

The Last Word

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**“To the person who
does not know where he
wants to go there is no
favorable wind.”**

Seneca, Philosopher



Visionary Leadership

This spring, I have had the great pleasure of participating in our leadership development offering for aspiring teacher leaders. **Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders** is a BCPVPA leadership development program for current teachers interested in school leadership positions such as Vice-Principalships. As a BCPVPA staff member, and sometime facilitator, my role is to support the program and engage with the cohort of participating teachers as they learn more about the role of school leaders.

In 1999, I was a teacher at what was then Burnsvew Junior Secondary School in North Delta. Burnsvew is now a Grade 8-12 secondary school. At that point in my career, I was interested in furthering my school leadership aspirations, and I was focused on engaging myself in school-based or district leadership opportunities whenever they occurred.

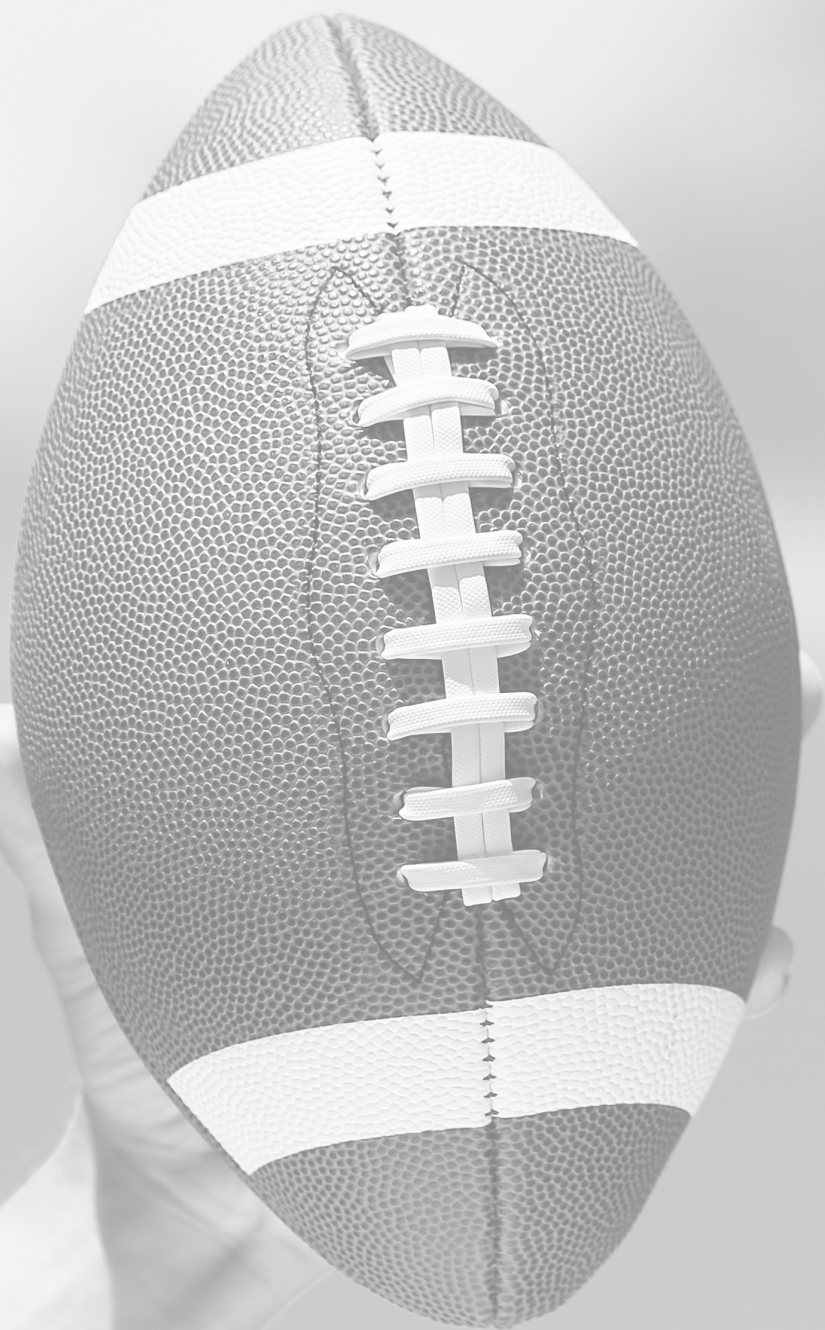
I was equally interested in raising my family in a smaller and more affordable community, so I began looking for Vice-Principalship opportunities outside of the Delta School District. In those days, teaching and Vice-Principalship opportunities were posted in the Vancouver Sun in the employment section, usually on Saturdays. So, on the weekend, I would scour the slim array of postings and opportunities across the province looking for the best fit. In the end, the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island became the most promising spot for relocation. My wife knew the valley well from her many summers spent at their family cabin on Hornby Island.

I applied for a House Vice-Principalship in the spring of 1999 at a Grade 7-9 school, and was shocked to be offered the position the day after the interview. I

was so surprised to be offered the position that I ashamedly told the superintendent at the time that I was going to respectfully request 24 hours to consult with my family before I gave him my answer. It was not supposed to work this way. This was the first of what I thought would be many interviews before I would be offered a position. To this day, that superintendent – who has long since retired – reminds me that I made him wait a full day before I accepted the offer. It was not that the opportunity was not appreciated: it was more about the finality of uprooting my family from our home in North Delta to a community and district that was largely unknown to us.

That spring I said goodbye to my colleagues and families at Burnsvew, and I spent the summer moving and settling into our new home in the Comox Valley and our Island lifestyle. In late August, the local Principals' and Vice-Principals' Chapter held a retreat at the outdoor school on Hornby Island for a day of teambuilding and conversations about the challenges and promises of the coming school year. We gathered on a school bus at the school board office in the early morning to take the two ferries across to Hornby Island for our retreat. Do I remember what we discussed, and how we prepared for the coming year? Sadly, I do not. The day was a blur of new faces, names, and attempts to familiarize myself with policies and procedures that I never had to fully understand as a teacher.

What I remember most about that first official day as a Vice-Principal is that a spontaneous touch football game took place on a large field next to the cafeteria during our lunch break. Out of a game of



catch between a few Principals and Vice-Principals came a spirited touch football game filled with good natured taunts and laughter with my new school leader colleagues. I could barely remember all their names as we played together that lunchtime, but I do remember how fun it was to share this moment together. At the end of the day, we had dinner together at the Thatch Pub before boarding our school bus back to Courtenay. It was dark when we arrived, and after a long day of sharing and learning, people were tired and eager to head home. Now, more than two decades later I find it oddly amusing that I only remember the football game from that day but, as you would guess, it wasn't really about a pick-up game played by a group of middle-aged kids. It was the fact that I felt like I belonged to something of importance. I loved being a teacher, but what I wanted at that stage of my career was to broaden my influence. I wanted to do more for children and their families, and while I loved teaching I felt somewhat constrained by that role. I just wanted to be able to contribute more broadly to the success of students.

When I arrived home late that night from my first day with my new colleagues, my wife was curious about my day and everything that happened. I shared the story from start to finish, talking about all of the people that I had met, and the activities, conversations, and learnings from the day. Early that morning, I had left the house with some trepidation and anxiety about all the unknowns that lay ahead for me. I felt very much like I was the new kid in the neighbourhood on the first day of school. In the end, I had spent the day with like-minded people who had a passion for their work and a strong commitment to setting positive life trajectories for the children in their care. I returned home feeling much more content and confident that I had found the place that I was meant to be. I would never have guessed that an impromptu touch football game would be the thing that made the difference.