

JERRY VOORHIS - Westerners', May 1, 1984

Nick Polos' introduction:

He has had a long and checkered career - I guess you'd call him a man for all seasons. Many years ago Gregory Peck and his wife were in a hotel in Palm Springs and they couldn't get a room. His wife was very supportive, as many wives are, and she said to him, "Tell them who you are." And he said, "If I have to tell them who I am, then who am I?" I wasn't too sure about Mr. Voorhis career, so I went to a library, as historians do, and read the two and a half pages in the current biography. It's a long career, and a very, very colorful and illustrious one. Mr. Voorhis has had many, many experiences, beginning, of course, in Kansas and New Haven. He has been very active all his life and he has some wonderful experiences to share with us. With that, I'd like to introduce Mr. Jeremiah Voorhis.

I'm not going to talk about anything tonight except things having to do with the Voorhis School for Boys. You're going to have to be patient with me because I just don't have enough wind to talk. I'm very, very proud of some of the people who came from Voorhis School. The Mayor of San Dimas, right now, once had the misfortune to be under me as his schoolmaster. I'm proud of that - I'm even prouder of the family that he and Sue have raised. I'm proud of the Glasgow family, and all of their children and grandchildren. I'm proud of Ernie Haber and his dear wife. So many others that were there and have made such a good record for themselves, as good, constructive, thoughtful, compassionate citizens of our country. This is all the blessing I've ever wanted. Lots of others I could mention, too.

Now, where did the Voorhis School for Boys come from? Well, it came out of my father's mind, really. He had wanted, I believe, most of all, ~~to have me be a~~ partner of his in a business venture, selling automobiles, or something like that. I couldn't do it. I had a call, if you want to call it that, to try to render Christian service. And I felt I must do the best I could. After I graduated from college, I tried to prepare myself by a variety of work. I worked in a factory for 39¢ an hour - handled freight on a railroad - worked on a ranch - and finally in a Ford assembly plant, where I made \$5 a day, by gosh! I finally thought I had my education completed and was ready to teach school, which is what I decided I wanted to do.

Well, my family had had connections, and my Dad, included, with a place in Lakeville, Illinois, called Allendale Farms. Allendale Farm was a place where homeless boys or boys sometimes in trouble came. They had a school there, and they had a farm, and they had a community, in other words. And I got a job there, for one whole year. This gives an insight. I left there, and went to Wyoming, and I was headmaster of the first boys' orphanage that the Episcopal church ever had in that state. In fact, my wife and I started that orphanage. While we were there, my Dad began to make noises about us coming to California, and saying that he wanted to put what resources he had into the founding of a school somewhat like Allendale, in California. Well, he wanted me to tell him if I'd come out and run the school if he built it. And of course, I told him I would.

So, in 1927, my wife and I, and our little girl, two years old, and eight boys, from various sources, moved to Claremont. We lived in a big house on Second and College Streets that belonged to Pomona College. Some of the boys that were there with us, came from Dray Cottage, in Laramie, Wyoming, where we'd been the year before. And some of them came from Allendale, where we'd been two years before. They lived with us there for that year. During that year we built Voorhis School. Stanley Plummer had plenty to do with it, so did Jack Campbell, Joe Walterscheid, and a lot of other people in San Dimas. Without them we couldn't have built it. We had a wonderful contractor, Mr. Voss. In fact, he and his workers donated to us the building which housed our infirmary. They didn't charge us for that building at all.

They built the Chapel first. They built so well that in the Long Beach earthquake there wasn't one crack in any of those buildings. There isn't yet. During that year, I got a Master's Degree from Claremont Graduate School in Education. In fact, I got the first Master's Degree that Claremont Graduate School ever gave, to anybody. That was the first year they were giving them out, and I happened to get the first diploma. Dr. Blaisdell just happened to get mine ahead of the other two that were graduating at the same time, which was just a bunch of luck. Anyway, I wrote my Thesis for my Master's on the subject of Education of the Institution Boy, which was an outline of our plan for the school. Then, in the summer of 1928, enough of the buildings had been built so that we could move to the school with the beginning of our boys. I think we brought 30 boys there then.

We had two cottages, with a Cottage Mother, and 12 boys in each cottage, and six other boys were living with us. Anyway, some of those boys came from All Nations Boys' Club, some of them came from Laramie, again. They were the boys that the people in Laramie said they didn't want, couldn't do anything with, and all this kind of business. They did all right when we got them. That was the beginning. The buildings were gradually completed, until they stood like they do now.

Through the years, we developed our institution as best we could. The Chapel was always the center of our community life, and a place that the boys, I think, even revered and loved. We had Chapel services three week-nights a week, and on Sunday mornings, of course. And many other activities went on there.

We had our own Junior High School and there we taught the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades. We had a regular curriculum, standard curriculum in many ways. We believed in progressive education for certain subjects, like literature and history and social sciences and art and music, and of course, all the things like that. But we believed in strict educational discipline for things like learning multiplication tables, learning to spell correctly, learning to write a paragraph and not make sentence errors. That was in general our educational philosophy. The boys, after they graduated from the ninth grade, went to Bonita High School, where Dr. George Bell was Principal. A great man he was. John Price was one of the coaches - head coach, I think he was. I think if John Price were here tonight he'd tell you that Don Haefer was one of the best football players he ever had.

A lot of the other teachers were great friends of our school, Bonita teachers, I mean.

Anyway, in general, the boys lived 12 to a cottage. Each cottage with a Cottage Mother, and to the extent possible, the same boys would stay with the same Cottage Mother throughout their career. The Cottage Mothers, of course, were on the job 25 hours a day, 7 days a week. They never really had time off, except when the boys were away in school. So in the summertime, we tried to give the Cottage Mothers some time off. In order to do that, we'd go to Camp. And we'd take the bus, the school bus, and take half the boys at a time. Either down South some place, near Warner's Hot Springs, or someplace like that, or more likely, up to Mammoth. When we first went up there, there wasn't anything at Mammoth except the Ranger Station and one little General Store. We camped on the ground beside Sherwin Creek the first year. Then we built some tent platforms and gradually developed the camp. ~~th~~The boys and the other Masters that were smarter than I built buildings. We developed a pretty good campus which the alumni of the Voorhis School have now given, I am very proud to say, to the Boys' Club of San Gabriel Valley, which is a big boys' club down in El Monte, that does such a good job. They have the camp now, that our school built. Up there where someone could climb most all the mountains, anywhere around there. We climbed Mt. Whitney one summer when they told us we couldn't get up because there was too much snow, but we did.

We had a Print Shop, Carpenter Shop, Machine Shop, and one of our teachers, Heber Clewett, was very good at teaching Radio and produced some results. One of the fellows got way up with, oh, the radio communication outfit that handles satellites.

We still have our relations, and we're going to have a Reunion next Sunday out at the School.. We have those four times a year and a number of the fellows and their wives and children and grandchildren come to them. This is a great source of joy, I can tell you that. So many of them continue to take an interest.

I might just tell you what the Daily Schedule was. This should have come in sooner. Our Daily Schedule was up at 6:30, breakfast about 7, or a little before, then work in the cottages - rather feverishly to get the cottages in shape. School was from 8 to 12, and 1 to 3. Work period was from 3 to 4:30. Athletics were from 4:30 to about 6. Dinner was supposed to be at 6, except we were always late getting in from athletics, and that was about our daily routine. All the boys were assigned different jobs, and on Saturday we spent all morning working on the place, growing our own vegetables and raising our own chickens, and raising our own hogs and so on and so forth, to make the place as nearly self-sustaining as we could. We never quite made it, but we did some good planning - planting, I mean - of groves of different kinds - all kinds of California sub-tropical agriculture was put on that mesa there - on those mesas, I should say - and on the bottom lands down by the creek.

So that, when in 1938, we had run out of money - for remember Dad's endowment was made before 1929. And when 1929 came along, the bottom dropped out of all the stock markets and values of securities, why our endowment was worth about half as much as it had been worth before. And so, we had to do something about that.

We went into Capital used up Capital as long as we could, tried to get contributions, and never got any of any size whatsoever from anybody. Nobody really helped us financially at all. So, finally, in 1938, we had to give up.

We gave the property, worth a good deal, to Cal Poly for educational purposes. That was the only condition in the Deed of Gift. I would have put some more in, but Dad wanted it that way and that's the way it was. Anyway, it was given to Cal Poly in 1938, and until 1956 this whole southern program of Cal Poly was conducted at what had been the Voorhis School for Boys. And Then Cal Poly was given some money, plus a lot of land over in Pomona by the Kellogg Estate, and they began to move over there. So they began to move over to Pomona gradually, leaving our place without a program - except that they developed a rather good program of conferences and counseling. A lot of different organizations and businesses would have their sessions there at the school. But gradually this didn't work too well and also, Cal Poly found it impossible to get from the State government any money whatsoever for the maintenance of that property. I'm not going to tell you who was Governor then - maybe you can guess. Cal Poly couldn't get a cent for the maintenance of that property - why, I've never been able to understand.

So - Cal Poly said we've got to do something, for the property was deteriorating. The plumbing was going to pieces and everything else was deteriorating badly. So, they said would it be all right for us to lease it, and I said, certainly. They did lease it to the Pacific Coast Baptist Bible College - which I can tell you is a college that prepares fundamentalist Bible students for services in their church - music directors, Sunday School teachers, missionaries, ministers, what have you. The most wonderful bunch of young people you ever want to meet. They sing like a bunch of birds, and it just lifts your heart to listen to them. Anyway, the place was leased to Pacific Coast Baptist Bible College for 5 years, and the lease terms were simply that the Baptists would spend \$5,000 a month on maintaining the place, on improving it, on rehabilitating it where it needed it. Which they did beautifully, and have done beautifully. At the end of the 5 years, they renewed the lease, but 2 years later, Cal Poly wanted to buy some land adjacent to their present holdings in Pomona, and they wanted to sell the property to the Baptists. So, we said, all right, do it. So the Baptists bought it. I don't know how much they paid for it. It's been rumored they paid \$5 million dollars. Anyway, Cal Poly got the money they wanted and bought their land and the Baptists now own the place. They've been very good to us. They welcomed us every time we wanted to come up there and have a meeting, and on the whole, I've felt real good about that arrangement.

I'm glad to have had this chance to talk about our school. We were proud of it, as long as it lasted, and wished it could have lasted a lot longer. We felt a deep affection for the community of San Dimas, Covina, and La Verne, and still do. It meant a lot to me when I retired from my job back in Chicago to come back to the same area where we had lived before. And to pick up all the threads of friendship that existed here. It meant a great deal.

Don Haefer:

There are three of us from the Voorhis School - Price, Ernie, and myself - that were very fortunate to have had the chance to work with Jerry and live with Jerry. Many of us said we were housed and clothed and fed and educated - but I really feel - and I speak for Price, and I speak for Ernie when I say this - that out of Jerry that not only did we get educated and were able to go to the public schools - and a lot of people in the public schools thought that we were truant kids - but actually we were not truant kids - we were the unfortunates who had lost a mother or father. From Jerry, I think that not only Price and Ernie and myself, not only gained an education, but through his love and his guide-lines and his philosophy of life, that many of us have picked that up and taken that on into our own families.

I never intended to get mixed up in politics, and especially having worked for Jerry and saw what he went through - but one thing I want to say to Jerry and this is probably the only chance I'll have to do it - that anything that I do in politics is because I'll follow the philosophy of that man. And I can't help but get worked up because I started in sixth grade in grammar school in that school and went through high school. And all that time I had a chance to look at the record and I think my Dad paid \$2.97 for everything that I had - the education, the love, the concern - but above all, he instilled in everyone of us the ideas that he carried. And we carry them along with him, and I feel that Jerry - I'll never be able to pay him - but if I can live a life somewhat like his - I'll never touch it - but I'll get a little ways along - then I feel that I've paid back to Jerry a little bit of what he gave to me. And to Jerry now, for Price and for Ernie, I just want to say to Jerry - thanks for everything, Jerry.

Jerry Voorhis:

One thing might be interesting, if you can stand me for a couple more minutes, would be how some of the boys came there. For example, I remember once I got a phone call from a rancher down in the Imperial Valley, who said that I understand you have a shhool for homeless boys. And I said yes. Well, I've got a youngster down here who's run away from home in Maryland. He's nine years old, he's working on my farm, he's never been to school, and I wondered if you'd take him. Well I didn't know anything about him. I said, all right, we will. I guess I thought for a few minutes about it. And he came. We tested him for IQ and first he tested 60. After one year when he was exposed to reading and writing he tested 90. IQ's aren't supposed to change, but believe me, they do. Another time I remember this young sister came up there and said "My parents are both dead. One of them had just died. I have these three younger brothers. Would you take them to the school?" I said, sure. Every year we took a certain number of boys of their choosing, of the All Nations Boys Club of East Los Angeles. Every year we took some boys from there. We took some boys from churches, and other institutions of that kind, and from some people who paid a little bit. One mother gave me four boys to take care of, and paid me \$50 a month. When we took somebody from the County, they would pay \$25 a month. Of course, that wasn't anything like what it was costing. As time passed, we did have a couple of exceptions. One of them was a man that many of you knew, I'm sure,

he was manager of one of the citrus houses. He thought his boy would profit if he could come up there as a day scholar. And he did, he came. And he later became an eminent professor at Cal Poly, in agronomy - an eminent professor. The other one was a younger son of a professor of Temple University who was on exchange with Pomona College. This younger son had been sort of overshadowed by a brilliant older brother and he came out there, clumsy as the dickens, couldn't possibly catch a baseball or anything else. The boys were a little hard on him. One day in the shop, he happened to cut off the end of his finger, and didn't make a big fuss about it, or anything. The shop man bound it up as best he could and took him to the hospital, and after that, he was a hero, because he didn't cry.

Our boys were good boys. They were good boys. We never good any boys from a court, or who were in trouble. We took good boys, They just needed a place to live and live together. And I think we lived a happy life together. I'm so grateful to Don for what he said. Don's not our only Mayor - we have a Mayor of El Monte also - he's not in office right now, but he has been.

So it goes - and thank you.

Question: What was the maximum number of students you had?

J.V.: 65 at a time. About 300 went there at one time or another.

Jack Carruthers:

I wasn't a Voorhis student, but I was at Bonita in 1929 when the first Voorhis boys came to Bonita. We got to know them quite well, and Jerry was very generous with people from the outside. A lot of us went to parties and dances out at the Voorhis school. We enjoyed it and had a great time. I knew most of the boys that were at the Voorhis school from 1929 to 1936 or so. They were really all a great bunch of kids - except for Don Haefer!