

PCACAC Living History

Submitted by Bert Hudnall, PCACAC President 1988-1989

When Sue Rexford asked me to be a part of this very interesting project....an opportunity to reflect on an organization and its people who were pivotal in both my professional and personal lives...I jumped to say a loud “Yes”! However, she may have made a mistake when she said I could submit more than one remembrance. Brevity is not my strong suit (witnessed here), and so in deference to readers’ stamina I may take her up on that suggestion. The first of many demurrers is that it is impossible to recall memories without sounding self-focused, and so let me say with total sincerity that underlying anything I write that sounds self-important is a deep and abiding appreciation for the common denominator for it all: PCACAC.

PCACAC and I came to know each other in the fall of 1970 when I became Director of Admissions at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College (now Randolph College). Among my new colleagues was a R-MWC alumna, Martha Jane Daniel who, true confessions time, got me that job! We had begun to date the previous fall; and when she told me of an opening in the Admissions Office and suggested that I apply, I was intrigued but had doubts that this women’s college would hire a male to recruit students. I did apply and, to my amazement and delight, was brought on board. Thus began my very long affiliation with PCACAC and, not insignificantly, an almost equally long “affiliation” with Miss Daniel with whom I have recently celebrated 49 years of marriage. It was at the annual PCACAC meeting in Wilmington the next year that we announced our engagement to a roomful of admissions counterparts and good friends, and to this day we recall the outpouring of congratulations and support which was a signal that PCACAC was a family.

In 1974, I was invited to be the Principal at Salem Academy in Winston-Salem, NC, effectively severing ties with PCACAC....but only temporarily. Four years later, North Cross School in Roanoke hired me as Headmaster, a job which included being the college counselor as well. The school’s board of directors held the very sensible premise that having the Headmaster be the primary contact with colleges was a way to have a handle on how the school was regarded among competitive colleges. In addition to “running the school,” I was meeting with and counseling seniors as they made college plans. In retrospect, that sounds fairly daunting, but at the time it was energizing. And the real blessing in disguise was that I was establishing relationships with college admissions personnel in addition to my secondary school counterparts, something that would prove to be beneficial as my PCACAC involvement expanded.

I knew that being involved with PCACAC and NACAC was beneficial to the “college counseling side” of my duties at North Cross. In no time, I discovered that the camaraderie at those meetings was golden. They were more than professional opportunities: they were pivotal in building a support system. After a year or two of simply being present at meetings, I felt I needed to be contributing something and so I asked what that might be. To my complete surprise, I received a call from the Nominating Committee asking me to run for the office of Secretary, being assured that it was more titular than functional. I agreed to do that, being very sure that almost anyone with more PCACAC visibility would be elected. My opponent was such a person, highly respected and a great fellow, and I was relieved. However, I won....just

unbelievably. I was told that being from the most populous PCACAC state and having contacts on both sides of the college counseling desk were the deciding factors, but in truth the better candidate had not been elected. Balancing PCACAC responsibilities with my primary head of school duties was a challenge, but doable, and I served as Secretary with pleasure.

Then came another surprise call from the Nominating Committee. They asked me to run for President, something I reminded them I was ineligible to do because I was midway through a two year stint as Secretary. Thinking that had laid that ill-conceived notion to rest, I was blown away when the newsletter came out announcing me as one of two candidates for President of PCACAC. It was in print! I was helpless to undo it, but I was heartened to see that my opponent was a seasoned, much-respected guy who by every measurable standard was better qualified. How and why I won that election baffles me to this day, except that I suspect the same two advantages I cited earlier carried the day. If there is any “message” from this account of my involvement with PCACAC, it’s that lack of experience should never get in the way of leaping in and doing what you can! The support system within the organization will see you through! Then came the greatest challenge of my professional life. As President-elect of PCACAC, I was the Program Chair for the spring meeting. Simultaneously, it fell my lot to make arrangements for the major head-of-school annual meeting that same spring because I was the member living nearest the site of the meeting, The Homestead in Hot Springs, VA. Normally under such circumstances, one can rely on his staff to handle many of the normal school matters while juggling a multitude of “extras,” like two major conferences. Indeed, I had good help, but I also had a beloved receptionist who found the multitude of calls to be overwhelming, resorting to delivering 6-digit phone messages from names she had not gotten anywhere near right. When I would ask for clarification, she might say, “Well, I think it was someone from that P organization”....and thus PCACAC became known as the “P organization” among those working with me on that program. Both meetings were deemed successful, and here I am to tell the tale!

I will wind up this “installment” of the PCACAC Living History from my narrow vantage point by citing the two most important experiences emanating from my years in the organization. My wife and I moved to Charleston, SC in 1995 for a professional opportunity for her. I was a happy tag-along. I affiliated with a splendid girls school, Ashley Hall, as a part time college counselor, and I continued to grow an independent counseling services I called The Next Step. I stayed busy, but not to the detriment of soaking up this city’s limitless charms and attractions. Then one day came a call from the Program Committee for a planned, first-ever joint PCACAC/SACS conference asking me to be the keynote speaker for that meeting in April. The two primary instigators of this offer were Betty Delk from Hampton Roads Academy (PCACAC) and Sam Moss from Darlington School in Rome, GA (SACS). I mention them by name not only because they are friends and valued counterparts but also because, in truth, it is such names that have given credence to what our organization stands for (the list is long!).

The keynote speech was a mountaintop experience for me. To look out into an audience of 900 friends and colleagues was overwhelming, and any queasiness I may have had was replaced by a warm feeling that washed over me, making me think “How lucky can I be?!” As a sidebar, I should mention that a week before the meeting someone asked if I was ready for the big meeting and then offhandedly asked, “Are you going to sing, too?” My reputation for enjoying a microphone at a karaoke bar had caught up with me! But the question planted a seed; and after

weighing the idea I threw abandon to the wind. After a generous introduction by Sam Moss, I rose, went to the podium, and belted out the first stanza of Frank Sinatra's My Way, substituting "opening curtain" for "closing curtain." I laugh when I tell friends that I received a standing ovation at the beginning, not at the end, of my speech.

And that second important experience? Receiving the coveted Apperson Award, important because it symbolizes peer appreciation. To have worked alongside so many fellow educators for many years and considering that the greatest kind of privilege, having their endorsement in the form of the Apperson Award constitutes a professional apex both humbling and headshakingly unbelievable. And for me there was a rare bonus. The Award was presented by Leigh Martin Lowe, formerly of Roland Park Country School, a woman I had known since admitting her to R-MWC in the early '70's. Somehow, this rang all sorts of "right" bells, generationally speaking.

Audrey Hill tells the funny story about being at a meeting where much was made of the honor of receiving the Apperson Award. She turned to the person sitting next to her and asked, "Who is this Apperson fellow?" to which he replied, "That's me."

By now younger readers are asking, "Who is this Hudnall fellow?" the answer: "That's me, a grateful educator who has PCACAC as a key part of his memory bank."

Bert Hudnall