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Interview with Ed Honabarger

Melissa Straus

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Melissa Straus

Interview with Ed Honabarger

Danville High School

Co-Workers present: None

Melissa: Okay, so this is Melissa Straus and I'm interviewing Ed Honabarger—is that how you say it?

Ed: Honabarger.

Melissa: Honabarger—

Ed: Yeah.

Melissa: And it's February 22, 2012, around 9:50 am and we're at the Danville High School and the purpose of this interview is to discuss public places in Knox County. Um, so where in Knox County do you live? I'm assuming you live here...

Ed: I live in Apple Valley.

Melissa: Oh really?

Ed: Yeah.

Melissa: Okay. And how long have you lived there for?

Ed: Um, we just recently moved there. We rent.

Melissa: Oh okay.

Ed: We—I taught here for eight years, I moved back home to Coshocton county for five years, uh, and came back the past two years so we have a, uh, permanent residence, residence in Coshocton county for about forty-five miles from here—

Melissa: Okay. Um—

Ed: --and, so we rent over here.

Melissa: Okay, um—

Ed: Confusing (laughs).

Melissa: So were you working here when you lived in Coshocton?

Ed: Pardon?

Melissa: Were you still—you were working in Danville when you lived—

Ed: No.

Melissa: So what made you come to Knox County?

Ed: Uh, originally back in 1997, I substituted for three years and they had a job opening—a teaching opening in my field, which was physical education and healthy, so, that's what originally made me want to come here. Uh, I taught here eight years, I left my dad who has Parkinson's disease but I wanted to be closer to home and help out and I went back over uh, to Coshocton county, taught in schools and taught across Coshocton county for five years but I missed Danville, so I came back when I had to opportunity.

Melissa: Um, what was is about Danville that you missed?

Ed: I think just the small town atmosphere. Uh, small town—people care, there's more, definitely more support for your school and for its activities. And just, you know, having to coach football all these years to, that uh, kids just—there's something special about these kids in this area and Danville kids and their work ethic.

Melissa: Um, how many people live in this town approximately? Do you know?

Ed: No, but I would say less than two thousand.

Melissa: Okay. And how many—like, how big is a class size here, like—

Ed: If you get sixty in a class, that's pretty big.

Melissa: Oh okay.

Ed: We've got a couple that had sixty and that's big. Usually—I mean, and it fluctuates, if you get a class of sixty in the past, it seems like the next class be like you'd have thirty kids. Uh, but we're pretty consistently in the fifties and sixties right now.

Melissa: Okay. Um, and so you've been working here for—did you say eight years, or...

Ed: Uh, well ten years all together but this is just two in a row since I came back.

Melissa: Okay, and um, how long—you're also the football coach, right?

Ed: Yes.

Melissa: So how long have you been doing that for?

Ed: Uh, six years, like, I was assistant for two years, head coach for six years, and then head coach again the past two years. So a total of eight years as head coach.

Melissa: Okay. Um, and so when did you become interested in football?

Ed: Little kid. I just loved it.

Melissa: Did you—

Ed: I just sort of learned it and picked it up, played it, and my high school coaches had a huge effect on me, and I think kids on our team—so I just wanted to be able to do the same and have a positive effect on kids.

Melissa: Where did you grow up?

Ed: Coshocton county. I went to high school in Ridgewood, which is in West Lafayette. 'Bout, thirty-five miles from here.

Melissa: Okay, um, so did you play throughout, like, high school and college?

Ed: Yeah. Junior high and high school, um, no, soon as I graduated I started helping my high school coach.

Melissa: Oh, okay.

Ed: Uh, I was a offensive defensive lineman and undersized, so (laughs) you know, going to college and playing—even at first I wanted to, but then I just figured if I help my high school coach and get into coaching and learn as much as I can, it's going to help me down the road quicker, in, you know, my job.

Melissa: Mhmm. Um, okay, so I've actually never gotten to make it to a Friday night football game—

Ed: Mhmm.

Melissa: In Knox County, which I hear is a really big community event. Um, so I was wondering if you could describe, like, a typical game for me.

Ed: Uh, a typical game. You have people tailgating—of course not to the extent of a college or pro game, but you have people, they'll bring their grills and cook out, uh, sometimes it's organized, you know, maybe say boosters might organize cookouts or maybe it's just two or three families always come and do it. Uh, and you know, it's you know, one thing about football, it's once a week. So lot of people, that's their family activity for that. Where other sports you have basketball, they might two or three games a week and that can get pretty pricey, and, you know, during a weeknight with school and everything, parents may not want to take their kids to those games but, you know, your

games are Friday or Saturday night, usually Friday night, and it's just—it's a family activity and it seems like everybody goes to. Uh, one thing about—at least in Knox County—Danville, East Knox, and Centerburg, those bleachers are really close to the field. So, it's like having people right on top of you. So it's a good atmosphere and it's loud. Uh, Fredericktown they have the track there, so that creates a little bit of barrier so it's not quite as loud, but those other three, you know, smaller, smaller fields, people are packed pretty tight.

Melissa: Okay, um, and could you, like, estimate how many people go to the game?

Ed: It just depends. I mean, you know, I think all the Knox County schools have good followings. You know, we support our kids pretty good and we'll travel to away games, even, you know, if it's an hour or two away we'll get a good following. I would say you, know, you're going to get a couple thousand people there. Which for a small communities are pretty good. And even if it's a really big game, like between, for example, us and East Knox, depending on, you know, what the records are coming in. You know, you can get—they've had upwards to six, seven thousand people.

Melissa: Okay. Oh, um, and would—do the people that attend the football games, um—are they always, like, a fan of one team or another? Or do people just sometimes go for entertainment?

Ed: People sometimes just go for entertainment. I mean, you'll a lot of people around the county, possibly, who maybe, don't have any affiliation with a school, but they may go to a specific, "Hey this is going to be a good game so I'm going to watch Danville play Centerburg," or, you know, they just travel and watch football. Because I know when we don't have games, uh, they're will be a lot of people from our community that'll go someplace, or if there's playoffs we'll go watch other schools, just 'cause they're—love football.

Melissa: Okay. And so, for—I've heard a little bit about the conference this year that is splitting up.

Ed: Mhmm.

Melissa: Um, who, who exactly, which teams are in the conference?

Ed: Uh, in the Mid Buckeye Conference there's the four county schools: Danville, Fredericktown, East Knox, and Centerburg. And then there are, there's Loudonville, from Ashland County, and then three Licking County schools, which is Johnstown, North Ridge, and Utica.

Melissa: Okay. And so, when those teams from out of the county come to play, do you get support from the other Knox County teams, like even if they're your opponents?

Ed: Uh, that might be fifty-fifty. You know (laughs), because of rivalries.

Melissa: Yeah.

Ed: Uh, you know, lot of Ohio State people never want to see Michigan win ever a game (laughs), you know, so, I—I'd say fifty-fifty, it's probably—it'd tend to lean on the, yeah you'd rather see more of your fellow Knox County school win than maybe one of the, the Licking County school or anything like that.

Melissa: Yeah. Um, so, I mean, other than to watch the game, why do you think people attend these games?

Ed: To watch the game, I think, to show support for the kids, uh, for the school. Social event, 'cause there are—there's a lot of people there you're going to see people you know, you know, I'm sure, you know, there are people that just go there to see people. Yeah, 'cause it's the thing to do on Friday night. Everybody's going to be there.

Melissa: Yeah. Um, so, do you—is it something that you have to plan, or can you just expect to see people that you know there every Friday?

Ed: Oh I think you probably can expect to see people. You know who the regulars are, and obviously the people with their kids, you know, they got kids participating, their going to be there. But you got some people been coming to the games for fifty or sixty years, that's just what they do. And uh, you always know you'll, you know, you'll see their faces at the game.

Melissa: Are there um, so are there, like, any big characters that are always at the games?

Ed: Yeah, I wouldn't know because of coaching.

Melissa: Mhmm.

Ed: You know, you don't, you don't really sort of pay attention to that. You're sort of focused on the game and, you know, every once in awhile you hear the band play, and half the time you don't even hear the band 'cause you're just, you know, you're trying to coach the kids and you're in the flow of the game so you don't... (laughs) I'm the wrong person to ask probably for that.

Melissa: Okay. Um, are the games advertised or broadcasted in any way, or does everyone just know?

Ed: Everybody just knows other than, you know, the newspaper does a good job of putting the schedules out and their football previous and, you know, the newspaper every week, you can look in there and see where the games are at. Um, usually we don't get on the radio too much, radios around here usually will do the Mount Vernon games, since they're situated in Mount Vernon. They will do our East Knox game, 'cause we play on a Saturday night in week ten to get more people from the county to come. And uh, so we'll

get on that game and if we make the play offs, which we did this past year, then we'll get the local radio stations to come to the games.

Melissa: Okay, um, do you think that these games divide Knox County as a community, or do they bring them together? Like, is it, like, putting people from different towns against each other, or, because everyone's at the games on Friday do you see it as people coming together?

Ed: Mhmm. Uh, probably a little bit of both, because people have friends from the other communities, you know, and they'll always talk to them before the game or after the game. Probably during the game it splits them, but before or after the game it's not a, it's not a big deal, I don't think. You know, it's mainly for bragging rights maybe at Thanksgiving or whatever when you talk to friends or relatives, you know, you can say, "Yeah we beat you guys," or, you know, "No we beat you," and you can brag about it for a year. But I would say, you know, during the game it splits but afterwards I would say no. And I think the older you get the more—maybe as a kid, you know, you hate losing to a certain school, you don't wanna lose 'em, but you get older and you realize, hey, they're not any different than what we are, you know, you might become friends with some of the players on the other team, so it sort of changes your outlook on things.

Melissa: Okay. Um, and so, since you, you—did you attend the games in Coshocton County also...

Ed: Yeah. Growing up, yeah.

Melissa: ...the games there. Okay. So, how would you say that Knox County is different from Coshocton in terms of...

Ed: You know, I don't think it's too much different. I mean, we're butted right against each other, and I think that's probably the same for the whole state of Ohio, because Ohio's pretty football crazy. I mean, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Florida, and California are you're, you're main football states to produce football players in the college. And uh, I would say, you know, the whole state of Ohio is pretty much football crazy when it comes to football.

Melissa: Okay. Um, so, are there any traditions for either the player, the school, or the town to prepare for the games?

Ed: Uh... hmm. I mean, every kid probably has their own little thing, whether they have to wear their socks a certain way or, you know, undershirt underneath their shoulder pads every week, uh... as far as little traditions... every school probably has something here or there that they might do before the game. You know, a lot of people slap signs, you know, touch signs, uh, maybe they say a certain—a little team cheer or whatever. So, I mean, that does go on. I'm drawing a blank right now, you know, through the years we've done a lot of different things, you know, different coaches, and it sort of hangs on, you know, maybe some of them started twenty-five years ago, like we would always sing

after every game, players sing the team fight song. And they circle up and do what we call Devil Jacks, and they spell Devils and, uh, do that. That's sort of a tradition for us, we do that after every game.

Melissa: Okay. Um, yeah, I was—I heard that, like, I think it's East Knox that does like a snake run...

Ed: Mhmm.

Melissa: And they also have bonfires, and—

Ed: We have a bonfire before the East Knox game. And then the kids, which they shouldn't, (laughs) but they like, Danville and East Knox kids will paint the road that connects us right out here, more where the school, where the line meets they'll spray paint the roads, like, "East Knox beat Danville," things like that, which we encourage them not to do, but, you know, they need to have some parental supervision. You know, there's only so much we can do as, as school officials, you know (laughs), we're not at home with them.

Melissa: Yeah. Um, so do you think that the atmosphere in Danville itself changes during football season?

Ed: Uh, maybe a little bit, it does. Danville is uh, what's one thing I think is real great about Danville is a lot of our kids are forth or fifth generation football players. You know, granddad, great-granddad played, all their uncles played, you know, brothers, cousins, so you know, it's a real family-like type atmosphere. And they're sort of, they grow up, "I gotta play football," "I gotta play football," you know, for a majority of them do—and not all of them do, you know, if it's not for them, it's not for them, but, you know, a lot of, they have a lot of—it's a family, it's a family thing for our kids. And in, so I think that, you know, football season seems to have a little bit more importance to it than winter or spring sports for whatever reason. You know, I think it's probably, we're entering—this coming fall will be our hundredth football team we ever had, so you know, I think that was something that was engrained a long, long time ago, and it has just kept going, probably getting bigger and bigger.

Melissa: So do you see the fathers and grandfathers at the game?

Ed: Yes, you'll see the fathers and grandfathers and uncles and, you know, at the game, and uh, you know, and every—the fans will always come out, down on our, on the field after the game, you know, to talk to the kids and to tell them they did a good job and congratulate them. So, it, yeah, you know, and you don't, you don't see that sometimes at a lot of different schools, you know, the support that at least we get here.

Melissa: Yeah. Um, do, do people have to pay to go to the game?

Ed: Yeah. Yes.

Melissa: Okay. And can you get, like, a season pass?

Ed: Yeah, you can get senior passes and there's senior citizen passes and uh, student passes where you can just pay at the gate.

Melissa: Okay. Has it always been like that?

Ed: As far as I know, yeah. Most schools, that's the way they do it.

Melissa: Okay, um, and does your school have to do pay-to-play as well?

Ed: We do uh, we do, yeah. I mean, we have a fifty-dollar activity fee.

Melissa: Okay.

Ed: Per sport.

Melissa: Okay. Has that affected...

Ed: No, I don't think so. Now some of the schools around are, like, five hundred dollars. Like Westerville, I think one of the Westerville schools is six hundred, and that would bury us. I mean, we, our kids couldn't afford that. But, fifty dollars is probably the cheapest around, you know, it's per sport, so it's still—if you played three sports, you're only dishing out a hundred fifty dollars where, you know, most every—at least in our league, all the other kids are probably paying over that for one sport.

Melissa: Yeah, that's true. Um, hmm. So, I guess has the program changed since you've started coaching? Like, have you seen the atmosphere of the game's changed at all, or even just the program itself?

Ed: Hmm. Uh, no. I mean, as far as atmosphere, you know, it's always been like a football crazy town, and, I think that'll always continue. Maybe expectations changed a little bit, you know, as you go through, uh, when we finally started winning play off games, we've been to the play off several times but, you know, couldn't win, and then we started winning. We went to the final four a couple of times and, I think, just your expectations get a little bit higher 'cause, like, yeah, we've been here, now our next step, you know, is to get to the state championship game and win the state championship. I think that's every team's goal. If it isn't, they probably shouldn't be playing. But, you know, I think we do usually have high expectations throughout the community and within our selves, you know, and certainly on the team.

Melissa: Okay. Um, so which teams—are there any teams in Knox County or has Danville made, or won, the state championships?

Ed: No, uh, farthest anybody's went is final four since the play offs have been. And we've had—Centerburg's made it to the final four, Fredericktown's made it to the final four, uh, we have twice, Loudonville—Fredericktown might have done it twice, too, if I think about it now—Loudonville, which is pretty, just next door in Ashland County, they're been to the final four. Uh, East Knox has been to the regional championship, which is right before the final four, so... I mean, we've—Mount Vernon? No.

Melissa: So did you get, like, a really big turnout at the—

Ed: Oh yeah, and '99 we played East Knox in the regional championship and they help the game in Mount Vernon and at that time that was the biggest crowd ever at a Division Six football game, play off game. It was about, like, seven or eight thousand people at Mount Vernon stadium. Uh, and still right now it's, like, the second largest crowd ever in a Division Six playoff game. They beat us earlier in the year, and then we turned around and beat them up in Mount Vernon, so...

Melissa: Okay. Um, I mean, are there any other ways that you, that I haven't gotten to that you think football plays an important role in the community, in Danville, um, I mean you've talked about how it's a generational activity...

Ed: Mhmm.

Melissa: ..and how it's really embedded in this history here it seems like, if this is your hundredth football team. Um, is there—like on a daily, on a day-to-day basis, do you see the football teams, or like the sport, affecting lifestyles? Because I've talked to some people who have said, like, they'll go to the grocery store and people are still talking about the football games, and...

Ed: Yeah. Definitely the football season, you know, is pretty much the talk of the communities around Knox County, uh, I mean, if you went through our school on a daily basis, or even like right now, or in the spring, you're always going to find a couple kids with a Danville football shirt on. Uh, it's just, you know, like you said earlier, it's sort of just embedded into the community. Uh, so, I think it's definitely, you know, it's, it's become more than generational as far as, you know, sort of, it's—it's the thing, I guess. It's, it's just so, it seems like... 'cause once again it's just a, it's a big community. And football teaches so many life lessons. That's what's great about it, because you've got to learn to work with other people, and you learn to work with a lot of people. And it takes a lot of, it takes eleven people to get stuff done right, where maybe in basketball, you know, if you've got one stud that can score thirty a game you're gunna win a lot of games, or in baseball if you have a great pitcher or softball you've got a great pitcher, you know, they can carry you a long ways. Football, you know, helps to have great players, but you gotta have everybody working together, so it teaches, you know, and the hard work you have to go through to prepare, you learn a lot of life lessons from playing sports in general, but I think football may be a little bit more because you deal with more people and you learn probably a little more adversity throughout, you know, practices

and games that you might not learn if you don't play sports, or you learn at a later date and it might be too late (laughs).

Melissa: Yeah. Um, do you think there are also some of those lessons out there for the crowd as well, because not everyone can participate in football, especially if you're a girl, you can't play...

Ed: Yeah, I think people learn. Actually I think people realize what the kids go through, you know, I mean the practices, the lifting weights all year, uh, this, that, they see that and they see kids working hard and I think they understand that even if you, you're not a player it's like, "Wow," you know, "That's hard work," and "They go through a lot." So I think it's appreciated by even, probably, who doesn't participate in it.

Melissa: Okay, um, and how do you see the, the town supporting the football players or the football team?

Ed: I mean, well, I'll tell you what. If something's needed, we can pretty much get it. I mean, for example, if we need something, something built, there's plenty of people around that's, you know, they can weld or do this, do that. They say, "I can do that for you," instead of, you know, there's something in a book you'd like to have that cost five thousand dollars, maybe you can get it built for a thousand dollars around here because people have spared pipe or this or that and they can weld it for you and they can fix it all up, and, so, you get a lot of support that way. Uh, financially, people will, you know, if you have a fundraiser they're always eager to help out, you know, the kids around here whether it's football or other sports or other activities, like the school play, or things like that. So, I mean, those are just some of the examples.

Melissa: Okay. Um, and so why do you think people are so willing to—

Ed: I think number one is for the kids, and I think number two, uh, probably they were there at one point, you know, a lot of our people in our community went to school here, and that, they were the football player, the basketball player, a lot of everyone went through that and people supported them. So that just becomes a generational thing again, hey, you know, when I was young, there was just—people were doing stuff for me, now it's my turn to give back, and, I mean, this community's great about that.

Melissa: Yeah, um, okay, um, hmm. Is there anything else that you think you want to add?

Ed: Hmm. I can't think of anything off the top of my head unless you got any other, something you can think of.

Melissa: Um, I mean I think I got most of what I was looking for, just hearing about how important the games really are. Um, I guess what do you see for the future—like, I'm not too sure exactly what's going on for the future for Danville football, but do you see any big changes that might affect the community?

Ed: Other than the, our league, the instability of the league 'cause the Licking County schools have left to go to a league in Licking County, uh, East Knox, or Centerburg and Fredericktown are going to a league called the MOWAK (sp?) which is west of here, and after next year, then East Knox is going the following year, so that sort of leaves us on our own. Uh, we're sort of waiting to see what happens, to see if a team leaves that league so we can be with the other county schools, but, you know, it's just a waiting game for that, so...

Melissa: Okay.

Ed: And that could cause a lot of scheduling issues for football and all sports, but football in general, just because everybody—you play your league games usually at the end of the year and everybody's going to be in league games and we're going to be looking for games. So that's going to create a issue.

Melissa: Okay, um, so, but even if you aren't a part of the same league will you still be playing the same schools?

Ed: We're going to try to, uh, it could become an issue just because of what the new league wants the other schools to do, so we might have some issues there, but yeah, we still want to play each other to keep those county rivalries, 'cause also those are good gates. And, you know, football helps support, even though it's the most expensive sport, you know 'cause the helmets, the shoulder pads and everything, you gotta buy them and recondition them but, it helps support the other non-revenue sports, too, so you definitely want to keep those big money games where, you know, 'cause it's in county, it's close, people—everybody knows each other so more people go to those games.

Melissa: Okay. Um, and why did this, why did the leagues change?

Ed: Well, mainly it started because the Licking County schools, the, they used to be a league called the LCL, Licking County League, back in the late '60s through '80s. They broke up and everybody went their own way, but now they're getting back together. And, so, that took three Licking County schools, so then everybody just started panicking, I think, and just going where they could right away and, so that's what we got now. And unfortunately, you know, it'd be nice if all four of us would've stayed together as a package deal, but I guess, I think everybody just panicked. You know, "We gotta get somewhere," and so, it is what it is and, 'til we can get it fixed I guess.

Melissa: Okay. So the change will happen after next year?

Ed: After next school year, yeah. So there's one more year of the present league, the Mid Buckeye.

Melissa: Okay. Well, thank you very much—

Ed: No problem.

Melissa: --for your time.

Ed: Hope that helps you out.

Melissa: Yeah, it does (mic being taken off).

Ed: So now—(mic cuts out).