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Interview with Hal Palmer

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Fort Hays State University

Harold Palmer

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ORAL INTERVIEW WITH HAL PALMER

July 12, 1984

The following will be an oral interview with Mr. Hal Palmer conducted by Jim Hickel. Mr. Palmer is a retired music educator now living in Hays, Kansas. This is in partial fulfillment for the class History of American Education instructed by Dr. Alan Miller.

Hal Palmer: This is Harold Palmer. I started teaching at Hill City. I got a B.S. degree in 1932 and I also got a B.M. degree. I stayed in school so I could be with my wife when she got her degree and I started teaching at Hill City in the fall of 1933. My beginning salary was \$66.66 2/3¢ a month for nine months. One month they would give me 66 cents and the next month they would give me 67 cents. Our rent at that time was \$12.00 a month and we spent \$10.00 a month for groceries. So we lived pretty well on \$66.66 2/3¢ a month.

Jim Hickel: Was that considered an average teaching salary then or was that high or low?

Hal Palmer: That was probably a little above average as Director of Bands because I taught - let's see if I can remember all of this - I taught Band, Girls Glee Club, Boys Glee Club, Mixed Chorus, Latin I, Latin II, Junior English, Economics, World History, Journalism - which I turned over to my wife because she was a journalism major. I was sponsor of the junior class and we had to put on a junior play. I had to give an operetta. That sounds like a heavy load - which it was. But I'll tell you one thing it did for me. It taught me how to work because I worked from early morning until late at night except when the dust storms hit and then I would get a yardstick and go along the sides of the sidewalk like a blind man to find my way home because you couldn't see otherwise.

Jim Hickel: Were all those courses in the curriculum?

Hal Palmer: They were in the curriculum and it was my job to teach them. Believe me, I had to do a lot of boning up to keep abreast particularly in Economics and Latin II. Junior English didn't bother me too much but Latin did. Journalism I didn't worry about because my wife took that over. So that was my daily routine and I was hired to be the Director of Bands. We started out up there with a band that was so small - now remember this was in the fall of 1933 - it was so small that my wife was a former trumpet player, cornet player, and I didn't have any clarinets that could play at all so I taught her to play clarinet in six easy lessons and she played first chair clarinet in my band. The band started out at that time - oh, I guess I had 30 or 35 pieces. The instruments were antique. I mean every clarinet at that time was metal. You could buy a Cavalier metal clarinet in 1933 for \$15.00 and that's what I had in my band. The other instruments were priced accordingly. At that time I had a chance to buy a Kolerk bassoon for \$75.00 and I didn't have the money to buy it and it was one of the best Kolerk bassoons on the market at that time. Well, you know, a Kolerk bassoon today would be about \$3,000 or \$4,000.

Jim Hickel: Were the instruments mostly owned by the kids or did the school own them?

Hal Palmer: Let's see, most of them were owned by the kids at that time. The bass horns, the bass drum - I think that was it. That's all that I can remember that was owned by the school. Everything else was privately owned. And I tell you to try to get - we dealt with Yurney's at Norton and to buy a Cavalier clarinet for \$15.00 - they would put it out on payments of about \$2.50 a month. Some of the families were hard pressed to pay \$2.50 a month on that \$15.00 clarinet. That's how bad it was. Of course, Graham County where I was teaching at that time was supposedly the worst financial-problemed county in the state. This is where the dust storms really hit the worst and I mean they were really bad. It's just impossible to realize what we lived through and where my room was - the janitor would go in in the morning and he'd get a tub and a scoop shovel and it wouldn't be just one tubful of dirt that he'd scoop out of my room with a scoop shovel.

Jim Hickel: Were all your classes taught in the same room or did you have a separate room for band?

Hal Palmer: The only separate room I had was for band, the band met in a separate room. Everything else was taught in a regular classroom.

Jim Hickel: So you taught all your glee clubs in a classroom?

Hal Palmer: In the bandroom. It wasn't much larger than our classroom. It was just set up with the type of chairs for band rather than arm chairs for the classroom. Hill City at that time was divided into two communities - a north side and a south side. At that time we used coal stoves and if we bought a half a ton of coal on the north side we had to go to the south side and buy a half a ton of coal or our jobs were in jeopardy.

Jim Hickel: You were in charge of ordering the coal then?

Hal Palmer: We ordered it but there was a coal company on the north side and one on the south side. There was a grocery store on the north side and one on the south. The post office at that time one night would be on the north side - the next night it'd be on the south side. I'm not exaggerating.

Jim Hickel: Was there any differentiation between the two communities as far as religious practices?

Hal Palmer: No, I don't think it was divided as far as religion was concerned. There was a bank on the north side, a bank on the south side, a clothing store on the north side, a clothing store on the south side and all the other businesses were divided on the two sides. Even today they are still split somewhat at Hill City.

Jim Hickel: Both sides were pretty much equal but were just split?

Hal Palmer: Yes.

Mrs. Palmer: You couldn't smoke or drink.

Hal Palmer: That was taken for granted. You couldn't smoke, you couldn't drink.

Jim Hickel: Were the teachers in the public eye as far as their actions?

Hal Palmer: Very much, very very much! Your every move back in 1933 and '34 - every move was scrutinized. If you went out of town to go to a picture show, like we would try to sneak away and go to Norton, the community knew it and of course, I had the church choir and had to go to church, of course, every Sunday and all this. It was very tough. Then when we moved to Ellinwood in 1935 we ran into just the opposite type - absolutely the opposite. They wanted their teachers to have a good time. Incidentally, I then made \$90.00 a month. The community was very open. I mean, if you wanted to smoke, you could smoke. If you wanted to take a drink, you could go out with some of your friends and you could drink. It was just an entirely different type of community. The teachers in Ellinwood were respected as human beings. At Hill City, they were slaves. That's actually how I felt.

Jim Hickel: You've already mentioned about some of the physical aspects of the building with the dirt and everything. Was there anything else that might come to mind throughout the rest of the building, the facilities, the physical aspects?

Hal Palmer: The plant itself, for the number of students enrolled in school, the plant itself was quite good. Of course, air conditioning was unknown at that time. There was no such thing as air conditioning. But as far as the specifics are concerned, in fact the building today is just east of the new high school. No, that's not quite true. Well, it's used as the junior high now. I think the same school is now used as the junior high. I think the high school is separate. No, the facilities were good.

Jim Hickel: What about the jurisdiction that the school encompassed? How large was that or how was that divided up?

Hal Palmer: It went south to the county line separating Graham County from whatever county WaKeeney's in.

Jim Hickel: Trego.

Hal Palmer: Yes, Trego and it went north to the county line that separated Norton and Hill City - whatever county Norton's in - county line to county line. No buses in those days.

Jim Hickel: Did the heat or anything have any effect on the length of the school year?

Hal Palmer: No.

Jim Hickel: What was the length of the school year?

Hal Palmer: I don't know. We started right after Labor Day.

Mrs. Palmer: About the 20th of May.

Hal Palmer: I don't really know. I'm not sure I can answer that. I just taught until school was over. In the summertimes I worked on the road gang. In fact I helped build the highway from Wilson to the county line south of WaKeeney.

Jim Hickel: Did you have any type of budget?

Hal Palmer: There was no budget. No budget for new instruments, no budget - we didn't have uniforms. There was no budget for anything. I did get some music but you must consider a march at that time cost about, oh about a dollar and an overture would cost about five dollars and I spent - guessing, maybe fifty, sixty dollars a year was about all. There was no other budget. You must remember this was during the Dust Bowl - nobody had any money. 87% of Graham County was on relief from 1933 on during the Dust Bowl days so you can see it was hard times.

Jim Hickel: Most of the money you did get then went to music?

Hal Palmer: Yes. All of it went to music. There was nothing for equipment. Oh, I suppose if a drum head had broken - no, I never did replace a bass drum head so I don't know. Snare drummers, of course, had their own drums.

Jim Hickel: What about the dress of the students?

Hal Palmer: I think back in those days that the dress was much neater and the students themselves - there's no question about it - the students themselves were much neater. They may have worn out, patched jeans but they were clean and they were neat. They weren't the dirty-looking, faded things that you see now-a-days.

Jim Hickel: What about community organizations like PTA?

Hal Palmer: I had the summer band, unfortunately, but I don't think they had a PTA at that time. They had something for the boys and the girls like 4-H and things like that but, no, there wasn't a PTA.

- Jim Hickel: You mentioned your summer band. Was that open to the entire community or just students?
- Hal Palmer: It was open to the entire community but I was the only one in the community that played and I had a very difficult time getting my high school students back because it was a farming community and they were all out on the farm working trying to get enough together to buy some food. Summer band was kind of a laughing stock as far as I'm concerned and yet I had to do it.
- Jim Hickel: What types of discipline or punishments were there in the school and who handled it? Was there a big problem with it?
- Hal Palmer: I never had a discipline problem. I can't answer that question. I never had any discipline problems and if I'd had any problems I'd handled them myself. I never let it get to a place where I had a problem.
- Jim Hickel: Do you think the parents expected more discipline out of their kids then than they do today?
- Hal Palmer: No question about it. I think the school was the center of the community. It was the hub of the community. I think the parents - there was no question about it - they were interested in the school and since they were interested in the school they were interested in their kids. The kids did not go around and run around then like they do now. The parents paid some attention to them. Now the kids just run wild and the parents run even more wild.
- Jim Hickel: Do you want to go on and talk a little bit about Ellsworth or was it Ellinwood?
- Hal Palmer: Ellinwood. I had the band and the Boys Glee Club and the Girls Glee Club and the Mixed Chorus to start out and eventually they hired a vocal teacher. It was a school with seven 40-minute periods and, of course, the requirements for graduation at that time, I think, was 16 units. So a lot of the students had two study halls and that was too many study halls for a lot of them so the superintendent gave me permission to take them down into the bandroom and I could make use of them any way I wanted. They could go practice or I could put them into groups. Anyhow, the 7th grade school was so helpful to me that in three years we won the district and the state and the national.
- Jim Hickel: Going on with that a little bit - can you explain how those were developed and maybe the requirements?

Hal Palmer: Back in those days - let's start at the top - back in those days we had what was called a national regional contest. The United States was divided into nine different regions. We went to Omaha, we went to Kansas City and to Colorado Springs. These were our national trips. To get to the nationals you had to - you would start out on the lowest level at the district. I would go from Ellinwood either to Pratt or to Hays - I had my choice and if the band was good enough, they would give us a I. Then they'd write after that - qualified for district. Then two or three or a month later, we'd have a district contest and then if the band was good enough, the judge would write on there - qualified for national. Now there weren't very many that would meet those qualifications. In fact, I think in our area around there maybe St. John and I were probably the only two bands in our class that qualified year after year. This was a distinct advantage because I would peak the kids for district - O.K. they went into district and I would say O.K. kids let's get ready for the - no, not at the district but at the one we went to in Hays. Then I'd say O.K. kids let's peak for the district - that was at Emporia. Then when we'd win that I'd say O.K. let's peak for the nationals. How did this help? Because you'd keep the kids - you had to have something going all the time and you could just push those kids and keep them going because they wanted to go and now-a-days you get through with the - whatever you have, district I guess it is - and you're through, aren't you?

Jim Hickel: You can go to the State now.

Hal Palmer: Oh, you can go to the State now. That was started two years ago thanks to Lyle Dilley. Yal, that's right.

Jim Hickel: I've found that helps a lot.

Hal Palmer: It helps tremendously in keeping the kids enthused and give them some incentives.

Jim Hickel: It seems like in music even though it's maybe not as competitive or supposed to be competitive as sports, the kids like that competition. They thrive on it.

Hal Palmer: I think that your administration thinks that it's competitive whether it's supposed to be or not. You better get a I rating. That's unfortunate but I think it's true.

Jim Hickel: What were the requirements for the festivals - two major numbers like it is now or something different?

Hal Palmer: Two overtures and a march and sight reading.

Jim Hickel: You got a rating on each section - the performance and the sight reading then?

Hal Palmer: Yes, you were rated on the three - the two overtures and the march. You were given a general rating there like maybe if you got a I,I and a II your overall rating would be a I. Then the sight reading was in a different place and if you got a I on the sight reading, they were combined. Now if you got a I in the regular contest and a II in sight reading, as I recall, they still give you a I. If it dropped down to a III then your overall would be a II. As I recall, that's the way it was. In addition, we had the Emporia State Band Festival, we had the KU State Band Festival.

Jim Hickel: Now these were all contests?

Hal Palmer: These were all different from what these are. I used to take my kids to the Emporia State Festival conducted by A.A. Harding and Edwin Franco Goldman and people like that. We'd go to KU so you see there was something going on so the kids were willing to work and go all times. Now it isn't that way - they don't have the incentive.

Jim Hickel: What time of year did these usually go on? Was it after Christmas?

Hal Palmer: Oh, about the same time - oh, yal, it was all after Christmas - the beginning of March - March, April and then early in May.

Jim Hickel: So you would have a festival every couple of weeks or something like that that you could go to?

Hal Palmer: That may be putting it a little bit early - two, three weeks, four weeks - depending. I can't remember the dates right now.

Jim Hickel: What about your other performances like your community performances?

Hal Palmer: I gave an annual fall concert, I gave a winter concert and a spring concert. In fact, I've still got all of those programs of everything we've played and they were well attended. One of the things, I think, that made my band tops was that I ran a summer music school. I had the entire high school and the entire grade school at my disposal and I assigned the kids when they were supposed to come and practice and they would come and they would practice at that time. Also, I started all of my beginners as soon as school was out in the spring unless someone would come in in September and say, "Hey, I've got a bassoon. Would you teach me how to play it?" Now if somebody came in and did that then of course I'd set them in a part. I would carry those kids together all summer and I'd develop them into a band so when fall came along I had a band of beginners ready to go.

Hal Palmer: The other kids would be practicing everyday an hour, an hour a day, really. They'd come up there and practice an hour a day. Now you're lucky if you get an hour a week out of some of these kids. Is that right?
(continued)

Jim Hickel: Yes. Was this a required thing for those who wanted to be in band?

Hal Palmer: Yes. It was a regular music summer school. I also had a rhythm class. Let me tell you something - this rhythm class. Can I give you an idea of what we did?

Jim Hickel: Sure.

Hal Palmer: O.K. Hi, Don. (his son came into the room.) In this rhythm class I would ask them, for example, O.K. for your next assignment - we would meet five days a week - for tomorrow's assignment I want you to write me eight measures of $4/4$ time, every measure different, and I want you to write the time beats underneath each measure. O.K. The kids would do this and then when they'd come up for their paper, I'd say O.K. you go up to the board - you go up to the board, you write what you have written on the board and then the kids would tap the whole thing out and count it. Then the next day might be $2/4$ time, it might be cut time. I tell you that made my kids -- do you ever have problems with rhythm?

Jim Hickel: Always.

Hal Palmer: All the time. My kids didn't and I'd go back to that rhythm class, O.K., when Clint was teaching in WaKeeney - you're familiar with WaKeeney I'm sure, and he was teaching also in the town west of there.

Jim Hickel: Collyer.

Hal Palmer: Yea, Collyer. O.K. He knew I'd given this to him in one of the classes that I taught so he said, "Mr. Palmer, I'm going to try that" so he tried it at Collyer and it worked so well for the kids at Collyer that he took it down to the beginners in WaKeeney and had that rhythm class. Believe me, it helps because a kid looks at a whole note - he doesn't have any idea, really, what that means or a half note or a quarter note until you actually get down and you write it and then you begin to understand - otherwise, it's just something out here in the air. You see it on a black and white staff and it doesn't mean anything until you actually get down and write it out. Boy, that helped me at Ellinwood more than any other one thing was that rhythm class.

Jim Hickel: What was the age that you started the beginners?

Hal Palmer: Seventh grade.

Jim Hickel: Then you started a little later than they do now. Was that typical of most schools or did some start earlier?

Hal Palmer: I don't think any of them started much earlier than that. I did give them tests. I went down to the grade school and gave them tests in the fifth and sixth grades. Musical tests of different kinds - you know, there are a number. I can't remember now exactly which one I gave to them but it resembled the Seashore test only it wasn't quite as difficult. Then after those tests I would grade their papers and then I would send a letter to the parents saying - your child has rated such and such and such and such, I would recommend that you consider for him in the very near future such and such an instrument. See, I would prepare them for when they got into the seventh grade. I had a salesman out of Salina, Cecil Knight - he died last year - in fact, he got the award, the outstanding, the outstanding music dealer's award, I think, at KBA last year and then he died about four or five months later, but, anyway, he would come out and I'd give him a list of the students and the instruments that I wanted him to have them play on. He would go out and, bless his heart, he would sell those instruments. I wouldn't do a thing - I wouldn't go out. Of course, he was making money on it and that was all right as long as he would go out and say, "Here, here is Ernie Bryant. He's going to be a seventh grader next year. I want him to play the baritone sax." O.K. So he'd go out and sell me a baritone sax. It really worked!

Jim Hickel: The kids would buy large instruments like that?

Hal Palmer: Yes. Uh-huh.

Jim Hickel: So you pretty much had the say-so as to what instrument that kid played?

Hal Palmer: Yes. It worked real well. I had a band parents organization in Ellinwood that became so strong that they could practically elect politically who they desired in the community. It was really a strong organization. We had a band festival, or whatever you call it, every fall to raise money.

Mrs. Palmer: Band Carnival.

Hal Palmer: Band Carnival. We had three sets of uniforms. When I quit Ellinwood, we had three complete sets of uniforms. When I went into the Navy in 1944, they had so much money, the band parents had so much money, they rented two cars, railroad cars, and took the entire band into Kansas City to see South Pacific. If I wanted an alto clarinet, I'd go to the band parents and they'd buy it.

Jim Hickel: So most of the band funding was done through the parents?

Hal Palmer: No. I had a good budget, a real good budget in the school itself and the band parents just helped. I had everything I wanted, I mean it was a perfect job. For instance, just to give you one example, we met in the fall. I had the school buy me a new bass horn and it was one of these real nice bass horns. We met in the fall, I never will forget this, the superintendent was Joe Austinburg. The home economics teacher got up and said, "Mr. Austinburg, I need a new stove or whatever it was in the home economics department and I didn't get one. I understand you got Mr. Palmer a new bass horn." I never will forget Mr. Austinburg got up to speak and said, "Yes, I got Mr. Palmer a new bass horn. He asked for it. Did you ever ask for your stove?" Well, she hadn't and that stuck with me. It stuck with me all through college when I was teaching down here. If you don't ask for something you are not going to get it. Isn't that true?

Jim Hickel: That's true. So you were at Ellinwood - then what 9 - 10 years?

Hal Palmer: Clear up to World War II. I left there in '44 - I went there in '35 and left in '44. We won the State six years and we won Regional two years so we really had a top notch band. I would set that band at that time. If I could get them all back together, I'd set them up against any band in the state right now. When I went into the service, as I kissed my wife good-bye I said, "Honey, if I can come back from the service and make \$2400 a year, I'll be happy the rest of my life." (Everyone laughed.) See, I'd finally gotten my salary up to \$200 a month, \$2400 a year - I worked 12 months out of the year - and I remember saying, "If I could come back home from the service and make \$2400 a year, I'd be happy the rest of my life." (Everyone laughs again.) Things have kind of changed.

Jim Hickel: When you went into the service, did your music background have anything to do with what you did?

Hal Palmer: Oh, did it ever. To start with, I was the drum major for the drum and bugle corp. Well, that doesn't mean very much but one weekend I saw a sign. We didn't have anything to do after our inspection so Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon, there was a sign saying - If you're interested in taking such and such a test (which I couldn't understand) meet at such and such a place. I'd never been a beer drinker and I didn't want to go downtown so I went to take this test. It was a CIC test I found out later. Anyhow, they set us down, they put earphones on us, and they put a compass rose - do you know what a compass rose is?

Jim Hickel: No.

Hal Palmer: O.K. It's 360 degrees with all the intersecting lines and they had put these phones on us and they gave us a pencil and then they started. Over the phones they had planes flying, machine guns shooting, people screaming and yelling, cannons going - every kind of thing you can think of and in the midst of all this, they would come out and say compass rose 245° southwest or this, that and the other thing. This didn't bother me. I found out later I'd followed the compass rose perfectly because being a band director and standing up in front of these kids and listening to that clackaphonic sound day in day out - all of this noise didn't bother me. You know, as a band director, you get used to all this. If they were in a business or something - those that were taking the test they would just, well they would go wild. This got me into CIC. There were two of us out of a battallion of 800 - there were two of us that made CIC. That's what I got into in the Navy. The best position I could have possibly gotten into - didn't have any idea what it was. It was radar - it was just when radar was getting started and I went from there to Fort Lauderdale and I couldn't even tell my wife what I was doing - it was so secret. So, yes, music was helpful.

Jim Hickel: When did you get back into education?

Hal Palmer: 1947, the fall of '47.

Jim Hickel: Where was that at?

Hal Palmer: Here, at the college.

Jim Hickel: Fort Hays State?

Hal Palmer: Uh-huh.

Jim Hickel: Did you find that there was a big change in attitudes between what you were teaching before and when you came back to education?

Hal Palmer: You see, I came back at a different level. I came back at the college level but, no, they didn't have a band here at the college the year that I came, the semester before they had no band. When I came here, they had nine enrolled in the band. I was sick 'cause I had a good job down there - I was a trained specialist, I was trained civil service, I was in command of the Naval Reserve, I had a beautiful job. I didn't think it could last because I thought eventually all the veterans would be trained and then where would I go? So I took this job and I got all the support from President Wooster - I got all the support from the college a person could want. Keating was the finance manager at that time - if I wanted something I got it. I drew up a five year budget of what we would need - he O.K.'d it. I never had a problem. Dilley has always - he just can't understand how I got all this stuff.

Hal Palmer: They just supported me all the way through. My band
(continued) grew from nine the first year to the second year I had what was called the marching hundred. I even had extras so if a kid wanted to go home I could put them in there. I had the marching hundred. I don't know if you've heard of them or not.

Jim Hickel: So it grew from nine to one hundred in one year?

Hal Palmer: In about two years. Wasn't it about two years, Edith, it took me to get it up to a hundred?

Mrs. Palmer: I don't know.

Hal Palmer: About two years, I think.

Jim Hickel: What were the requirements for music education then? What was mainly required of the students and was there a degree program?

Hal Palmer: Yes, we had a degree program - we had a degree program when I graduated in 1932 and '33. I'd say 80% of my college band were not music majors. We didn't pay them anything either. These kids never thought of being paid. We didn't pay them anything for anything and my band was there because they wanted to be there. I think that what they're doing now (I hope the right ears hear this) - what they're doing now paying the band for playing at basketball games, paying the band for commencement, paying the band for football games - darned if I don't think it's wrong. I think if a kid wants to play you don't have to pay him. You disagree with this 'cause you've been one of the paid members, I know.

Jim Hickel: They really got into that paying part after I left. Did you have much close association with public school or high school programs when you came back into college?

Hal Palmer: You bet I did. I made an effort to know all the band directors and I made an effort to know all the seniors - that's the way I built the band. In fact, this book that I wrote, Instrumental Music in Western Kansas Public Schools, indicates in there my close contact with the band directors. If I had not had close contact with them I wouldn't have been able to write the book. This was published by the state of Kansas, incidentally, I never got this published by a regular publishing company. I did clinics - I just cliniced myself to death. I slipped a disc in my neck from too much directing and was paralyzed in the right side for quite a few months. I had two ulcer operations. I just killed myself. I set up there in my office, O.K., Pittsburg, Kansas would call me and say, "Can you come down for a clinic on such and such a date?" Sure, I'd write it on the calendar. Next day (I'm giving you one example) Goodland, Kansas called. "Can you come up on such and such a date?" I'd look there - well, I was in Pittsburg there - I can go to Goodland tomorrow, sure.

Mrs. Palmer: I'd tell him I'd put his white shirts on the front porch and he could pick them up on the way by.

Hal Palmer: That's just about the way it was. I did too many but it kept me in contact with all the high school seniors. I could talk to them when I got out and did the work and stayed in contact with the band directors. Plus the band camp, of course, which I started. Oh, that was such a blessing. I didn't know it was going to be. I started that in '48 - the summer of '48.

Jim Hickel: Do you recall what your approximate enrollment was then?

Hal Palmer: A hundred and fifty-two. I can tell you exactly.

Jim Hickel: That's the first band camp?

Hal Palmer: The first band camp. I had two bands and a hundred and fifty-two enrollment. I got the finest directors that I could find in the United States because I knew that if I was going to build anything I had to get men that were tops. Clarence Sawhill, for instance, and then I had Buddy U. Tompkins - does that mean anything to you? One of the finest jazz clarinetists in the world today I had come out here. I had Bill Bell on the tuba, I had the bass trombonist, what's his name, well, anyhow, I would always try to get Siguard Raschard. I had him out here, O.K., three or four times. I would always try to get the finest in the country and of course the band directors would say, "Hey, look who Palmer has coming to camp. You kids better go." Emporia had a band camp - started the same time as ours - they used just their own local people. The band camp lasted about two years. I just stumbled into it. I didn't know what I was going to run into but, you know, at one time, one year I tried seven bands - I had around 900 enrolled - I tried seven bands and I tell you I about went crazy. So I set the limit at 600 and kept it there. Six hundred was the absolute limit. And since they knew that was the limit, it was amazing how the band directors would fight to get that enrollment in early. That was another incentive.

Jim Hickel: At this time was it just high school or did you have junior high involved?

Hal Palmer: It started out I just took them, first come first serve and we auditioned them and if a junior high kid would happen to get first chair in one of the bands, in the Gold Band, which was first at that time, we gave it to him. Later on we had to segregate them into high school and junior high. They all auditioned for a band. Junior high competed against the high, but later on we got so many junior high we had to make the change. I started the first balanced clarinet choir in the United States.

- Hal Palmer: I got Russell Hobb who is the finest woodwind man in the country (still is) to write the music for me. I got Leblanc to - one of the reasons I started it was Leblanc had just come out with a contra-bass and Selmer had just come out with a contra-alto and I talked both companies into loaning me one telling them what I liked to do. I started a balanced clarinet choir and Russell Hobb said he'd write the music so in '52, band camp of '52, we had the first balanced clarinet choir in the United States. It's grown pretty well over the years.
- Jim Hickel: Do you recall when the majority of the public schools would start their beginners?
- Hal Palmer: A lot of them would wait until the fall to start which I think is a mistake because then the band director not only had the regular band but you also had the beginners to work with the often times this would interfere with their lessons. When I worked with my beginners in the summer time, I started them out at two lessons a week. I wouldn't let a whole week - you know you can develop a bad habit in a hurry. You know teaching beginners what I'm talking about. So they'd have two lessons a week for two or three weeks and then if they got along all right I'd take just once a week. I'd spend all of that time with those beginners and of course my other band, my regular band, was practicing all together. I'd supervise that and leave it up to them. To me that's the ideal time to start the beginners if you can have a summer program - that's just the right time. It worked out very well for me anyhow.
- Jim Hickel: What was the cause, if there was one, of a lot of the public schools starting their beginners in 5th grade instead of the 7th grade? Was it just to get to the kids earlier?
- Hal Palmer: I don't know if there is any real reason for that or not. I think it's a good idea. I think some of the schools even put them on flutophones and things like that down in the 3rd and 4th grade. Rhythm instruments came in at that time and I think that was good. And then I think they just developed from 3rd and 4th and maybe 5th grade from rhythm instruments and then the band director thought - well, let's finish this - let's put them on the regular instruments. I think that's good, I really do.
- Jim Hickel: Do you think athletics had anything to do with that as it got a little more popular in the junior high?

Hal Palmer: Oh, I don't know. I don't think so. I do think this - the two people in a high school - the coach and the music director - I think those two people have more in common than any other teachers in the entire system and if anyone should be together it should be the coach and the band director.

Jim Hickel: Could you sum up the progression or digression (however way you want to put it) of community attitudes and what you would think community attitudes are and children's attitudes toward music from when you started to present day?

Hal Palmer: You won't like it. I think that with all honesty - if I wanted to be real honest and I was still teaching at the university, I'm not sure I could recommend that a kid become a band director. Isn't that terrible? When I see the discipline problems that the band directors have to put up with today with no support from the majority of their administrators - when I see the parents lackadaisical attitude toward their own kids, when I see the athletics not only going through high school but down in the junior high and down into the grade school, when I see the units in high school jumping from 16 to 20 some and then you try to submit what they call an extracurricular activity band (which I don't think you could name that) - how could a person, how could you be a band director and survive?

Jim Hickel: Well, Mr. Palmer, I'd like to thank you for all the time you've given me and I appreciate the opportunity to interview you. You've given me some insight into the past of music education and I appreciate it very much. Thank you again for your time and effort.