grew up with a lot of music. My mother had a record player that you could stack about four vinyl records on, and they would just play through the cycle, and a wide variety from Boots Randolph to Kenny Rogers to Roy Clark. And so we had a lot of that, but the remarkable thing to me was the Brotherhood Assembly, sponsored by Alice Glenn. Because we’d come home from elementary school, and my Dad said, “How was school today?” And I said, “We got a lot of boat people.” And my Dad said, “Excuse me?” And I said, “We got a lot of boat people today.” And he said, “Where are they from?” And I said, “Laos and Cambodia.” And my father stopped me and corrected me, and said, “They’re Laotian and Cambodian. They’re not boat people.” And I remember, not so much in jest, but just in ignorance, to say, “Well, they came on a boat.” And he said, “But that’s not how they’re referred.” And my father grew up, joined the Navy at 17 and was in World War Two and Korea, and so he had learned prejudice, in a fairly, probably the most segregated portion of the military. And, so he had seen some things in himself, so he thought, “My children are not going to learn this pattern.” And so we had already – in fact, the Dee School Song says “Dee School’s my kind of place, every culture creed and race, it’s a fun and learning place, even has a smiley face.” And then it’s the chorus, “Dee School’s just right for me, I’m as lucky as can be to study here with you,” then it goes through a couple of choruses of “studying here with you” with some claps. The fact that we actually had every culture creed and race was fairly dynamic, and really unique, because I didn’t realize the influx of the Asian population was because of the fall of Saigon, and individuals that just needed, wanted freedom. We were already past the civil rights movement, and so, or children to grow up without seeing that visual strife day-to-day, and hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute, whether related in the press or other forms of media, that it was a nice thing to look back and say, “Oh, this is what we’re striving and working towards.” And because we were already familiar with Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, Jr., and so that portion was already covered. But then, you know, here comes another group of individuals, was quite unique, and occasionally we would have some individuals that, they’re parents by trade were migrant workers, but they came to school, and so they taught us Spanish lessons to make those students feel more at home, and more welcome in our community. And even though they were probably with us in the spring or in the fall. Some ended up being here permanently, and it was great to have that skill set in the Spanish. We’d have assemblies with that theme, so we learned the Mexican hat dance and those kinds of things. It was a very multicultural place, but multicultural education in that sense too.

RW: So tell me a little bit more about this Brotherhood Assembly. What was that?

TP: The Brotherhood Assembly, I think, was again related closely to the civil Rights movement. I still remember, singing, “We shall overcome. We shall overcome, Someday.” Just because of the recognition of the brotherhood of man. I think that one of the songs, I don’t know, it had to get away with it now almost, because there’s almost an extreme polarization of let’s remove any reference to any type of deity, any type of anything, but we’d sing, “He’s got the whole world in his hands. He’s got you and me brother, in his hands, he’s got the whole world in his hands.” I think that aspect of blending that education with US History, and the founding fathers, the belief in a supreme being or a deity, and, and just the rights for everyone. We had individuals that were different denominations, and if there was a birthday or something else celebrated, something else shared, we knew there were some individuals we respected, “Hey, they don’t observe birthdays, they don’t observe Christmas.” It was really case-sensitive, but it wasn’t anyone singled out They just didn’t pull one kid out of the classroom and said everyone else can have a cupcake. They were really discrete in the sense that all was just uniformly understood that each person has a different faith, a different background, a different heritage.

RW: So then that Brotherhood Assembly was kind of a regular recurring event that brought all students together?

TP: Correct.

RW: And might feature a speaker or a topic?

TP: Correct. Speaker and topic. Typically it was led by Alice Glenn and then Phillis Savage accompanying. I had the chance prior to Dee School being demolished – they had the final Brotherhood Assembly – so I attended that. But a week prior, we had a goodbye, farewell, happy birthday to Dee Elementary. So I think seven of the last eight principals were there? Milt Kendrick has since passed away, but his wife and their son were there. Any past administrator or teacher that started with the building was welcome and was there. I remember that one of the teachers, Pat Bardet, which I never had, she had left the school by that time, had said it was fairly unique, right when they opened the building, that not only was the floor plan open, the staircase was open. And so Milt said, “Okay, and yes, we will be wearing pants, so the women instructors got to wear pants,” which isn’t too far a cry off from my mother who worked for the Forest Service still having a note from the federal government that said she can wear pants to work. So it was like almost that same time, that same era.

RW: That’s great. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about, regarding Dee School?

TP: Yeah, the playgrounds. They had a full grass turf area, and then also we had some of the experimental playgrounds. So we had not only the hard steel cage standard equipment of a merry-go-round and monkey bars and uneven bars, and different sites like pull-up bars, but there was actually a tire monstrosity when everyone was trying to say, “What do we do with all these extra tires?” That was obviously again in the mid to late ‘70s, I guess late ‘70s, almost early ‘80s. So there were jungle gyms made out of tires. There was a Godzilla tractor tire tapering down to smaller tires that you could crawl through. I think it was funny, because there was just this huge playground that showed up almost overnight, made almost exclusively of hewn lumber, and, like raw pine stocks. And tires. It was interesting because it took them a little while to figure out that some of the tires were more durable than others. So, if we came in with our hands black and our faces smudged, those were the tires that had to be replaced.

RW: There you go. That is repurposing, for sure.

TP: Yeah. I think, as far as, you’d asked about education wise, I went Dee and then Central, then Ogden. This structure was there, just the neighborhood school. I felt like a part of the neighborhood, the school was a part of us. Then I think, emotionally, I think Dee School set me up for some very well cared for aspects. Besides the music – which several things had a lot of themes – “ Raindrops keep falling on my head, that doesn’t mean my eyes will soon by turning red.” So that kind of music that had the messages with it. We were there for the Iran crisis. The Iran hostages – 54 people for 444 days that were held hostage. My sister who was closer to high school age had several Iranian friends. With the overthrow of that government, the Shah of Iran, a lot of the Weber State students that my sister associated with all had to go back. And, then with the overrunning of the embassy, we were just heartsick, and they talked to us about national crisis and federal crisis. I think probably more so than that, as when they were freed, it was Tony, Orlando, and Dawn, “Tie a yellow ribbon,” which is relative to an individual being in prison, but then coming home, saying “do you still want me?” And I think that was the part, yes, “what did I see, a hundred yellow ribbons.” I think we had changed it, “a thousand yellow ribbons around the old oak tree,” because we were that well set on them coming home, and them being safe. And what this land of liberty meant. Because that, I guess that is the other part of the sing-ins. There was a lot of patriotism, a lot of patriotic songs. So a lot of foundation of founding fathers, and patriotism, and service to God and country.

Along those same lines, we got to see the space shuttle Columbia, which was the first reusable air craft, go up. Our whole school was just focused on that, even though we had probably the, not so much the junky televisions but all these – compared to nowadays – these little televisions. [There] were about four or five of them in the multipurpose rooms and then the individual classrooms where everyone was huddled around watching that space shuttle be launched. These beautiful magnificent rocket boosters, they said, are from Utah, then a painted white tank, which we didn’t realize that was an expensive paint job. So all the rest were just kind of a rust yellow from then forward, but, just to see the magnificence of that space shuttle, of the space shuttle go up and be reusable. We were all with pins and needles, and excited for the next step into space.

RW: So it sounds like the administrators and the teachers weren’t definitely trying to shield anybody from national events, even when they were unpleasant, such as the Iran hostages. And so, would they typically bring you all into the multipurpose rooms to watch those things?

TP: For that kind of event, with Iran, that one was more than we’d seen them in the individual classrooms and just the news reports. With the release then, that was an assembly and a sing-in and all themed towards, you know, the freedoms and liberties. That’s the part that I remember the most, is the learning about the crisis individually in our small groups and our classes, but then once there’s the pinnacle and some resolve, that we were able to come together and honor and observe and celebrate the freedoms. That was the assembly, but I remember specifically the, “Tie a yellow ribbons” song.

RW: That’s funny how some, just certain things stick in our head, then when we hear those songs again it really takes us back to certain places. Okay, anything else that you would like to get on record about Dee School?

TP: I think the funniest thing again with the fifth grade to sixth grade transition, probably one of my favorites was still Miss Parilla, and I’ll have to get you her first name, because she always guarded me against the sixth-grade girls. They would chase my twin and my other friend, Terry Shane, down, and tell us, “Hey, we’re going to get you!” and the teacher said, “Oh, they’re only chasing you because they like you,” and then the girls would go “Ewwww!” and then turn away, not so much disgust or anything. She was really just kind of a gem and a star. She was close to our size and stature also. I no sooner left and got to Central than all of a sudden, here’s another Miss Parilla, and she was her sister, and a little bit taller, longer hair, and then quite a bit more stern. And so we longed for the day of having the more gentle Miss Parilla, until we later did get to know the new one, her sister. She also, once she found that we were from Dee School, there was almost a little more favoritism, particularly if her sister was our instructor.

I think also the transition of Larry Zaugg and Mrs. Archibald, who were our, who were going to be our sixth-grade teachers, there was still a great respect for them. Larry Quist was somebody that was pretty remarkable there also. He was, I want to say, fourth grade, and his brother Ivan was the assistant superintendent with the schools. Larry kept track of me well into adulthood. He knew there were four of us there at the same time, because my brother was born in ‘68, my sister in 1969, my twin and I in ‘70, with my older sister being a 1963 baby. “Okay, you’re a Pate kid,” and so they grouped us a little bit, but they always made sure there was some respect that we just knew our own identity. As I said, he followed me well into adulthood, and I had the chance to serve an LDS Mission to Germany and Austria, and he showed up at my mission farewell to just show support that, hey, these kids are doing good in their lives. Along those same lines, Milt Kendrick was quite regularly at Weber State events, and basketball games, and to see him aside from school, twenty-years later type thing, that they still know you, they identify you, and say hello. And the same thing with Mr. Sandoval and Ms. Medina, Ms. Ortega. I could probably just keep going and just name names for almost ad nauseum, because there were just so many people that just seemed so invested in us, not just the Pate kids, but I think every child, and them knowing their names, years after they’ve left the facility, is, is remarkable to me.

RW: Do you know how many students were enrolled?

TP: I’m not familiar with how many students were enrolled.

RW: I think one of the other people we interview might be able to tell us that. Well, okay. To wrap it up for the record, I’m going to ask you, if you know some of the spellings of these names. So, Quist? Q U I S T?

TP: Correct.

RW: Zaugg? Z O G G?

TP: Z A U G G.

RW: Z A U G G. And Parilla?

TP: P A R I L L A.

RW: Okay. And I think you mentioned a Mrs. Howell?

TP: H O W E L L.

RW: And Carol Reese? How do you spell her last name?

TP: R E E S E.

RW: And Mrs. Hawkes?

TP: H A W K E S.

RW: And Kendrick?

TP: I believe it’s K E N D R I C K.

RW: Okay. Great. That will help with the transcriptions. Well thank you Travis. I really appreciate the time, and clearly Dee School was an important place and a place filled with people that really stuck with you. So I appreciate you sharing those memories with us today.

TP: You’re welcome.

1. Travis later confirmed later it was an autoharp. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)