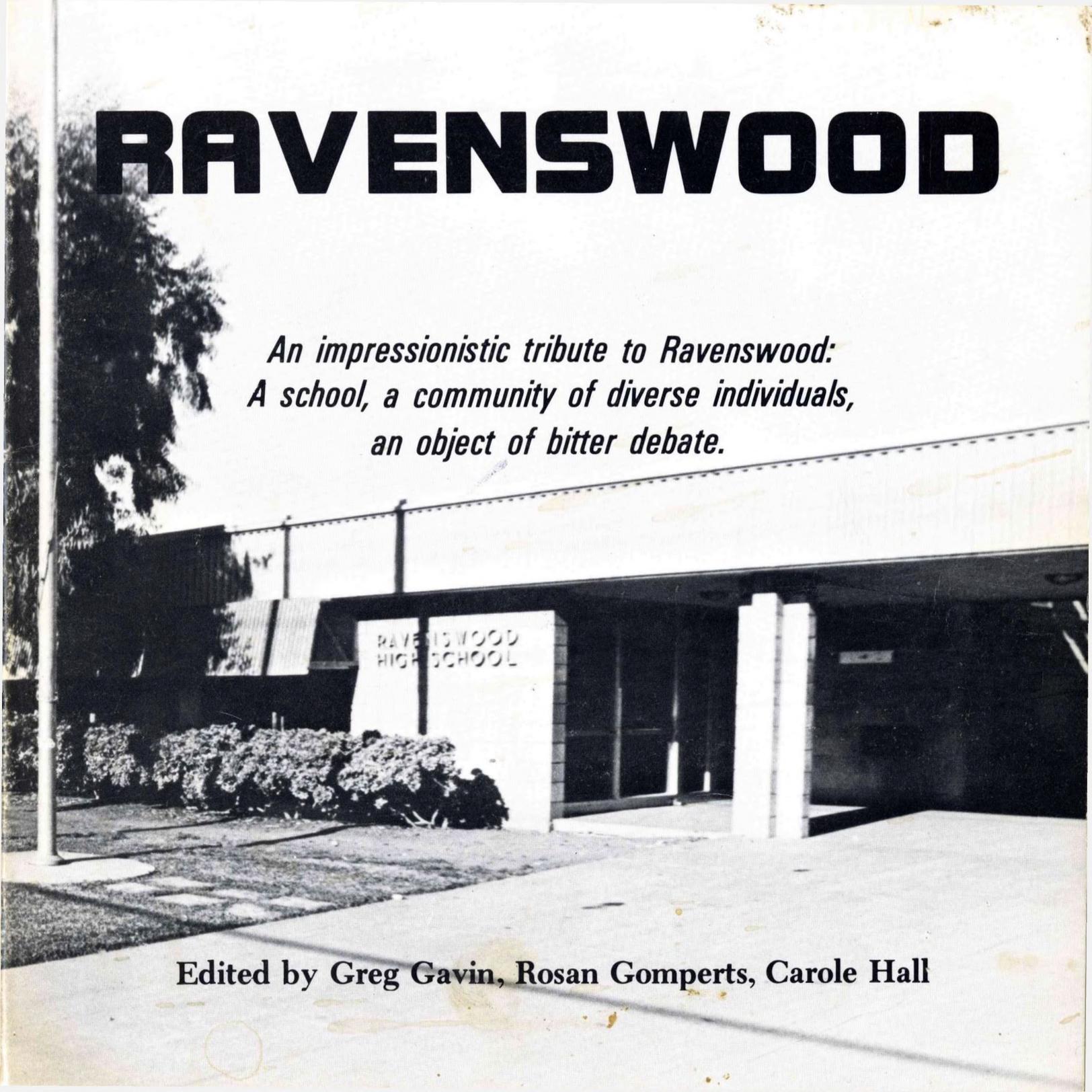


RAVENSWOOD



*An impressionistic tribute to Ravenswood:
A school, a community of diverse individuals,
an object of bitter debate.*

Edited by Greg Gavin, Rosan Gomperts, Carole Hall

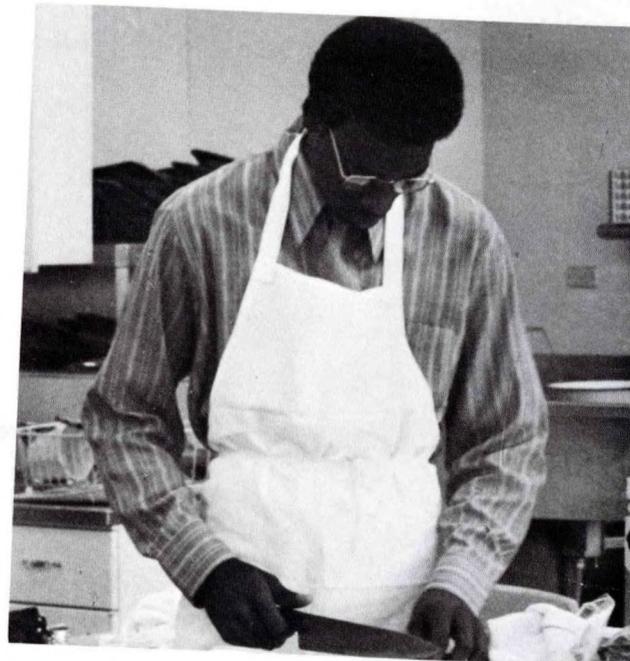
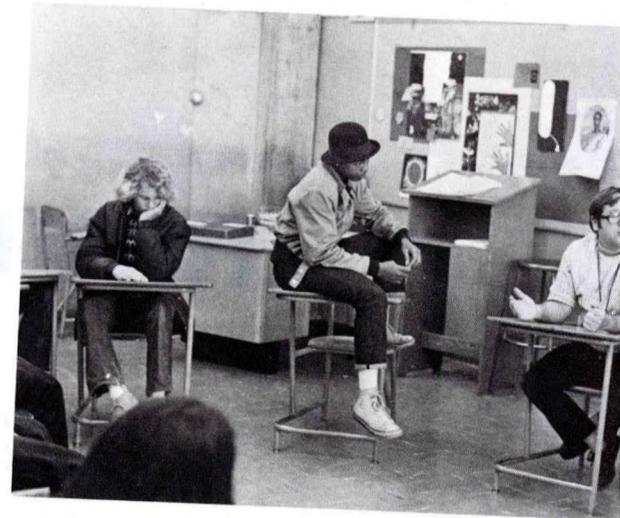
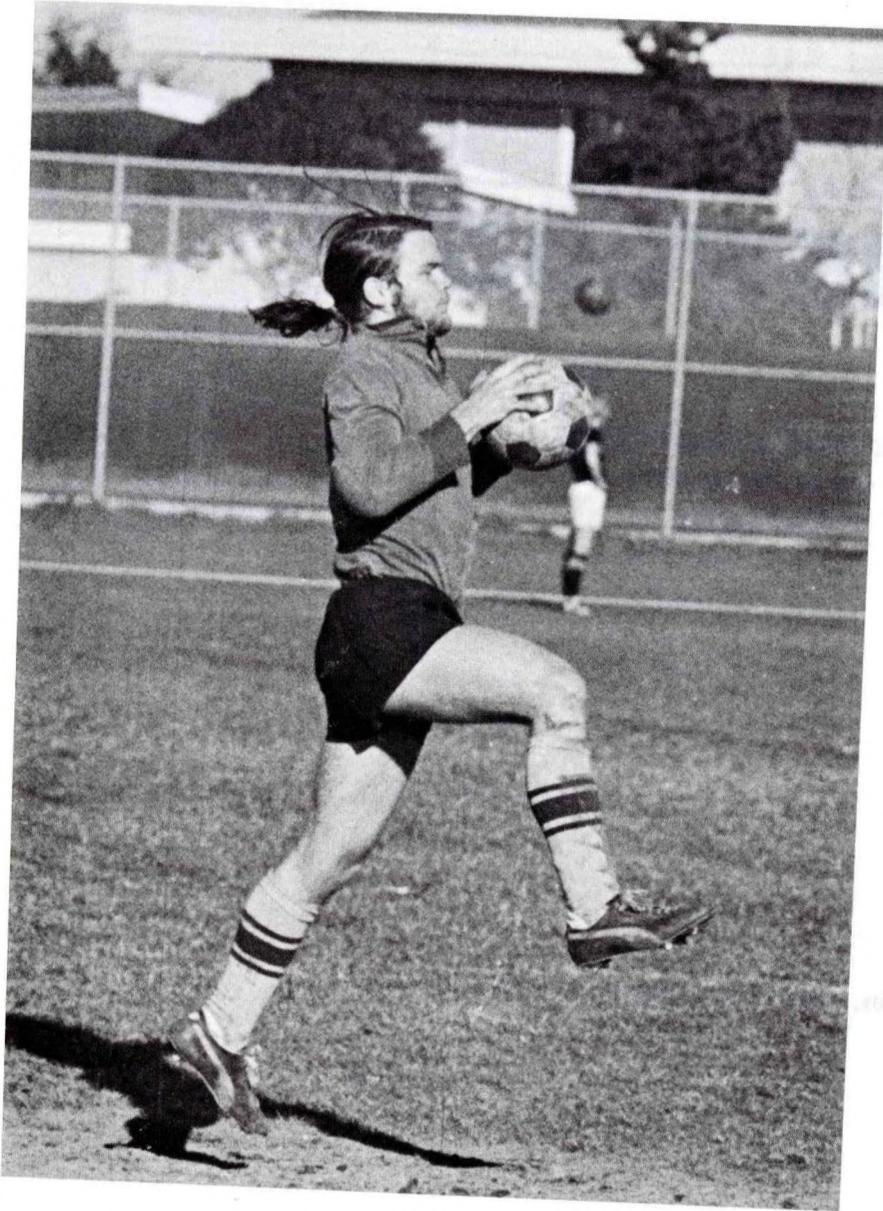
RAVENSWOOD

*An impressionistic tribute to Ravenswood:
A school, a community of diverse individuals,
an object of bitter debate.*

Edited by Greg Gavin, Rosan Gomperts, Carole Hall

RAVENSWOOD

*An impressionistic tribute to Ravenswood:
A school, a community of diverse individuals,
an object of bitter debate.*



Edited by Greg Gavin, Rosan Gomperts, Carole Hall

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to:

San Francisco Call Bulletin, Habari Gani, Palo Alto Times, Redwood City Tribune, Ravenswood Yearbook, and Ilium, for quotes and photographs.

Charlotte Nasr, Ed Ford, Betty Carr, Malcolm Taylor, Shannon Bradley and the Ravenswood Book class, Deborah Sanderson and the Graduation Insurance Program for research and opinion.

Robert Kellar, for advice.

The Gomperts, Gavin, and Hall families for caring.

Without such help this book could not have been realized, and we wish to express our gratitude.

— The editors

Cover Photo taken by Gene Chappell.

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 76-44062
Copyright © 1976 by Greg Gavin, Rosan Gomperts, Carole Hall
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
First Edition: 1976

Published by Pressed for Time Press
132 Alta Vista Rd., Woodside, California 94062

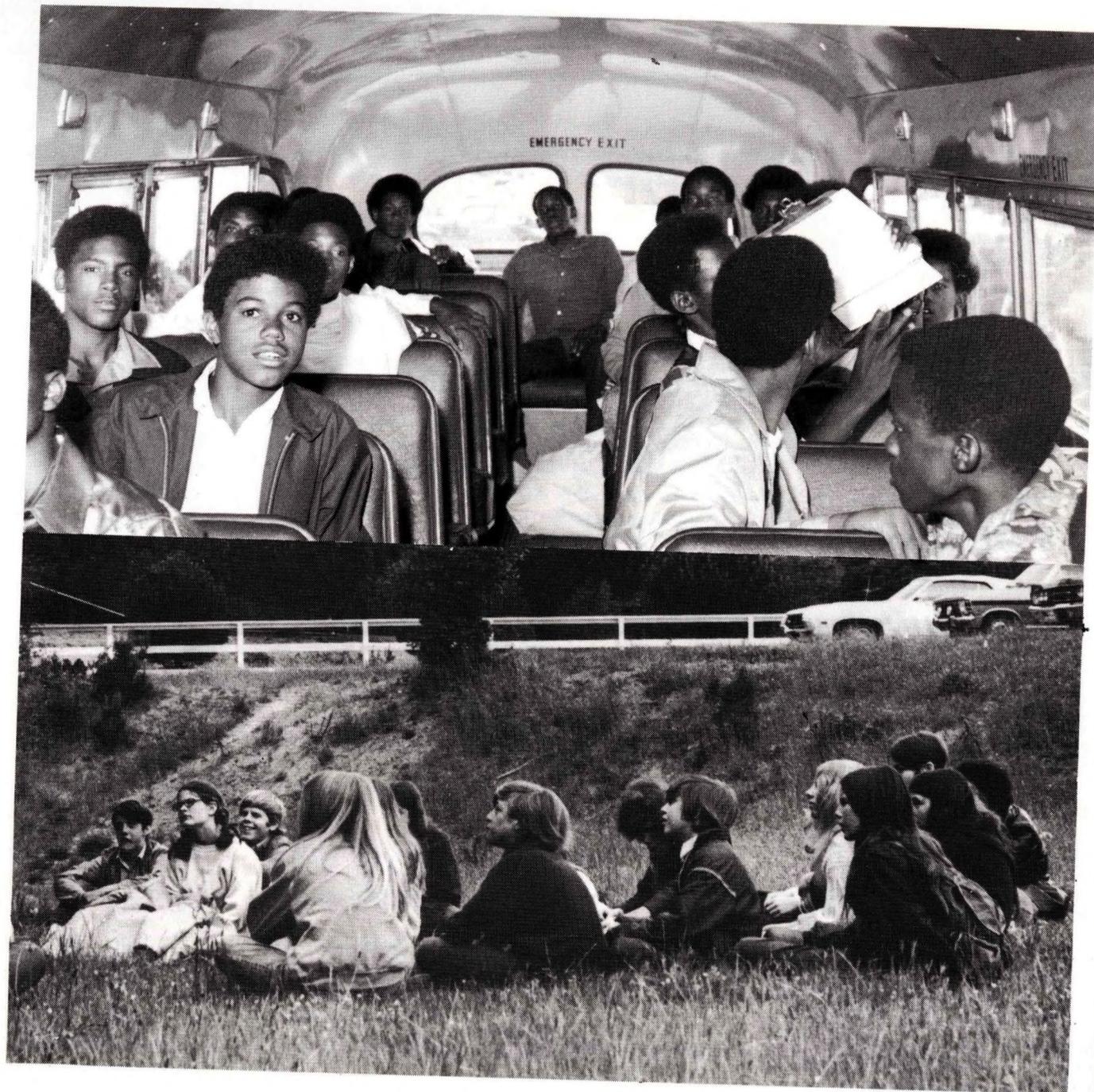
CONTENTS

ONE	Ravenswood	8
TWO	The boundaries	16
THREE	De-facto segregation	22
FOUR	Protest	30
FIVE	The change	36
SIX	The new school	42
SEVEN	Closure	56
EIGHT	Reflections	64

CONTENTS

Ravenwood	1
The boundaries	10
De-facto segregation	15
Protest	20
The change	25
The new school	30
Closure	35
Reflections	40

*Dedicated to all the people
who were
the school.*



ONE Ravenswood

One school or many?

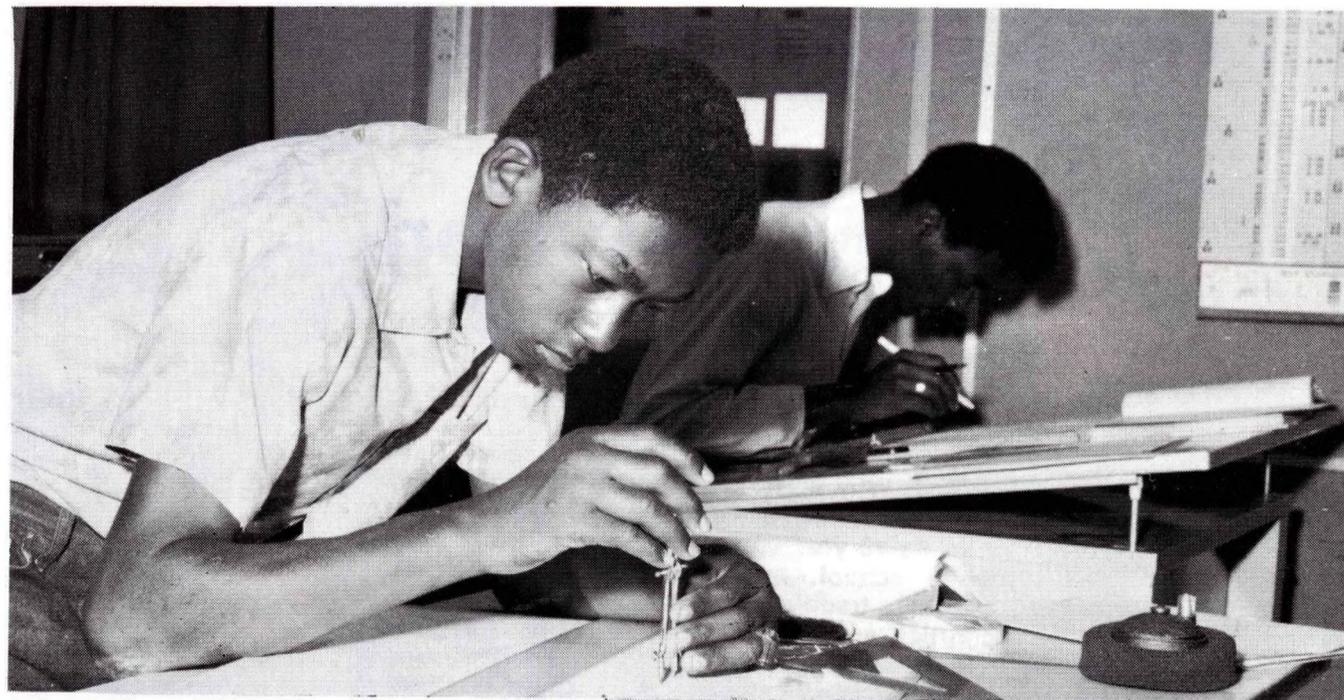
This book is about a high school called Ravenswood. Why write a book about a high school? Why about Ravenswood?

In its 19 year history Ravenswood has been a white school, a black school, an alternative school, a traditional school, a school riddled with conflict, a school with busing for desegregation, a school whose student body has been a majority of voluntary transfers, and usually a mixture of these schools.

Ravenswood has been simultaneously called "the worst school in the Bay Area" and "a great educational experience."

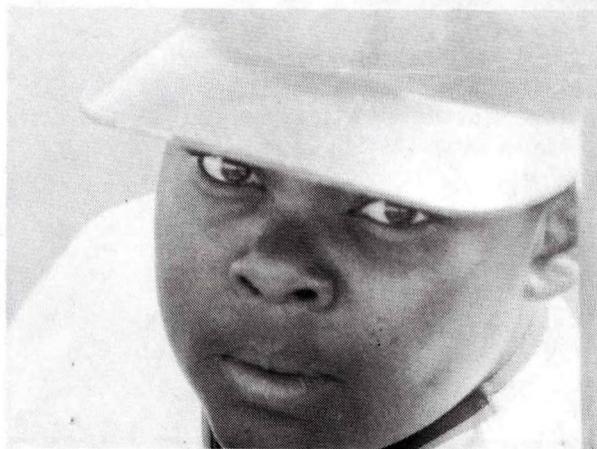
But now Ravenswood is a dead school. This book will try to explain why Ravenswood was a meeting ground for so much diversity, how it was dealt with, and why the school closed.

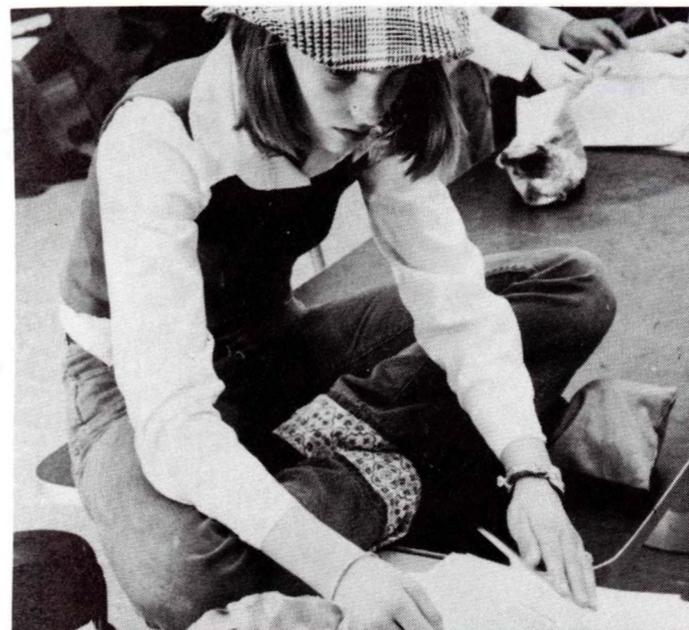
Ravenswood opened in 1958. Some people even then felt that building the school was a mistake, and that it was doomed to closure. But no one could foresee the school's unique and controversial future.



Ravenswood is an indispensable institution to the East Palo Alto community.

Ronald Shirley, student

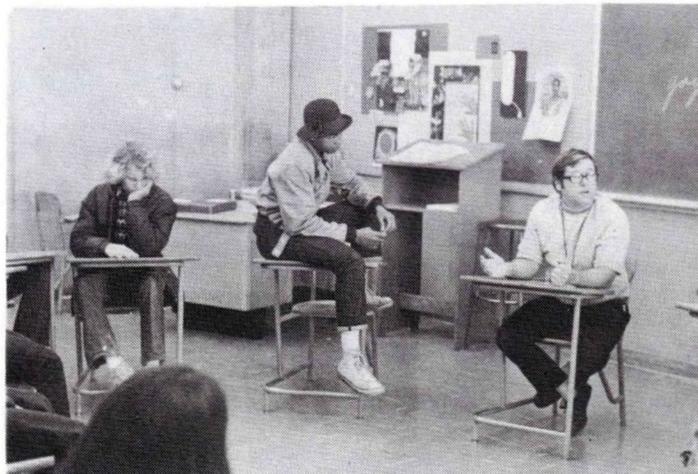




Ravenswood has changed my life. I'm more open to other people and try to understand them. Ravenswood is a very special school.

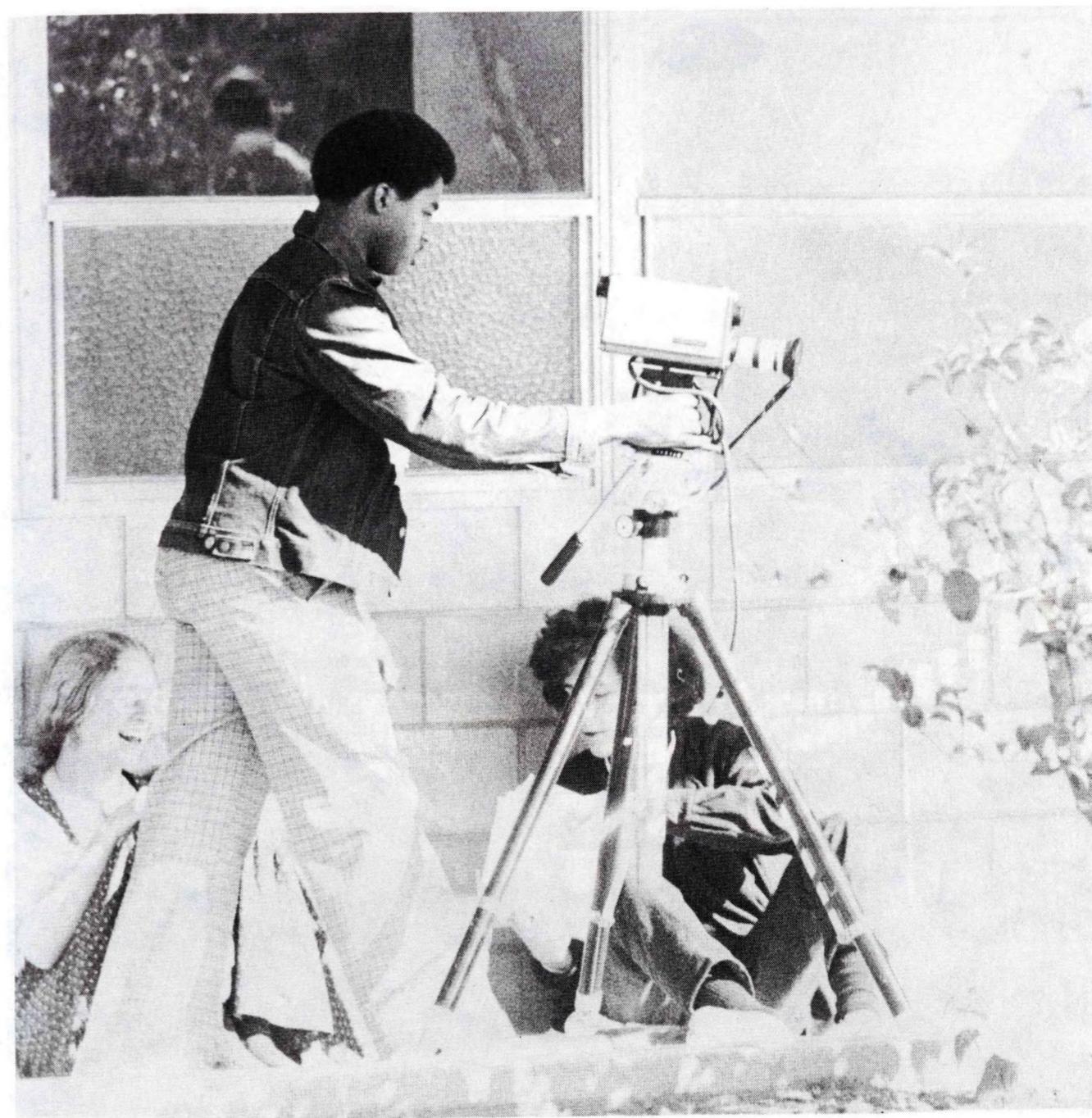
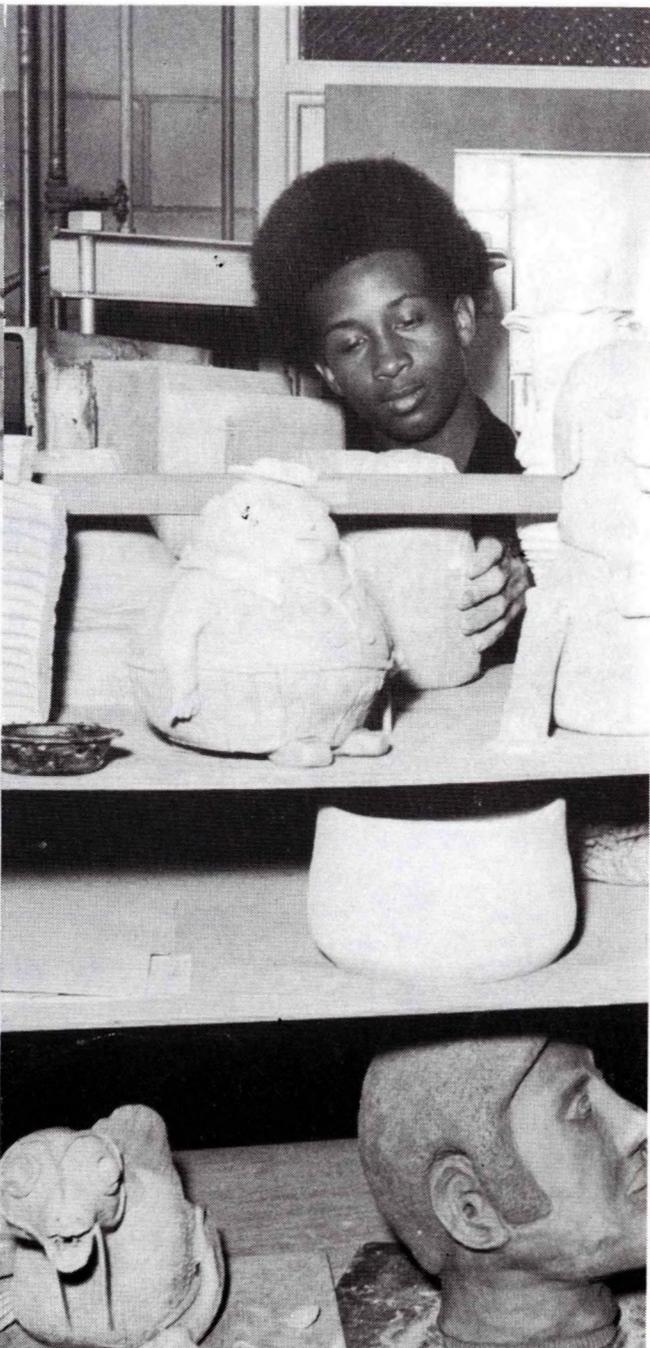
Carol Soshea, Student

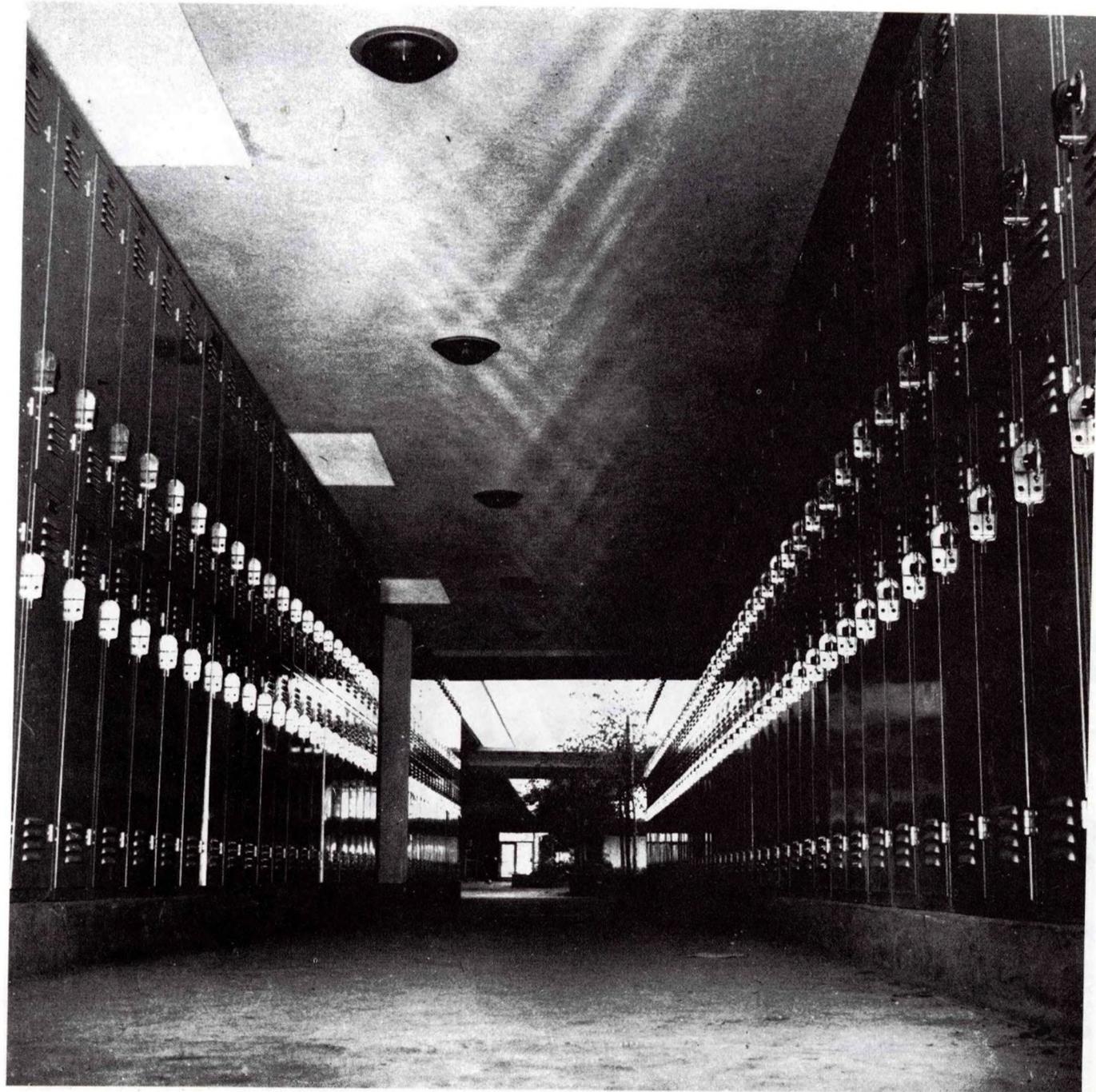




The tragedy of Ravenswood is that we failed to realize that by letting every individual have his separate niche, there is no community.

Bill Vines, teacher





TWO

The boundaries

Who will go? 1955-63

In the early years Ravenswood was a traditional school, with the same cross-section of courses, teachers, and activities as other schools in the district. But it was plagued by controversy. In public debate, boundaries were always the Ravenswood problem. Who would go to Ravenswood? The question haunted the Sequoia Union High School District [SUHSD].

It was one thing for the district to pass a bond issue in May, 1955, to build Ravenswood High School for East Palo Alto, California. After all, the community of nearly 25,000 was growing. But it was another matter to decide where the school should be built and who should go there.

Should the attendance boundary parallel the Bayshore Freeway, isolating what was projected to become a black community?

Throughout the summer of 1957, community leaders from East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, the SUHSD director of guidance and director of child welfare, and 3,668 petitioning parents argued for a boundary that would include a fair percentage of stable, white neighborhoods.

But the school board voted the Bayshore Freeway as the basic dividing line. And Ravenswood opened in 1958 at the southern end of the SUHSD on flatland between the Bayshore Freeway and the San Francisco Bay, at 2050 Cooley Avenue.

But the boundaries would become the issue again, and again provoke vehement reaction. The real problem at Ravenswood had to lay deeper than boundaries.

Why else, with Ravenswood operating well

below its 1500 student capacity in 1962 and the other district schools overcrowded, would 600 people pack a board meeting to protest any realignment that put them inside the Ravenswood line? Why else was it impossible for board committees, civil rights organizations, homeowners, teachers, and coalitions of various interest groups to compromise on a Ravenswood boundary that the communities would accept?

Certainly, by the spring of 1963, the board was ready for compromise, but none was forthcoming. So in a split decision, the board voted to extend the Ravenswood boundary to bring 180 white students into the school.

For the summer, then, the boundary issue was settled. But the deeper issues continued to simmer, undiscussed and unresolved.

VIEWS

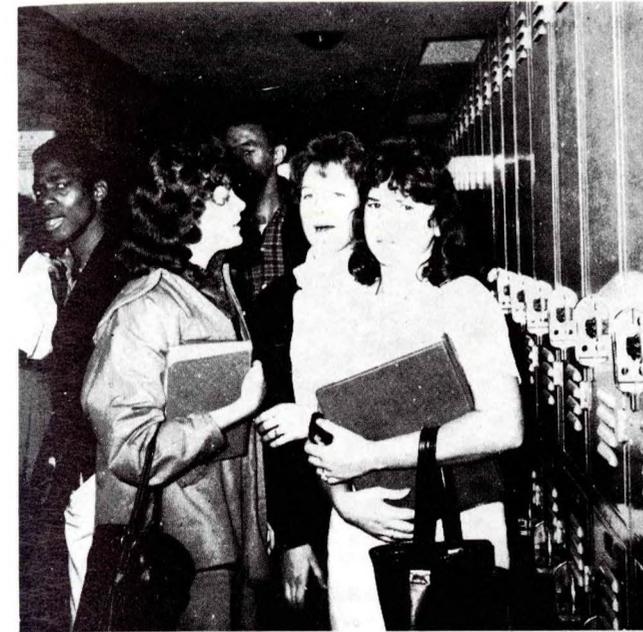


East Palo Alto has had economic problems from the first days when it was planned as the port city of Ravenswood, 115 years ago. After that it lost its poultry business, missed its hoped-for industrial boom, and settled down as a largely low-income residential area.

Subdivisions sprang up in East Palo Alto in about 1947 and industry was soon attracted by low taxes.

East Palo Alto has always had a low tax base, which hindered it in its move to incorporate in 1958. After that, the Kavanaugh tract was annexed into Menlo Park, leaving East Palo Alto without that tax income.

Palo Alto Times, Jan. 3, 1966



It used to be that a white family in East Palo Alto would go to sleep at night and if they woke up and a black family had moved next door, they'd move out, like we had some kind of disease.

Marcie Combs, student

It (SUHSD board policy) is a policy of containment which can only make East Palo Alto a poorer place to live. White people will move away, and so will Negroes who are able to.

There is a feeling of rejection of us as a community. I'm telling you, this has a depressing effect on a minority race.

Ed Becks, parent in S.F. Call Bulletin, April 12, 1963

It (the proposed boundary adjustment sending Willow area students across the freeway to Ravenswood) hit us like a bombshell...Our first thought was, 'Oh no you don't, not to us.' But we came to believe that the thing to do was to build up Ravenswood educationally through smaller classes and a bigger variety of subject matter, and to make it an even bigger school, with a higher proportion of white students than had previously been proposed.

The image had been created that Ravenswood was a sub-par school. We felt the community couldn't rest until this was changed. We still feel this way.

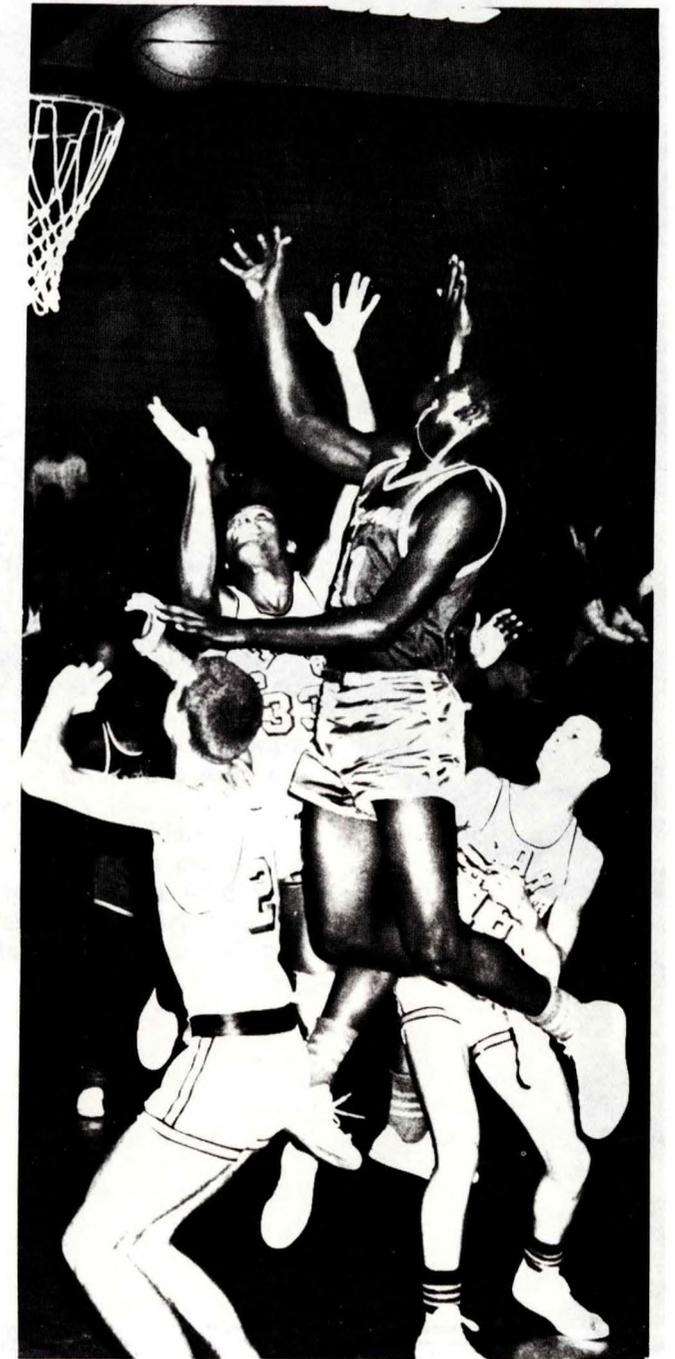
*Addison Janes, Chairman
Willow Residents Assn.,
S.F. Call Bulletin
April 12, 1963*



Ravenswood High is an every day example of democracy with students of many nationalities. Education is available for all through the departments of Art, Business Education, English, Homemaking, Industrial Arts, Language, Music, Physical Education, Science and Social Studies. A fine program of student Government and activities furnish the students a complete education.

May her graduates ever be living examples of the high ideals of service and democracy for which Ravenswood High stands.

Donald L. Bogle, principal





THREE

De-facto segregation

What's the problem? 1963-67

By 1963 it was clear that whatever people called the Ravenswood problem, the real issue was race. When the Congress of Racial Equality [CORE] and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] demonstrated in the area, they expressed the common fear that not even the new boundary could keep Ravenswood from becoming all black. The Supreme Court decision of 1954 on school desegregation had called attention to the affect of residential segregation on schools, and East Palo Alto was increasingly a black community.

That fall, only half of the white students in the new attendance area showed up for classes at Ravenswood. Blacks from East Palo Alto were turned away from Woodside High School, and minority enrollment at Ravenswood hit 50 percent.

At this point, the NAACP took its protest from the streets to the courts with a suit that charged the SUHSD with barring minorities from equal educational opportunities. Premeditated or not, the suit said, district policies segregated students by color and no steps were being taken to change those policies.

The next year it looked as if the district was finally going to make those steps, and break through to a solution to the problem of ethnic imbalance. Various committees started digging for answers. Congress pressed with a threat to withhold funds from segregated school systems. In good faith, the NAACP withdrew its lawsuit and waited for the district to make its move.

The move that came was explosive: a joint citizens and school administrative committee recommendation to phase-out Ravenswood over a three year period. The recommendation was supposed to be a simple, straight forward answer to a problem, but it turned out to be a major problem in itself. The board was in a bind.

On one hand, taxpayers defeated a bond issue to build two new high schools and voted out two board members who supported a Ravenswood phase-out.

On the other hand, Mothers for Equal Education [MEE] in East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park picketed Ravenswood and sent members to Sacramento to petition the State Department of Education to force a halt to de facto segregation. By 1966, MEE was threatening a boycott of Ravenswood unless the phase-out proposal prevailed.

Caught in the middle, the board chose to risk outraging MEE and civil rights groups by tabling the phase-out proposal and adopting a voluntary transfer plan instead. Somehow it seemed easier to imagine letting 100 Ravenswood students transfer out of the school in exchange for 100 volunteers who would offer to come in from other schools.

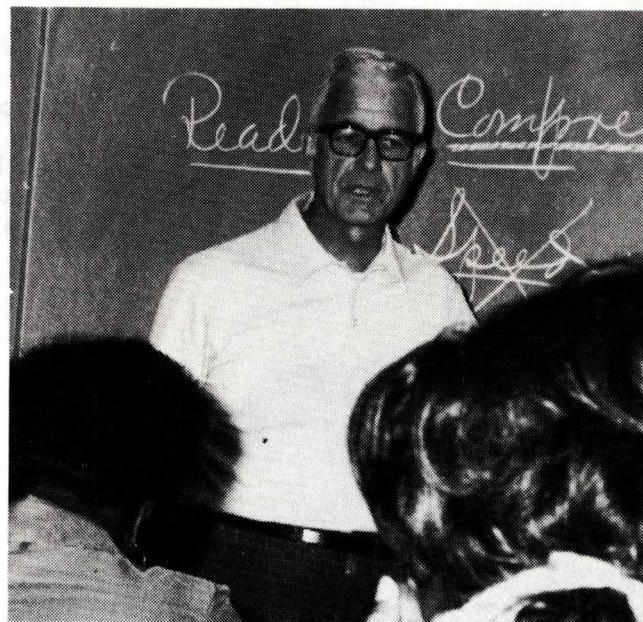
But the transfer plan was dropped when the board found itself trapped by yet another dilemma: whether to accept accusations of prejudice if they limited transfers out of

Ravenswood to blacks, or to aggravate racial imbalance when whites transferred out of Ravenswood as parents polled indicated they would if given the chance.

MEE responded by acting on their belief that black students could get a better education outside a segregated Ravenswood, and placed Ravenswood students in white Palo Alto homes and schools. They called it a "sneak-out." Meanwhile, Ravenswood began a redevelopment period emphasizing tutoring and extra-curricular activities.

Tensions in the community ran high regarding Ravenswood, but local residents were reluctant to unite behind one definition of the Ravenswood problem, much less one solution to it. Was the problem really ethnic imbalance, or was it district neglect of a troubled school?

VIEWS



The day (my son) graduated from Ravenswood, I bet that 75 percent of his class was not performing at grade level. We have to face that fact. To keep each other down is the biggest mockery we can make of human beings.

Gertrude Wilks, community leader

The people of East Palo Alto are caught in the middle of a paradox. Although the people are all members of a democratic society, where "all men are created equal," they must fight to gain a place in that so-called democratic society that should be their birthright.

One important area covered in the struggle for equality is education. The people of East Palo Alto are rightfully concerned about the education their children are receiving, and out of their concern have sprung several groups working toward total integration, but each by different means. Each group offers a solution, and each solution increases the chaos already created by the problem. Up to now no one solution has settled the matter, and certainly several solutions put into use at once have not solved anything.

Changing boundaries, voluntary transfers, efforts to phase out Ravenswood High School were hopeful solutions; but Ravenswood remains, in the words of some a ghetto. The Ravenswood P.T.A., Mothers

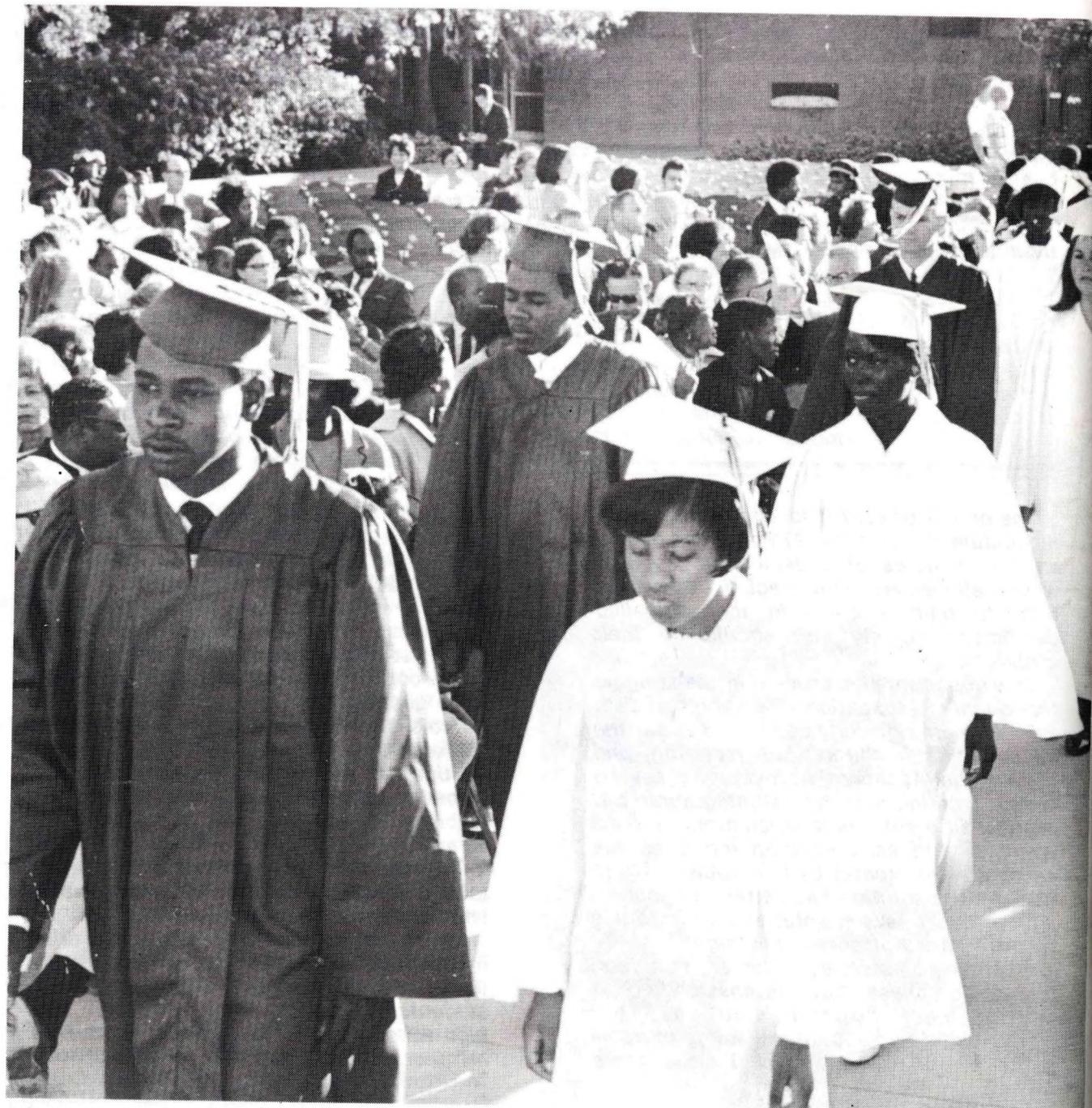
for Equal Education, the school board: all are concerned with the situation. Citizens are divided by their loyalties to a particular group, each foolishly fighting each other, and still an answer has not been reached.

Criticism of the educational opportunities offered at Ravenswood indicates that several of the concerned groups really do not know what goes on at Ravenswood. Not many schools offer what Ravenswood does to its students.

Both the faculty and some of the concerned students at Ravenswood have worked to bring Ravenswood out of its academic slump.

The claims against Ravenswood aren't totally invalid. The upward rising racial imbalance is obvious; one-third of the student body need work in reading and arithmetic; out of 48 courses in English, 19 are in the remedial category; the number of students continuing their education after high school is low compared to the number in other schools; but who is at fault?

Mari Tsutsumi, student



Palo Alto Times

Even though classes were structured, we weren't learning what we were supposed to. When I got off to college I found I was way behind. Maybe we had greater participation but academically, we weren't learning what we were told we were learning.

Faye Knox, student

People who live in East Palo Alto are just as intelligent and just as capable of deciding what is bad and what is good for their community as those who live west of the freeway.

Regarding the boycott, we have tried for seven years to improve the racial imbalance and the quality of education at Ravenswood High School. We have been unable to get through to the school board by talking.

*Robert Hoover, community leader
in Palo Alto Times Sept. 30, 1966*

The experience I had at Ravenswood is one that you can never learn in books.

Ken Semon, student

In a letter to the Palo Alto Times of October 8, 1966, Mariam C. Nixon outlined two factors that made Ravenswood, "a frustrating morass that can be more deadly than a fully segregated school in the South." What she meant is the majority of white teachers were trying to buy the black students' friendships instead of pushing them to learn. The teachers say this brings a friendly relationship between the student and teacher, but Mrs. Nixon states it is a sign of a major flaw.

At Ravenswood and other schools in the SUHSD, people have a lack of understanding of each other because of different economic backgrounds and this is what has been confusing whites' feelings toward blacks and blacks' feelings toward whites. Both groups are trying to combat forces that have roots beyond Ravenswood.

Sheila Harris, student

There was a lot of activity, a lot of school pride and spirit. Every lunch time we had softball games and there would be 75 to 80 people on the field.

James "Butch" Williams, student



Reynolds Crutchfield



FOUR

Protest

Who's in control? 1967-70

For three years, Ravenswood rocked from the consequences of educational deterioration, short-sighted decisions, and rising political activism.

Just before the opening of school in 1967, the board inadvertently revised bus routes in a way that virtually no black students could ride buses to school. As a result, students from East Menlo Park held a sit-in in protest. This, combined with pressure from parents, restored bus service.

That sit-in was just a preview of things to come. By 1969, student demonstrations at Ravenswood had ousted the principal and numerous teachers in a quest for community control and quality education. Students wanted Ravenswood changed but also wanted it to remain intact. Soon it became apparent, however, that time was running out.

The board realized as early as 1967 that it needed professional help to correct district problems tied to racial imbalance and hired Management and Economics Research, Inc. [MERI] to come up with a long range plan. The state board of education, however, denied the district's requests for the sweeping changes the MERI report recommended [e.g., phasing out several schools, creating high school education centers with 3500 students and school-within-schools].

Blocked on one level, the board moved ahead locally by financing 115 minority transfers out of Ravenswood to neighboring schools and districts. But this action was too little, too late, underestimating the new mood and new demands arising in a 75 percent black Ravenswood.

On the first day of school in 1968, 500 students rallied on the football field in support of demands for improved classes, ethnic studies, teacher transfers, and a new minority principal. For the next week, a sit-in in the administrative building disrupted classes. The staff scattered, the principal resigned, and the district negotiated the demands.

VIEWS



If the result could be called a student victory, it was hollow. What followed was too much distrust, instability, and interruption for a normal teaching program. Learning went on, but in an environment now widely conceded to be in a state of collapse.

The California Teachers Association, called in by Ravenswood's demoralized faculty, concluded, "This is not a Ravenswood High School problem, nor an East Palo Alto problem, but a Sequoia Union High School District problem. The district is admittedly handicapped by arbitrary boundaries, by the geography of the Peninsula, and by the lack of a unifying political structure. Nevertheless, the Ravenswood High situation cannot be treated as something separate because of its location. It will not go away if no attention is paid to it, and it cannot be solved fastidiously with bureaucratic mittens. It requires expert, hard, sincere work in human relations, and it is a contact problem."

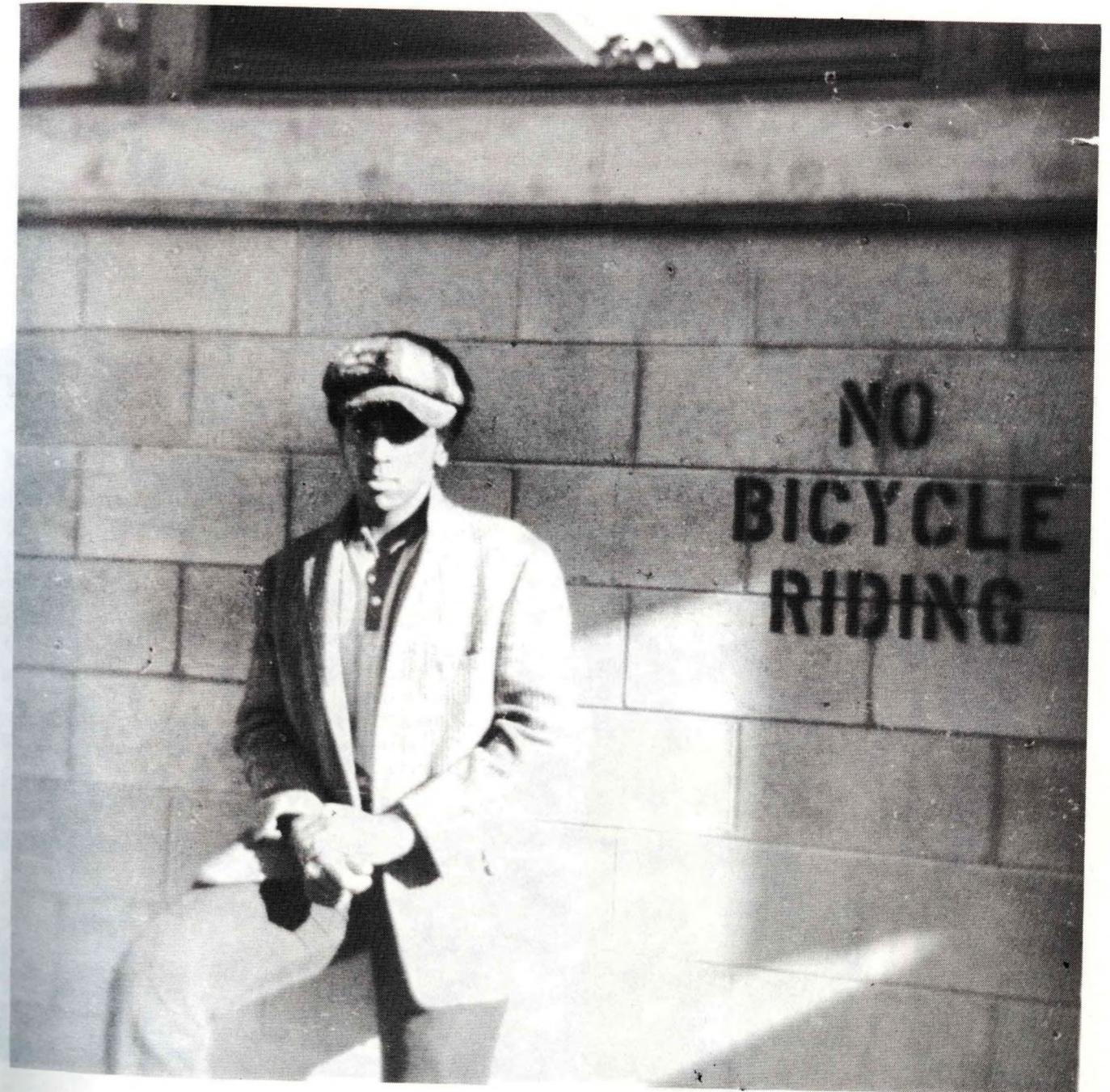
When the CTA report urged discontinuing Ravenswood and putting a model high school in its place, the board responded with the speed that only a crisis could provoke.

In 1968 the students at Ravenswood were fiery people. It was do or die. That's the idealistic stage. That's what people told me I was: "You're idealistic. You're just going through a stage." But everything was happening, every year in a row.

There would be the Day School, or the Community House was having something, we were picketing, we were canvassing for the new Co-op, we were getting people out to vote. We were asking people if they wanted to change East Palo Alto's name to Nairobi; we were knocking on doors.

East Palo Alto was the place to be. It was Nairobi. We knew we were brilliant, we were fiery, we were glowing.

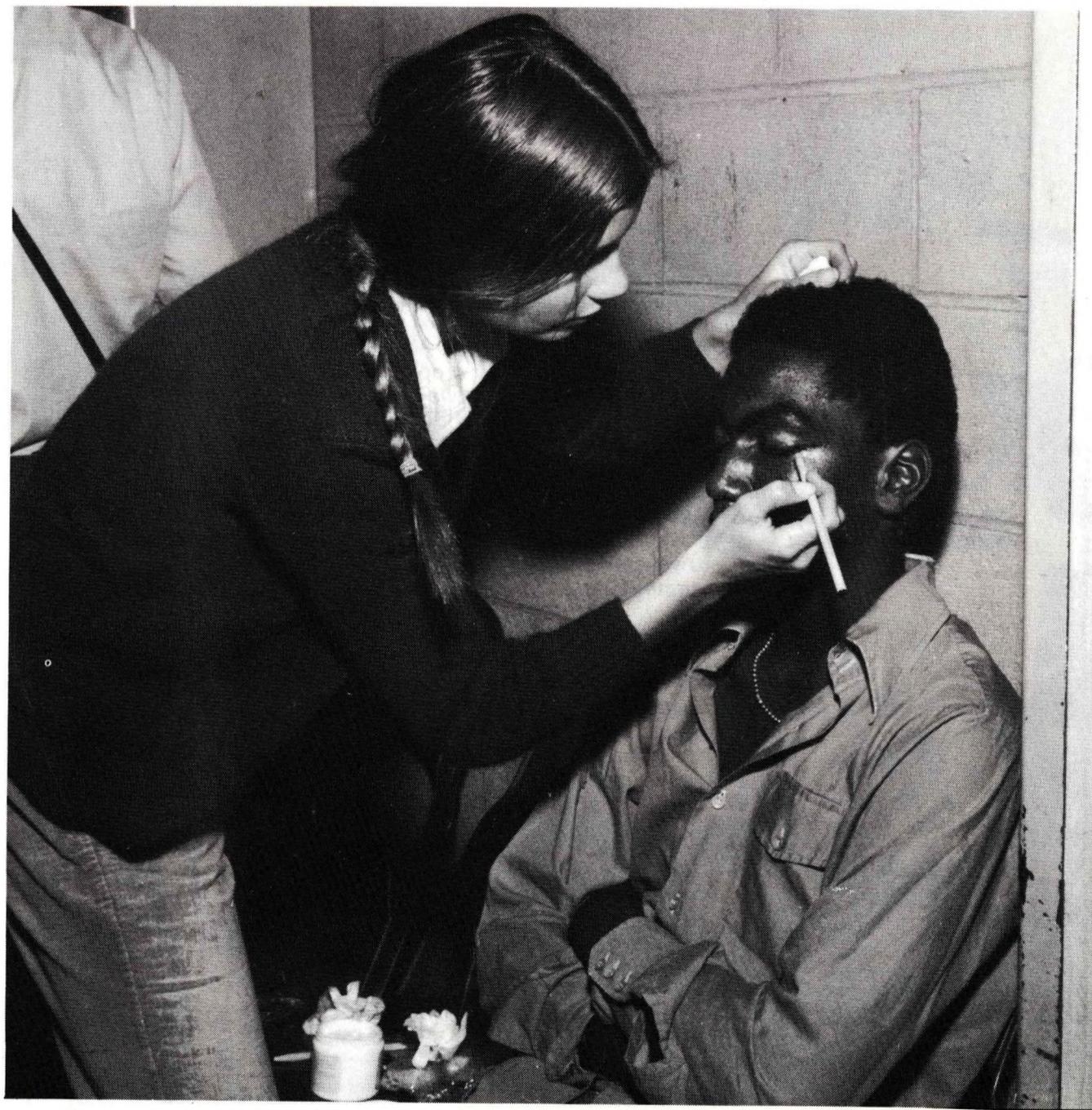
Schery Mitchell, student





We have committed a number of sins of omission and commission. That we haven't done anything significant prior to this time to end de-facto segregation is probably our number one sin, one that falls on the shoulders of the entire community. The voters have hamstrung the board and the administration on this issue. Because of tenure laws as well as humaneness, we have done little about incompetent staff members at Ravenswood (other schools as well). We've known about them. The school and district administration were willing for Ravenswood to live with a number of intolerable situations, unmoved by them unless motivated by an explosion. In all fairness, it must be stated that the same stresses exist at the other schools; they differ however in degree and in the fact that complications due to race are not as visible as at Ravenswood.

Malcolm J. Taylor, Principal



FIVE

The change

Dream or intrusion? 1970-71

Desegregation was still the primary issue for the Sequoia Union High School District, and how to change Ravenswood, the primary problem. Phase-out no longer fitted the times. Ravenswood looked like it was here to stay, but only on two key conditions: that there be a radical transformation of its image and that district-wide desegregation be accomplished at the same time.

Desegregation could only be achieved if large numbers of white students enrolled at Ravenswood. For that to happen, Ravenswood had to be made not just a new school, but a stunningly attractive educational environment, an ideal school. To some people the idea was intriguing, a rare chance to innovate and take a stand for equal rights. But to others, it was a threat.

At the heart of planning for the new Ravenswood was forced busing based on random selection that would occur if enough volunteers both in and out of Ravenswood failed to materialize to create a 75/25 white/black ratio, there. Strident rejection of this strategy came from both sides of the freeway.

Ravenswood students boycotted one day to protest forced desegregation. In the next school board election voters defeated candidates and incumbents supporting mandatory busing. The message was clear. One of the new board's first decisions was that the new Ravenswood's staff and supporters would have to recruit volunteers for their experiment without any mandatory back-up.

What was the experiment? What, after all, is an ideal school? District staff and teachers reviewed dozens of schemes. But in the atmosphere of social change that characterized the times, these

ideas seemed important: participation, human understanding, individual progress, success-orientation, involvement, and responsibility. Ravenswood's ideal, in short, was to reduce alienation, one of the major concerns of the 1970's, and in doing so, to become an alternative to traditional schools.

So Ravenswood, the magnet in the SUHSD push for desegregation, became simultaneously, Ravenswood, the alternative school. But the board's retreat from mandatory busing made it questionable whether or not the district was indeed pushing for desegregation or backing alternative education. And neither desegregation nor alternative education fit comfortably into the black community's agenda for the 70's since for many, community control replaced integration as an ideal, and teaching traditional academic skills seemed like a more important job for schools to do than reducing alienation.

VIEWS

As you all know next year our school will be turned into a school with majority white. It is at present 95 percent black. How do you like that? Next year our black, beautiful, and soulful school is going to turn into one of the biggest hippie fields in the district....

I don't want to walk down the halls of Ravenswood next year and say "Hi guy." I want to walk and be proud of what I see and say "what's happening brother!" I don't want to listen to Simon and Garfunkel at my senior prom and I'm sure you don't want to either. I want to dig on the Temps. And I don't want to be doing the frug, either, I want to still be digging on the Cold Duck if it's still in.

Sandra Boulding, student

Black people should be tired of getting messed around, tired of reacting, living as somebody else's shadow. Ain't you tired of working under "the man's" terms, jumping every time he says "—you?"

Before when we wanted to go to his white schools, he said, "hell no!" Then we started being halfway proud, trying to build up our own schools, proud and black, only to have him take it away....

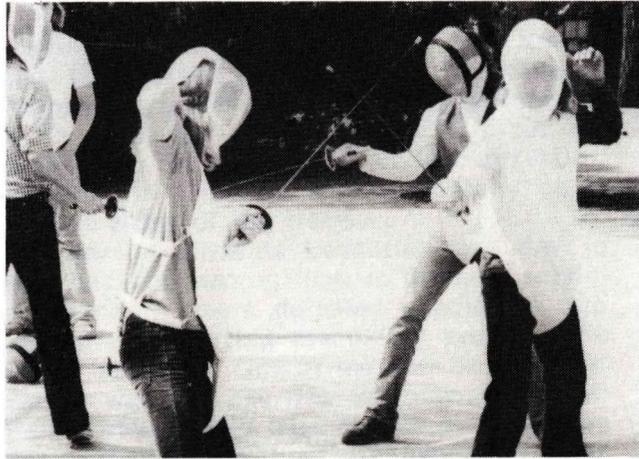
The "new school," the desegregation, means phasing out of the black community, black people; black students will lose. We, as black students, will be going through so many changes that we won't have a chance to be educated to survive in our own community.

Habari Gani, editorial

Although I had begun my teaching career in India amidst statewide border alignment agitation that included student hartals, gerhaves, and stopping of trains by students laying on the railroad tracks, I was unprepared and surprised at the intensity with which some of our Ravenswood students threw themselves into "closure." The Palo Alto Times story front page and with a picture said, "Rumpus closes Ravenswood High". For those of us for whom it was a "first" experience, riot would have been a more accurate term.

Lynn Hunwick, teacher





Those of us who "founded" this new school in 1971 came here as risk-takers undertaking a bold experiment in human relations and education.

The emphasis of the comment varied. Some staff and students came primarily to take a personal role in desegregation. Some came primarily to take part in the educational experiment. But in either emphasis there was risk—the risk that one would wake up one morning wishing she or he hadn't left the security and safety of Woodside, Sequoia, Carlmont, Menlo-Atherton, or San Carlos. So while our visions varied we were still united in courage.

Phil Arnot, teacher

Meet the staff • Help plan the curriculum

Saturday April 24

Huddart Park
students

11 am to 3 pm

HUDDART PARK

NO DOGS ALLOWED

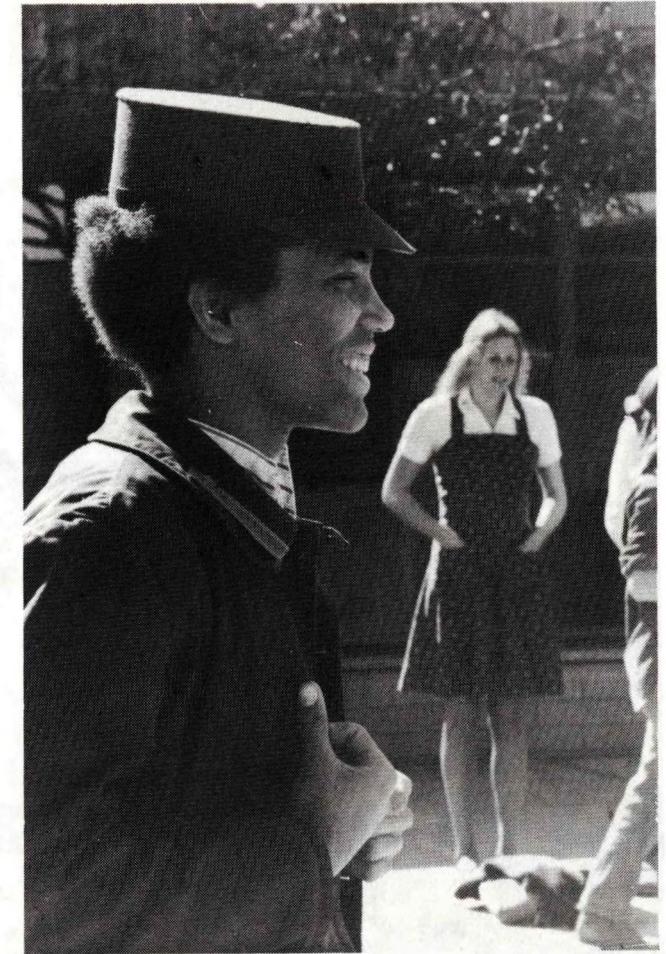
TRANSPORTATION WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ANYONE

WISHING BUSES WILL BE AT EACH OF THE HIGH SCHOOLS AT 10:30.

PARENTS INVITED TO COME FROM 1 TO 3 TO MEET THE STAFF AND JOIN IN THE ACTIVITIES OR COME FOR THE ENTIRE DAY. Bring your drums, guitars, etc.

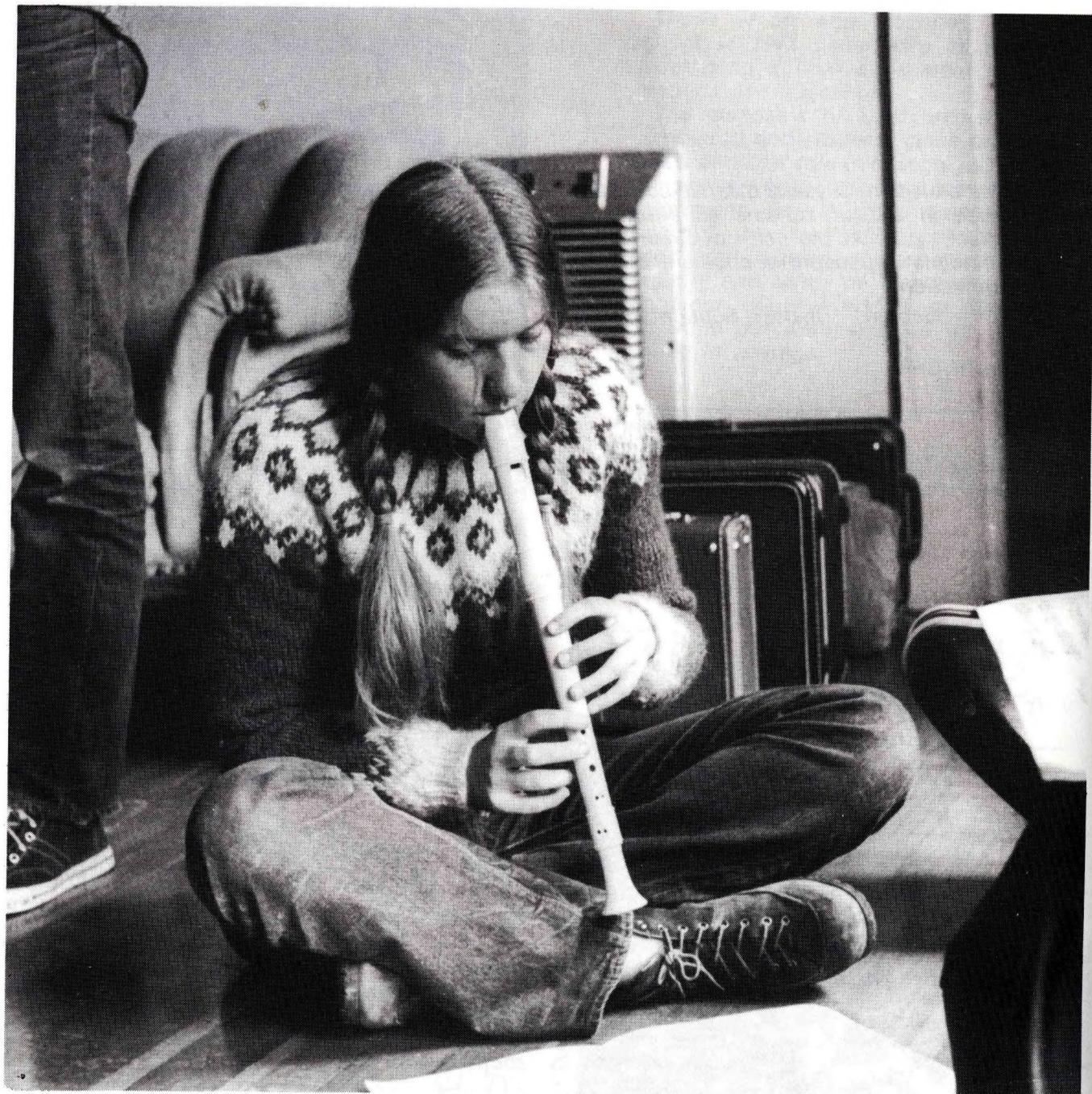
What a blessing if racial balance could be achieved in all our schools on strictly a volunteer basis! At the heart of America is the principle of freedom of choice and self-determination.

George P. Chaffey, Superintendent



Ravenswood was a great opportunity for me to actually do something about desegregation in the Sequoia District. It was high time I got off my butt, stop talking about it, and act.

Tom Marks, teacher



SIX

The new school

Success or failure? 1971-75

Ravenswood opened in 1971 with a racially-balanced student body and an enthusiastic volunteer staff. If they thought they had overcome Ravenswood's troubled image, they were right for the time being. It was a new school. The next five years would bring waves of unexpected setbacks, but the beginnings were heady and creative.

There was freedom and innovation in the curriculum, with students choosing their own teachers and courses from nearly 200 offerings with titles like Filmmaking, History of Dissent, and Limits, a Transition to Calculus. Individualized instruction, independent study, and field-trips were the order of the day. Even traditional classes were presented in untraditional ways.

The overall organization included "houses" in which students were grouped by astrological birth signs for counseling. The school day was organized on flexible scheduling, with 28 mods in a day. Each mod was 15 minutes and classes were one to six mods long. Each semester was broken into five three week cycles, where again each class differed in length. During an eight day mini-cycle regular classes stopped and everyone took or taught special interest classes.

But flaws in "the new school" soon became apparent. True integration, which was supposed to be achieved automatically by quotas, turned into a distant hope to be achieved through endurance and trust, as individual racial clashes flared periodically and more classes became almost totally white or black. Innovation, which was supposed to bring out the best in teachers, also drained their time and energy. The house system, which supposedly guaranteed that no student got lost, looked confining and artificial. The freedom, which supposedly stimulated learning, often invited escape from study.

Internally, in response to those pressures, the school moved through compromise toward more routine counseling, scheduling, and curriculum.

External pressures also mounted. Despite its glowing state accreditation, its widespread impact as a model for integrated and alternative education, and the growing acceptance of the black community, Ravenswood could not get a guarantee of minimum enrollment from the SUHSD board. Without the public pressure of a mandate, recruiting volunteers became more difficult each year.

Even in the new school the old question prevailed: who would go to Ravenswood? Two separate lawsuits, *Gomperts vs. Chase* and *Sanders vs. SUHSD*, pressed for district guidelines for racial balance. In the *Gomperts* case the U.S. Supreme Court denied a preliminary injunction to reinstate mandatory busing in 1971. The *Sanders* case for racial equality in all district schools stayed in the courts through 1975.

District financial problems compounded the uncertainty surrounding the school. A new state

law governing school funding and the budget cuts it set in motion, the defeat of two elections to increase SUHSD taxes, and a sharp decline in district enrollment added up to cutbacks in Ravenswood's program and promised more to come.

Volunteers and morale dwindled, yet the school continued to attract and hold people. For despite the disillusionment of some, the perpetual planning for a more workable system, and the year to year uncertainty about enrollment, Ravenswood was still an alternative school.

VIEWS



To turn a desperate educational situation into a model high school takes guts and genius. The school has gone from the last choice to the first choice for hundreds of the best students in the district. That is a major accomplishment.

*Albert Lepore, Professor,
Cal State Hayward*

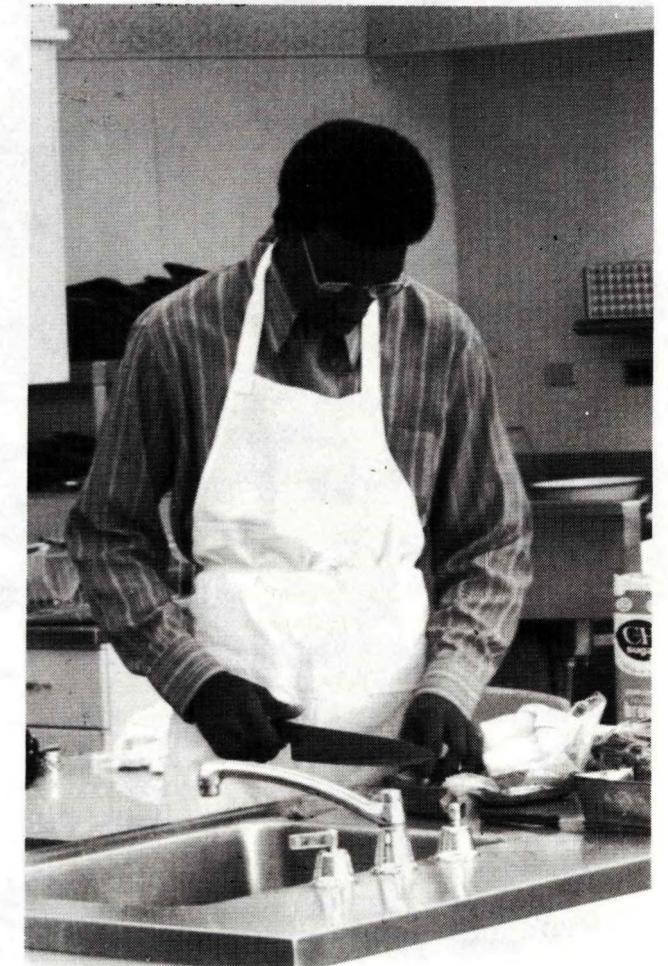


Basically, I hate high school. But since I had to go, Ravenswood made it less painful.

Tim Strohane, student

What really brought me to Ravenswood was that everybody in my family, my brothers and my sisters, all graduated from here. There was always someone from my family here — from 1967 to 1976. I had a chance to go to Nairobi, a private school, but I really wanted to go here.

Graylin Lee Young, Student





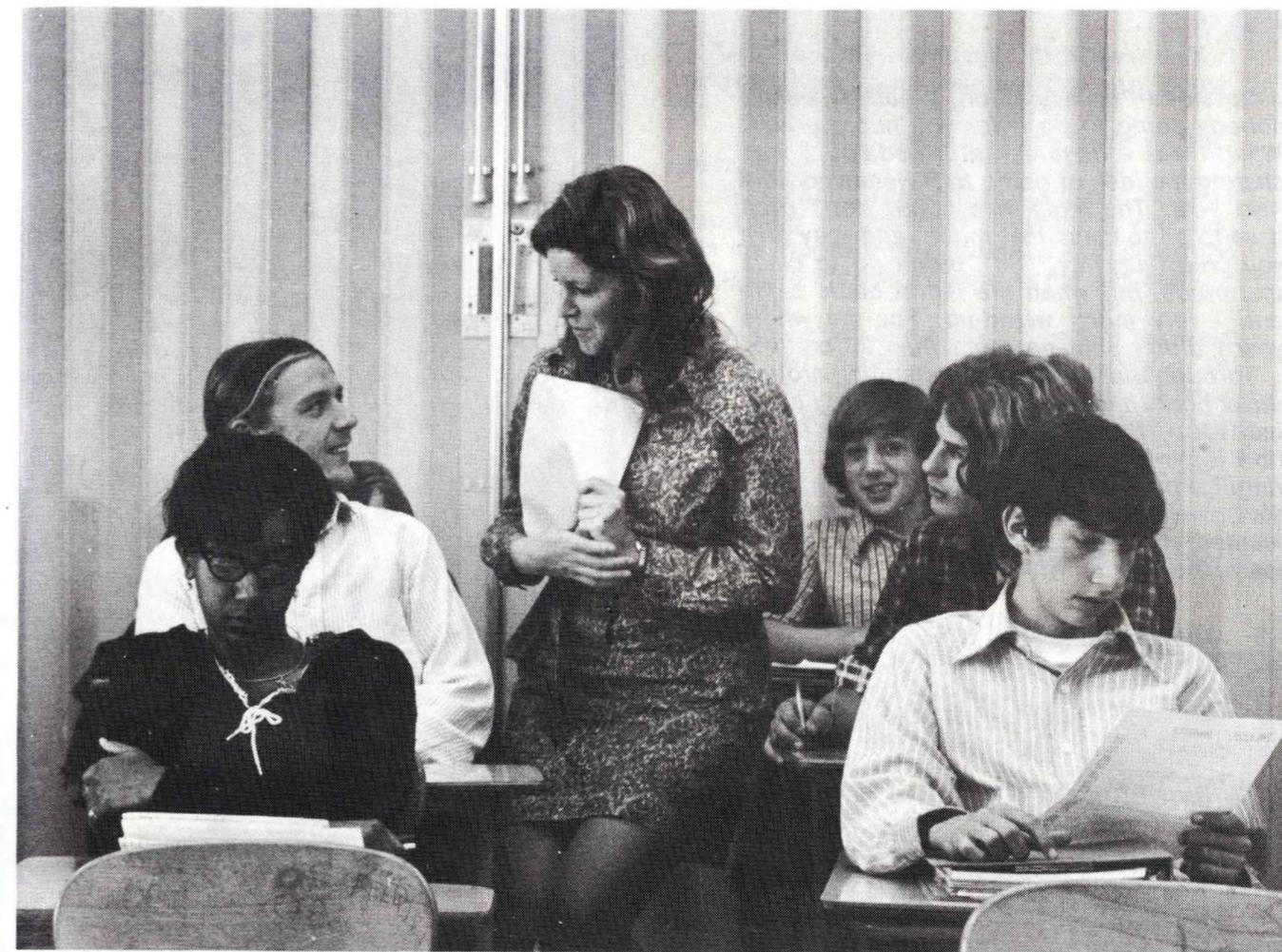
Ravenswood was new, not because of its strange set up, but because of the unique spirits and constantly conflicting values of those who were there. There was always someone yelling, or arguing, or thinking strange thoughts, or conversing intelligently: the likes of which had never been seen in the Sequoia District before and maybe never will be again. There was a violent, forceful aura about the campus.

Bruce Kelley, student



The thing I will remember most at Ravenswood is the completely different atmosphere it promotes. The thing that really surprised me is that they don't chain you to a desk and keep you in that particular class all period.

Ronnell Vines, student



Ravenswood was the closest to the real world you could get. All the classes were tailored to fit the times, like Watergate, Eco-Politics, Who Owns America, the Middle-East Crisis, Election '72. So many times I'd call home: "Guess, what? Haldeman and Erlichman resigned!" or "We've been sitting in our cars listening to the SLA shootout." The school newspaper was a driving force. It was so with-it, covering the Cambodia bombings and the Angela Davis trial.

Did I care about what was happening to the majority of blacks at Ravenswood? Yes and no. We had a lot more security about our futures than they did.

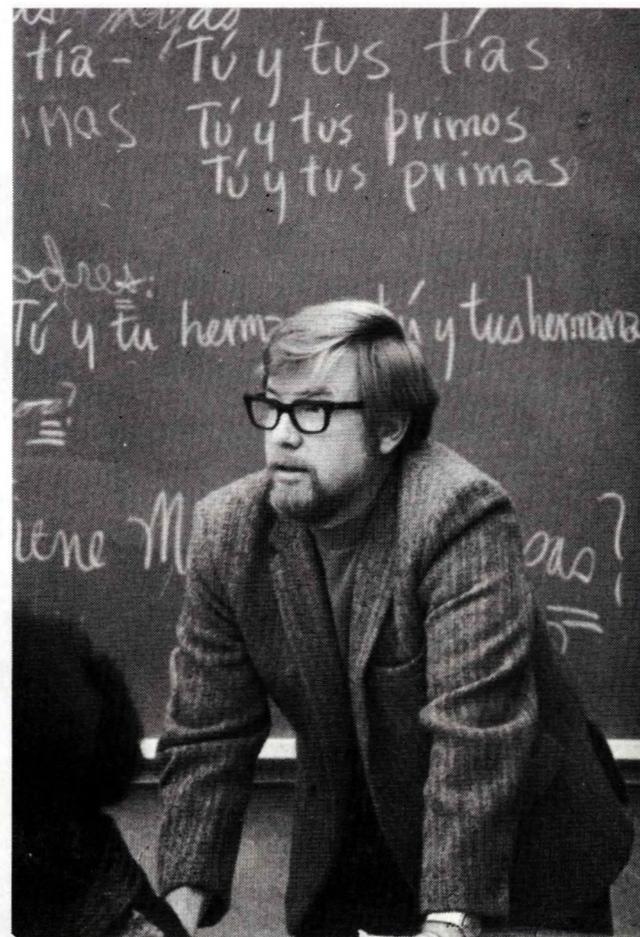
But Ravenswood was a second home to me. When you get over the overpass, you're in Ravenswood territory. It's not protected, but it lets in the whole world. It is the whole world.

Delia Athey, Student

Outside of an education, I learned wasn't nobody going to do it for you but yourself. When I was a freshman at Woodside, I was sharing the idea of going to Ravenswood the next year. The reply was, "You don't even have to go to class that much, and they give you credit anyway." So I didn't go to class that much, but when the report cards came out, I very much wised-up. For the whole year I didn't gain no more than 20 credits.

Through that I learned that hanging around the school smoking weed wasn't shit. I as an individual learned how to respect an adult, how to go to class without all kinds of bells ringing, how to take on responsibility that I was given. It's not so much what you have learned, it's what and how much you want to learn, no matter where you are at.

Myrna Smith, student



I thought Ravenswood wasn't structured enough and also not challenging enough. But I thought M.A. was too conservative and I hated the bells, so I went back to Ravenswood and stayed there till graduation.

I liked the social environment and relaxed atmosphere the best, but I was discouraged because race relations weren't what they could have been. Also at Ravenswood, being an alternative school, there were some classes which I considered "Mickey Mouse."

Rodney Minott, student

The worst experience I've had at Ravenswood was not too long ago. The way it happened is that I was in the locker room, getting dressed after a good day of P.E. I heard some voices out in the hall and for some reason, I anticipated trouble.

About eight guys came walking in. They were all about five foot eight to six foot two, but it seemed that their heads scraped the ceiling. One guy came over and said, "Turn out your pockets." I proceeded to do so, knowing that there was nothing in them. He and I both noticed at the same time that I was wearing my watch.

"Take your watch off," he said. "No," I returned.

"Take your watch off, boy!" It was evident that he was starting to get annoyed.

"What did I do to you?" I asked.

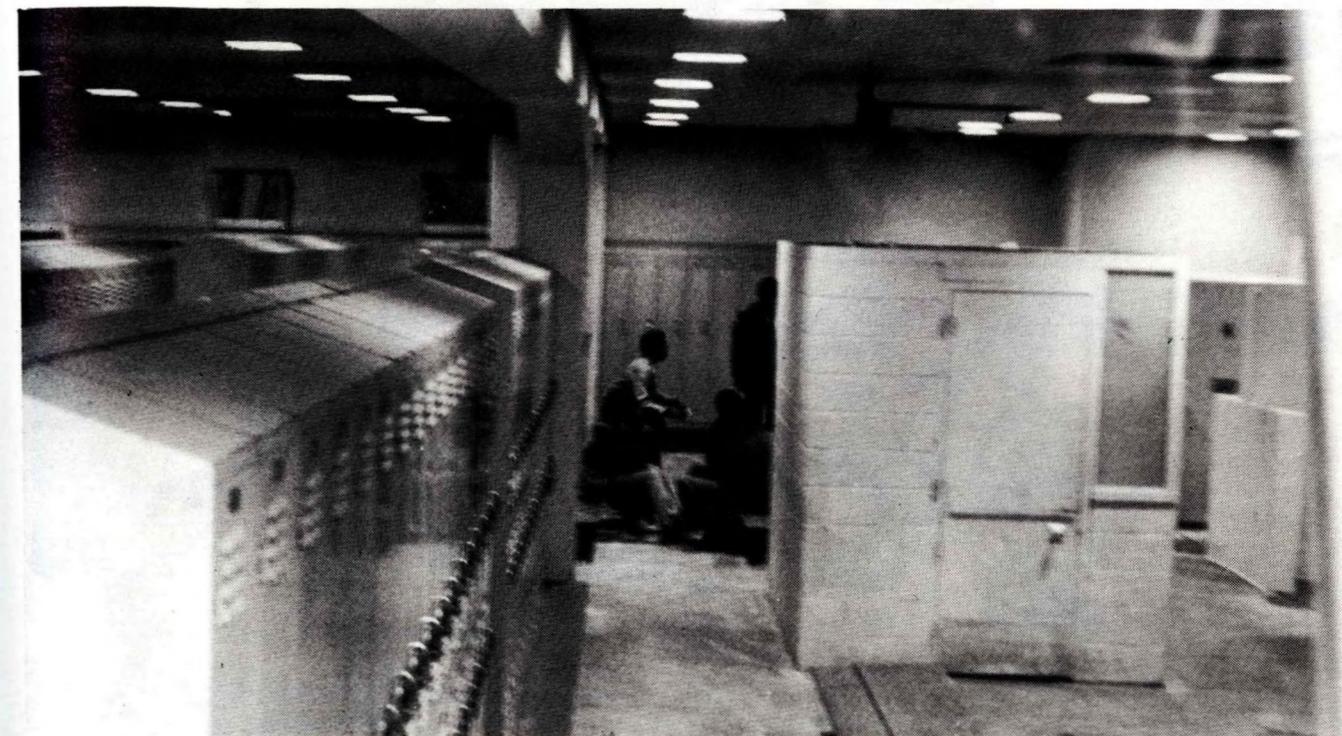
"Just take the watch off." This went on for several times, and then another guy came up.

"This one's mine," the second one demanded.

"No, it ain't. Take off your watch," he said, switching his talk from the other guy to me. On my fourth or fifth refusal, I was promptly popped in the eye, and the watch was slid off my wrist.

I made a bee line for Mr. Rivera in the next room. "Mr. Rivera! There's two big guys in there, just took my watch." Mr. Rivera disappeared. I walked into the locker room to find him questioning anybody and anything and within ten minutes, he had rounded up a posse and was searching for my watch.

Bill Alvord, Student





When we opened the library after school began, hordes of students came into the library, who had no place to go. It was literally standing room only, some times of the day. They seemed to be "on the loose," rather confused, very sociable and certainly not studious. The white students seemed to be at Ravenswood because they didn't like school, and this was a place where they could avoid regulations. A lot of the black students seemed resentful.

During the year, we (being white) received quite a bit of anger from black students. The dean of girls felt that we might be prejudiced and held a few meetings between us and groups of black girls. I remember one saying of me, "she has a mean look," I felt mean all right. They seemed to gather in the library into small groups and deliberately talk loudly, comb each other's hair, and eat. Probably meetings could have accomplished better relations if we could have met regularly, but we didn't.

The second year we were fortunate enough to have a new librarian, young, black and beautiful. We were now a black and white staff and I hoped our race relations would improve. In fact, they gradually did improve. It was a high point for me that year when I was told by a black that he had formerly thought I was prejudiced but now thought I was not.

Marilyn Berger, librarian

Integration was a very enlightening experience.

Nanette Mitchell, student



Ravenswood the integrated school. Sounds nice, huh? It's plain crap! The whites on their courtyard and the blacks on theirs: There's a little blending, but nothing real.

Jeanette Traverso, student

It's 11:00 in the morning. The sky is a clear deep blue, the sun is rising bright and warm on my body. Just out of Algebra II, I'm lying on the cool pavement in the quad, shading my eyes from the sun with my hand. It's such a beautiful day, I want to grow wings and fly to the beach.

The urge grows, but my wings just won't work.

As the thought crystallizes, I decide I'll just have to drive if I want to go to the beach. I say in a loud voice to any of the fifteen people lounging around me, "Who wants to go to the beach?"

Mat Sexton, student

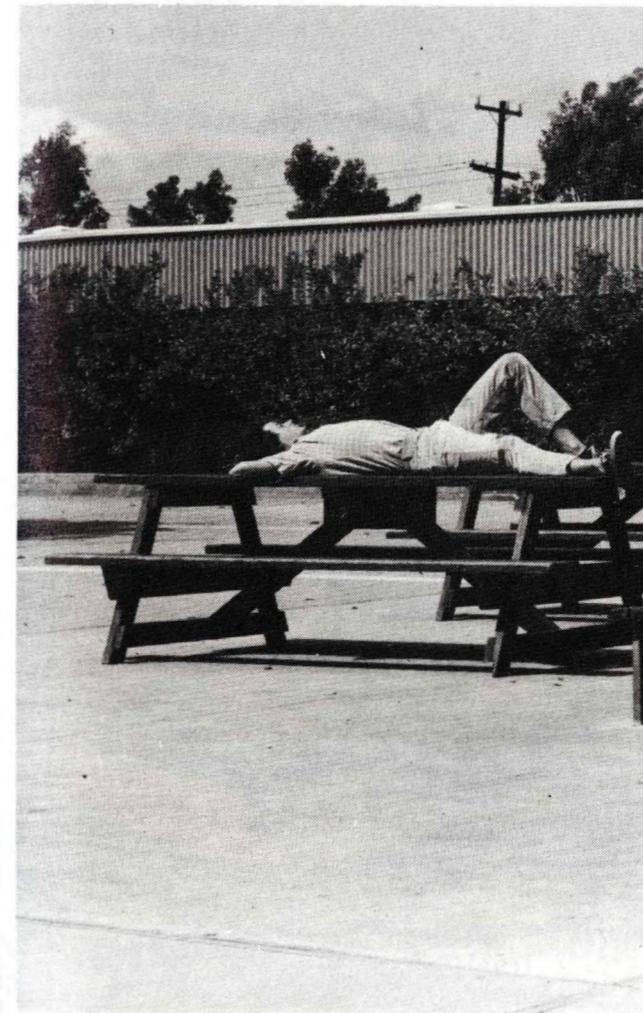


Yes, we've been criticized because kids are happy here. People seem to think there's something wrong with kids enjoying school.

Clarence Cryer, Principal

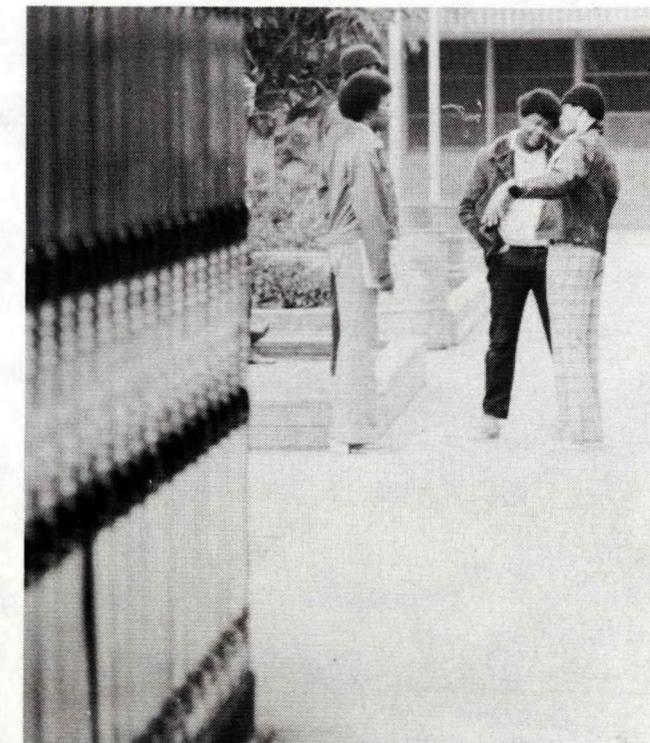
Sometimes I am frustrated with the students here. They have the opportunity to do so much but nothing moves that way. I think most here haven't felt what it is to go under rule, under "turn to page two and read..." and the "constraints of a normal school." Laziness and spoiled students breeds decadence, but again that is part of the school. You have the choice.

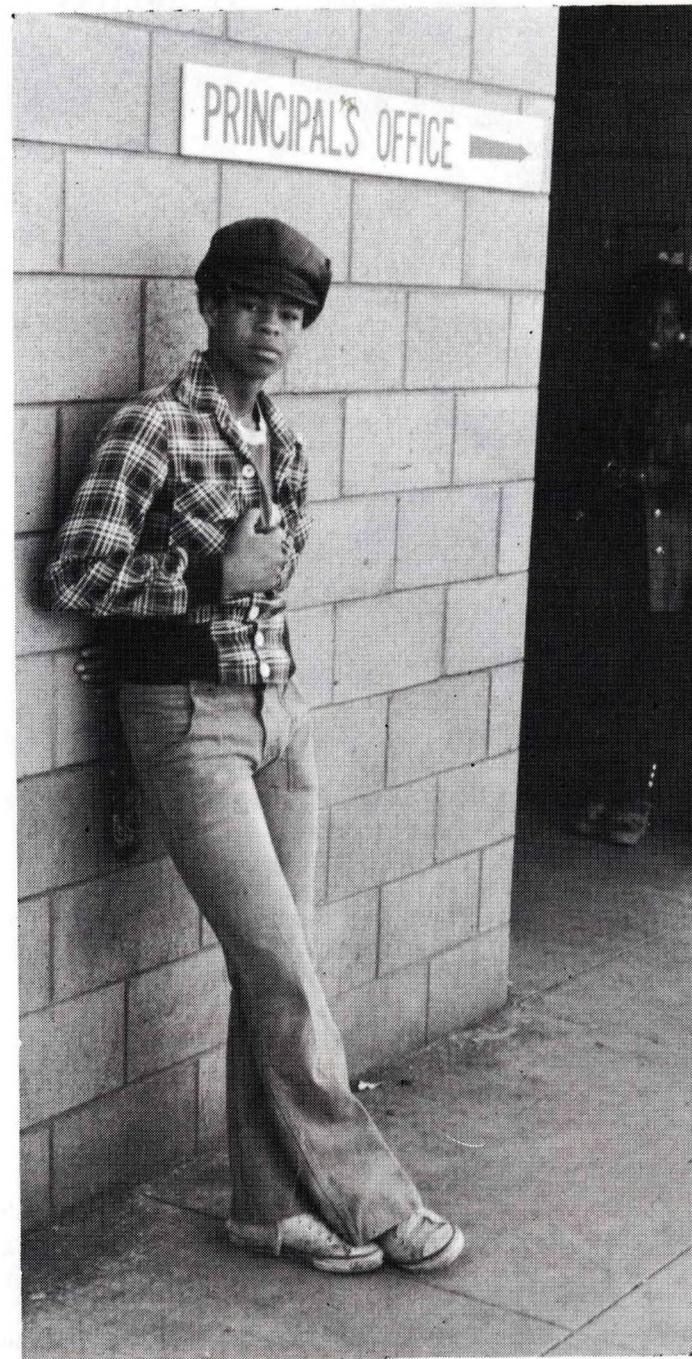
Meg Grafton, student



The worst thing for me at Ravenswood was when I was on my break. There was nothing to do. I would always go to the side of the school to see what was happening. Most of the time there was somebody over there; I would go over there and we would talk and light up a smoke. It was like this day in and day out. I was getting tired of this. I like action and Ravenswood just wouldn't give it to me.

Anthony Arnold, student

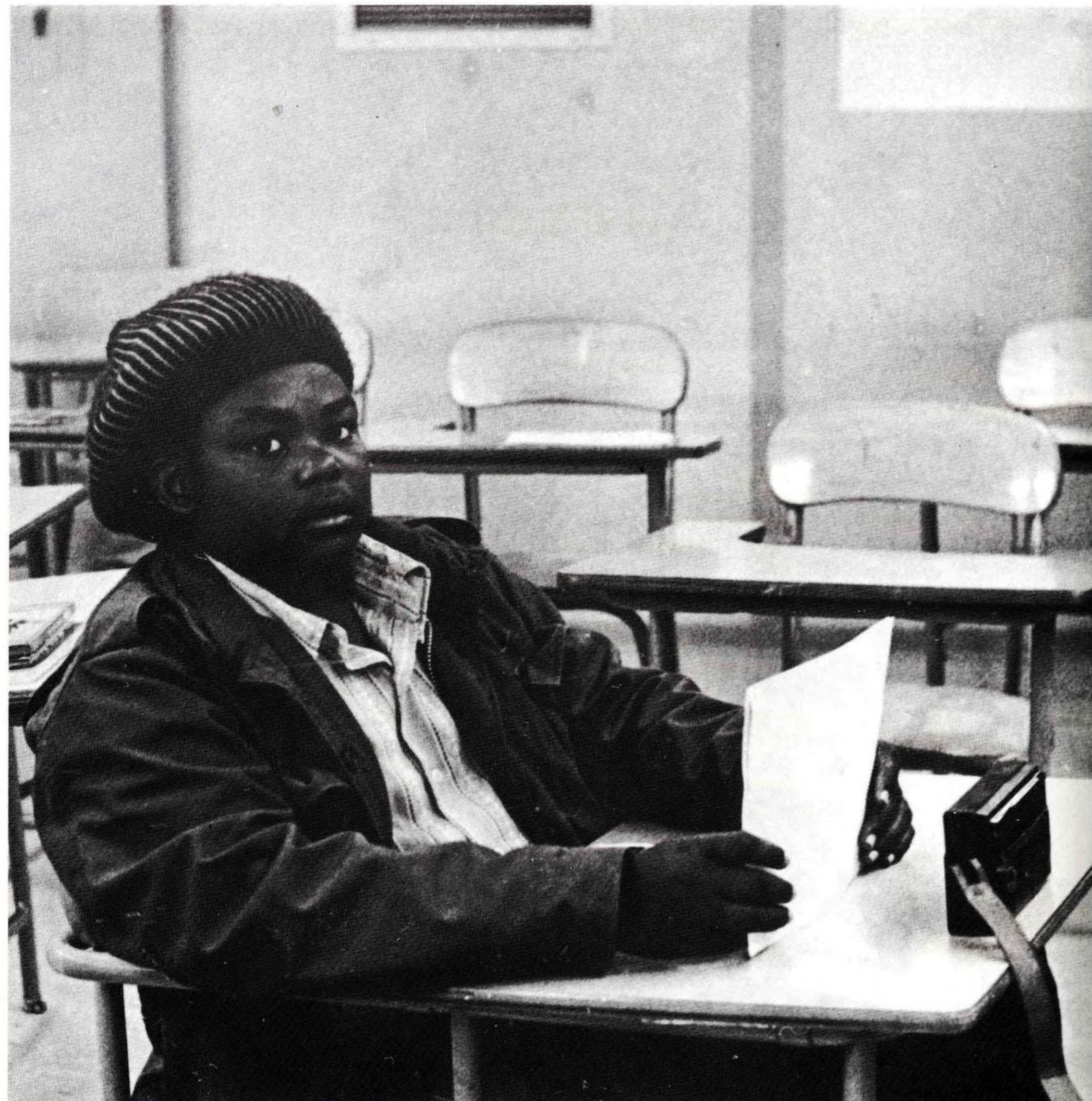




*I will miss the quietness of Ravenswood,
the togetherness. Everyone hangs around
where they want to, in their own groups, in
their own favorite spots.*

Josephine Aceves, student





SEVEN

Closure

Is it fair? 1975-76

Amid protests from students, parents, teachers, and the East Palo Alto community, on October 15, 1975, four of the five SUHSD board members voted to close Ravenswood. For years the possibility of closure had loomed over the school, but when reality hit it was still a shock. To many, it meant unjustly destroying an alternative school and placing the burden of desegregation on the black community. But to the board and the administrative committee that recommended closing Ravenswood, it meant the end to a series of nagging problems.

In 1974 the board committed itself to closing one or more schools as a way out of its financial troubles. As rationale for making Ravenswood the first to go, they cited its depleted enrollment, the negative image of East Palo Alto, cost savings, and district-wide desegregation.

The rationale was attacked on all points. Opponents argued that the board's past policy was the reason for Ravenswood's declining enrollment, since the board had encouraged minority transfer out of Ravenswood, without pressing for white transfer in. The argument continued that East Palo Alto's political and economic stability was increasing; and that closing other schools would save more money.

Ironically, the very symbol of the board's commitment to integration was being closed in the name of integration. Even though Ravenswood had again become predominantly black, closing the only high school in the black community could hardly be called equalizing educational opportunity. Didn't the board have a responsibility, opponents asked, to save Ravenswood?

But Ravenswood's survival in 1975 depended on

the same conditions it had depended on in 1970: a change in its image as a controversial problem and desegregation of the entire district. Ultimately, neither condition had been met.

So the Sanders lawsuit against the district was withdrawn, since it had accomplished its purpose. The judge's prodding in the case actually contributed to the board's decision: desegregate all other district schools by closing Ravenswood. Even though local residents filed another suit specifically against the closure, the court found in favor of the district.

The "we will never give up" attitude did not disappear completely. But as the months passed, most people accepted the fact, if not the justice, of Ravenswood's closing and began to prepare for the next year at schools in which they would be absorbed.

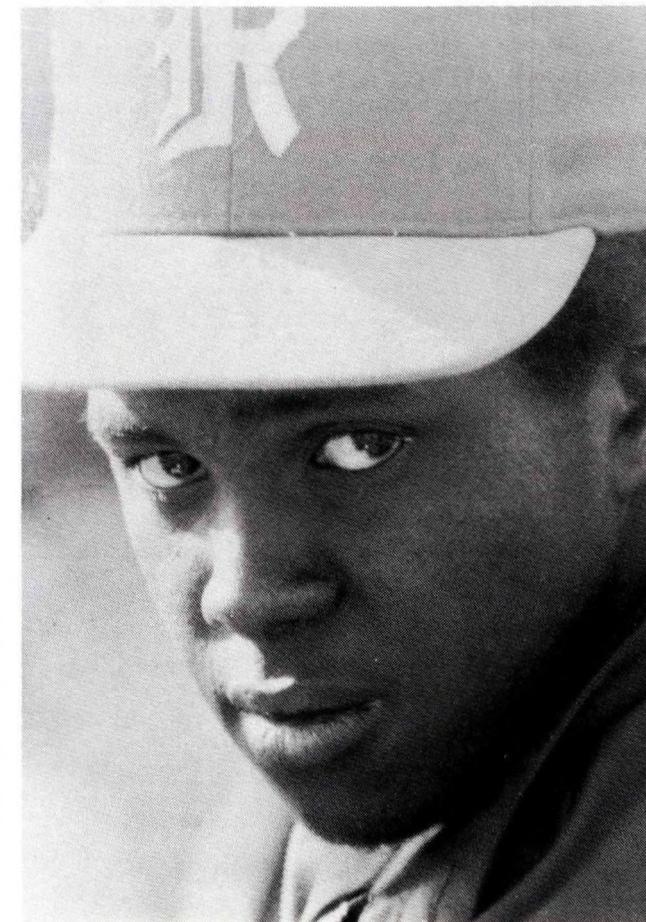
VIEWS



We have been threatened, told off, talked about and just about everything else you could think of.

I say it's time we got our stuff together to do whatever is necessary to save our school.

Gail Anthony, student



Why should EPA students be forced to go to a hill school when white students have it so simple? Minority parents can't always make it simple or even just equal for their children compared to the whites. I don't think it's fair for our black community to be forced to hold the burden of desegregation, which is catering to the white community's demands. When the whites speak, somebody hears, listens, and action is taken. But when the E.P.A. community speaks everybody just assumes that it's just mumbling and can't seem to understand.

I know that if Ravenswood remains open it will have to change. I see a lot of areas for improvement. Yes, I want to help rebuild Ravenswood.

Denise Womak, student

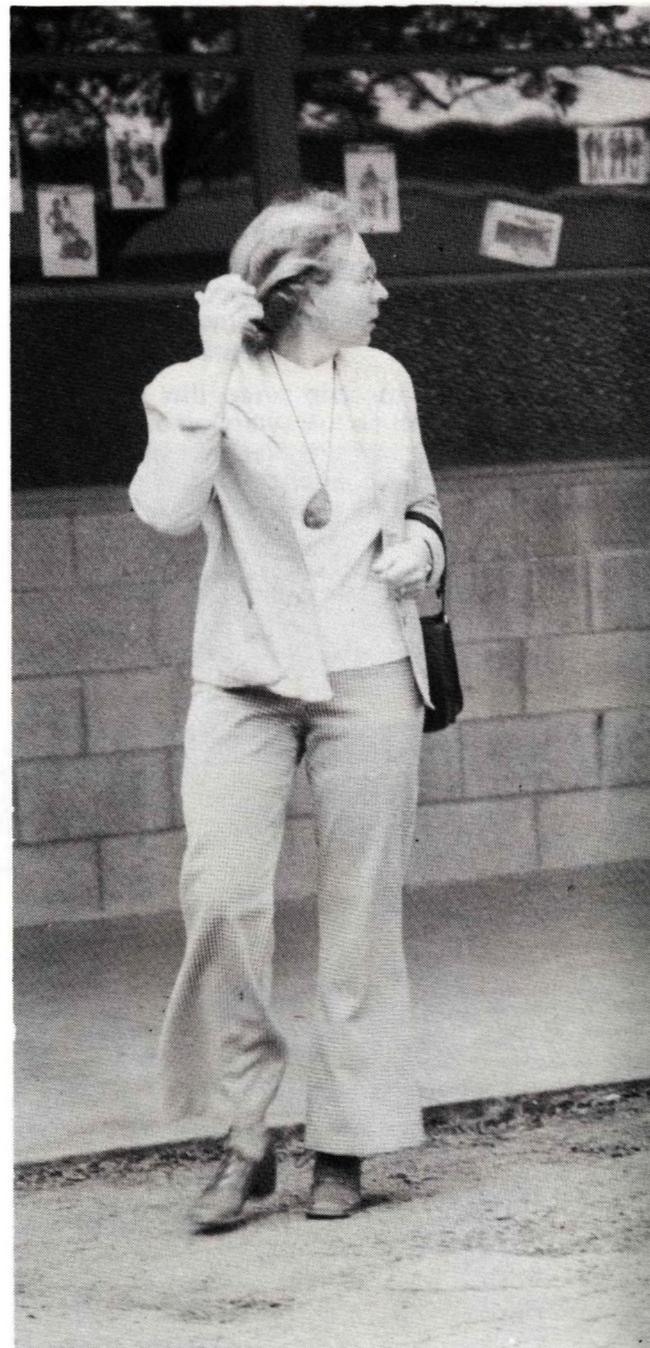
Ravenswood is currently under fire by every other school in the district, by every other community around and by individuals on the board, all shouting "Save our school, close Ravenswood" or "Save the district money, close Ravenswood."

I have found that not only are the students in the "hill schools" ignorant to facts about Ravenswood and the closure, but so are many of our fellow students.

No matter what we DON'T do here, we always come out to be the bad guys. It seems that we always will and have been used a political scapegoat.

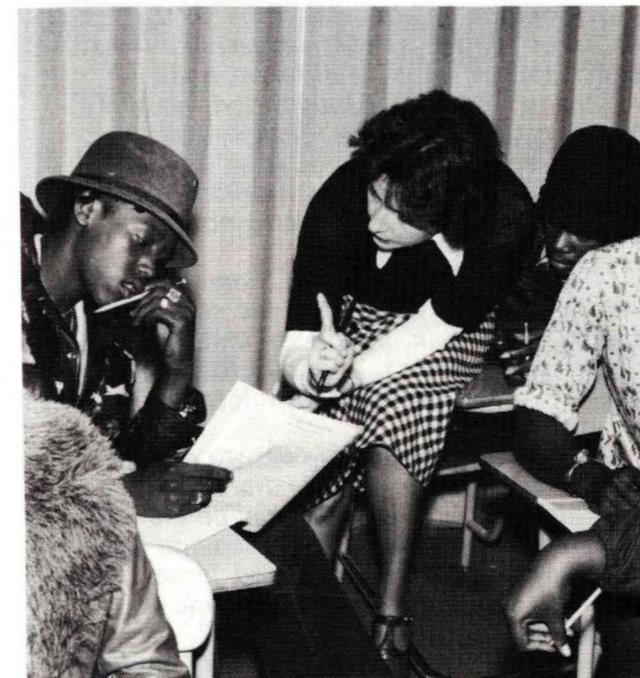
We have bridged many gaps since Ravenswood was desegregated four years ago and we have gone through much more than any other school in the district. I believe that having to live with each year on the assumption that this may be the last year is wrong and I believe that has been slowly killing us.

Pier C. DuPee, student



Our district has gotten publicity all over the nation for our creative voluntary desegregation plan. Even with its shortcomings it has been better than any forced integration effort. It would have worked even better if the board, district, administration and the staffs of all the schools had given the support such a program deserved.

Verda Lindberg, parent



It was not destined to be just another open house. There was an aura of placid gentleness—almost to the point of sickening politeness. There was only a mild smattering of activity and a small crowd compared to the excitement known from previous open houses. It was to be the last open house ever, since it had been decided by the board of education that the unique, innovative, exciting new Ravenswood would be closed forever. All the hearings were over, the editorials read and forgotten. Ravenswood closed forever.

Then it came. "A touch of nostalgia" they called it: a slide-tape presentation of the Ravenswood experience which had been prepared for recruitment by some of the staff and students a couple of years earlier when Ravenswood was the star and the talk of the district. There it was—the magnet school—Ravenswood!

"A school with a magical course offerings," the tape said. Over 90 social studies and English classes, 10 languages—with 4 years in each! No other high school could meet that. "A dedicated and dynamic staff" the tape rambled on. The cream of the crop, a labyrinth of selected teachers brought to Ravenswood to create the ideal school. "More money" the tape clicked on; "peaceful desegregation." The pictures flicked by.

"No students will get lost." That's what the tape said. "The house plan will locate each student with an advisor in small groups where attendance, achievement, and conflicts will be handled on an intimate basis.

Now Ravenswood closed forever.

Who killed Ravenswood? What were the warning signs? What do educators have to learn from the paradox of the Ravenswood experience?

Charlotte Nasr, teacher

It really upsets me to think I have to go to a conventional school next year. When I first came to Ravenswood in June '73, to see how the school was, I was impressed.

But it was a whole different thing with my friends. They told me I was crazy. They said if I came down here I would get shot or raped or mugged or something like that. It kind of scared me, but I just kept thinking about the high school I would have to go to if I didn't come to Ravenswood. I stuck with my decision.

I feel sorry for all the kids who had chances to come here, but didn't because of the location, plus their prejudices against the black students. I know quite a few students who wanted to come, but their parents wouldn't let them. They don't realize how much they missed.

Sheila Burke, student

It gives me a lonely feeling, knowing that it is not me leaving Ravenswood; but Ravenswood leaving me.

It makes me lonelier still to know that no one cares about people, personalities that need a Ravenswood, a different home.

Somehow if I knew Ravenswood was there to carry on, I'd feel safer, I'd know there was still a place for those too good or too bad or too different to live in an institution's world: no miracles, no achievements, no goals to live for.

It scares me, this giant combine: hill schools, waiting to swallow me and all the others into their harmless and ordered sameness (oh what a crime to have no differences, how much easier it would and wouldn't be).

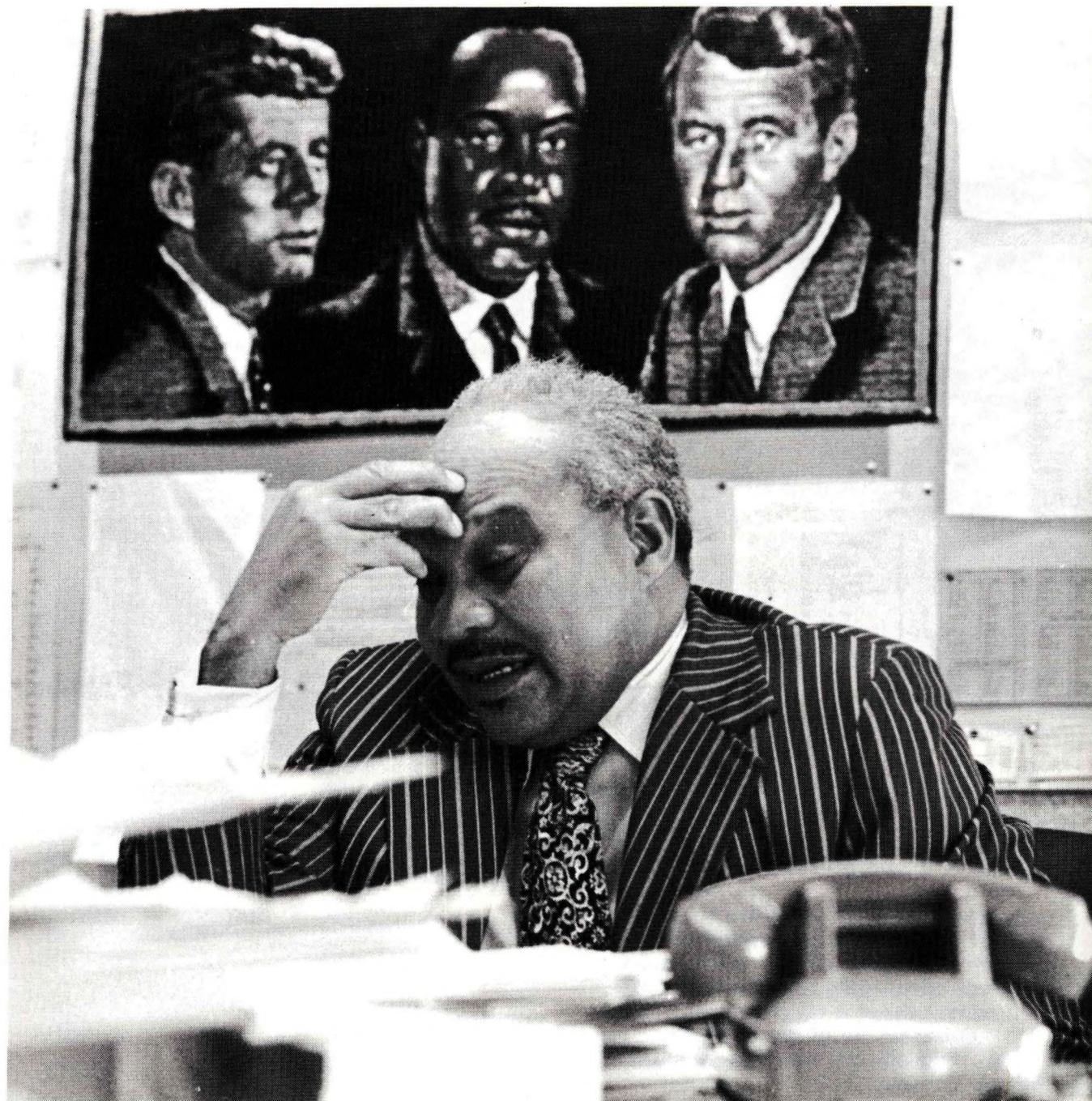
This world will never stop us, we who have been at Ravenswood, a place that worked too well and died for it—but we may be the last.

I have lived and died here—cried and loved and torn my pants on a jagged fence, and now I go elsewhere to do the same.

Ravenswood, where do you go?

G.D. Harwood, student





EIGHT

Reflections

What happened?

During its short life Ravenswood led an often turbulent existence. It came into being and closed amid controversy. In between it was different things to different people. But whatever it was, Ravenswood was not a run of the mill high school.

There still is a 2050 Cooley Avenue. Yes, the building still stands in the same place, looking almost exactly as it did 17 years ago. But today there is no more life. All the sound and vibration is gone.

Many people shared happy and sad times there. There were angry times and friendly times, but all the time there was a shadow cast over the school. At first not so noticeably, but lengthening as the years progressed. Now all that shines through are the reflections of people who worked or attended school there — or had the heart to care.

Ravenswood was like a performer on a tightrope, at times teetering dangerously near to falling, at times the darling of the cheering crowds. The analogy is historically descriptive: the tightrope artist in a state of constant tension and balance always focusing on the immediate stress, drift of the wind, constantly struggling to stay up, to survive, to avoid catastrophe.

The balancing, the very need to balance insured failure, because the school was never able to launch in one definite, defined direction.

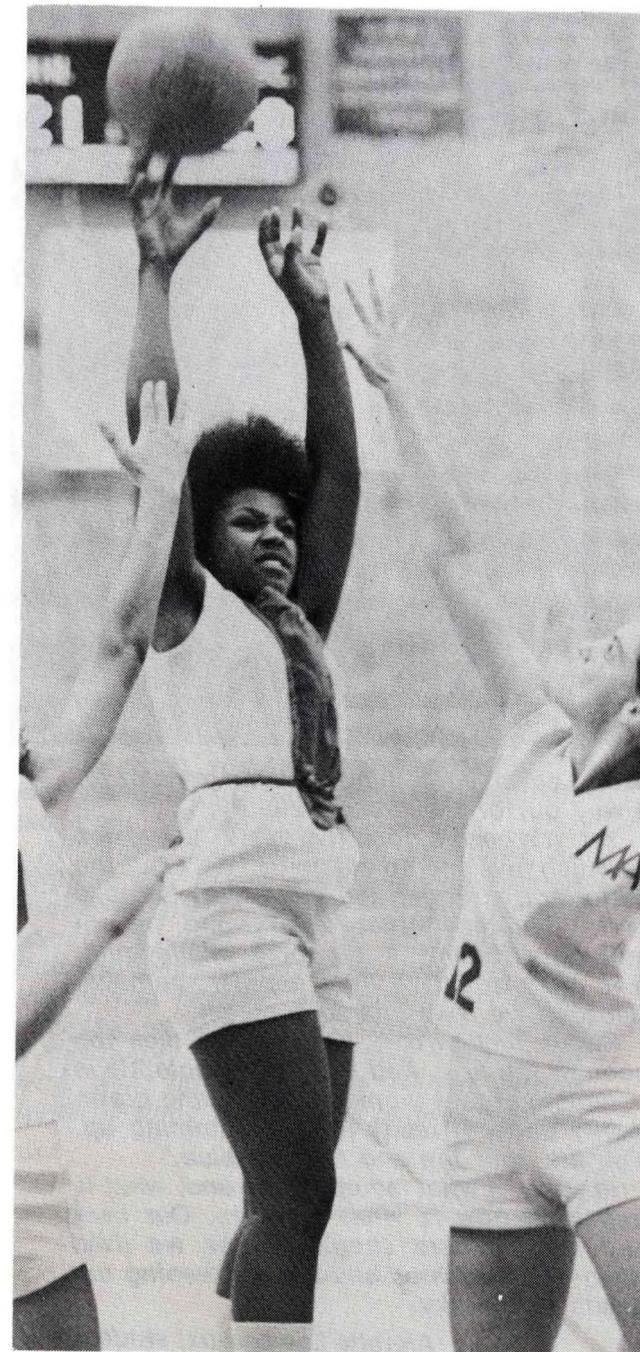
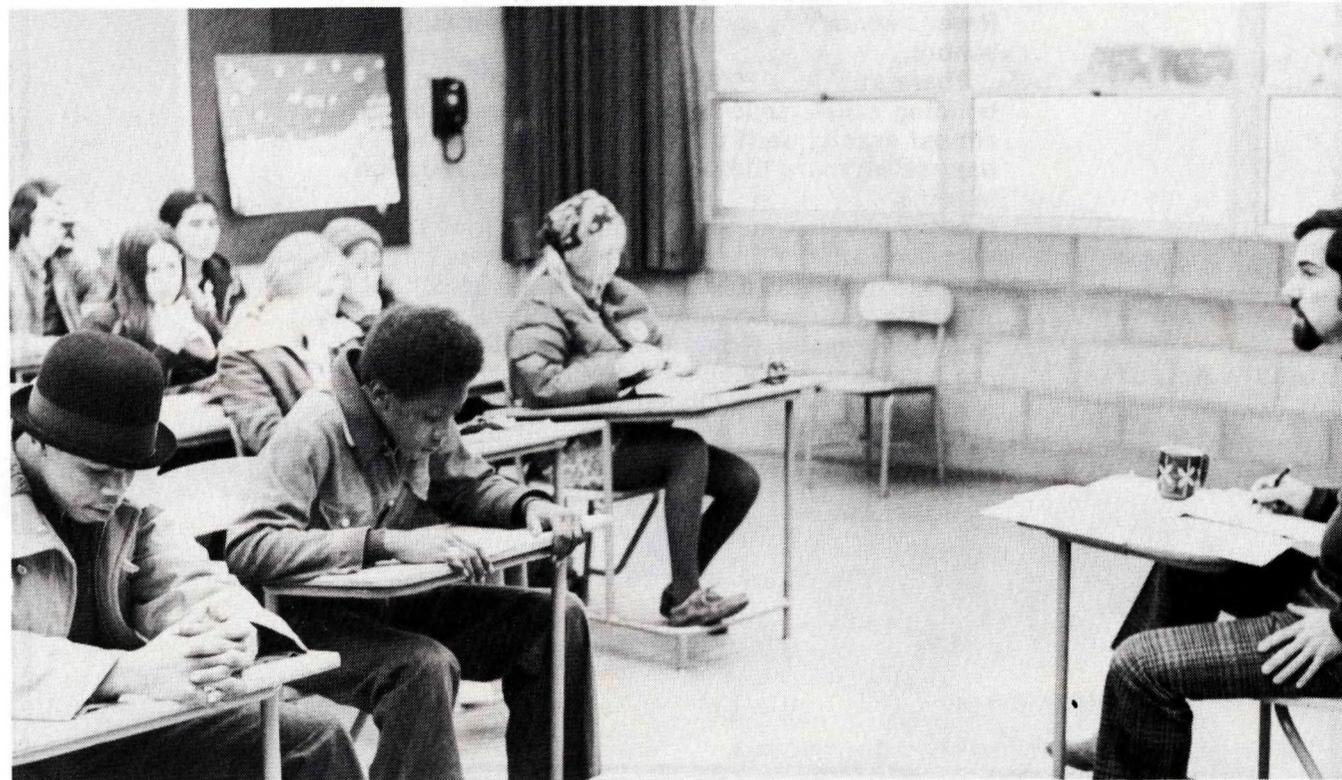
It was too taxing, too demanding to ask one small institution to meet so many needs. Yet, paradoxically, in the very challenge of that demand has been Ravenswood's vindication.

Opposites have co-existed in a relatively peaceful, dynamic academic setting. Many students have had a good education, be it in basic skills or the poetry of Dylan Thomas and mountaineering.

It is a wonder that Ravenswood has endured so long. It has succeeded brilliantly with national acclaim, interest, and praise, even at the same time that it has failed dismally, with professional disgrace and community distrust.

Where is the truth about this school? What is the reality? Through the last two decades we have asked much of the school. Ravenswood has provided so much, and yet fallen so far short of its ideal.

Shannon Bradley, teacher

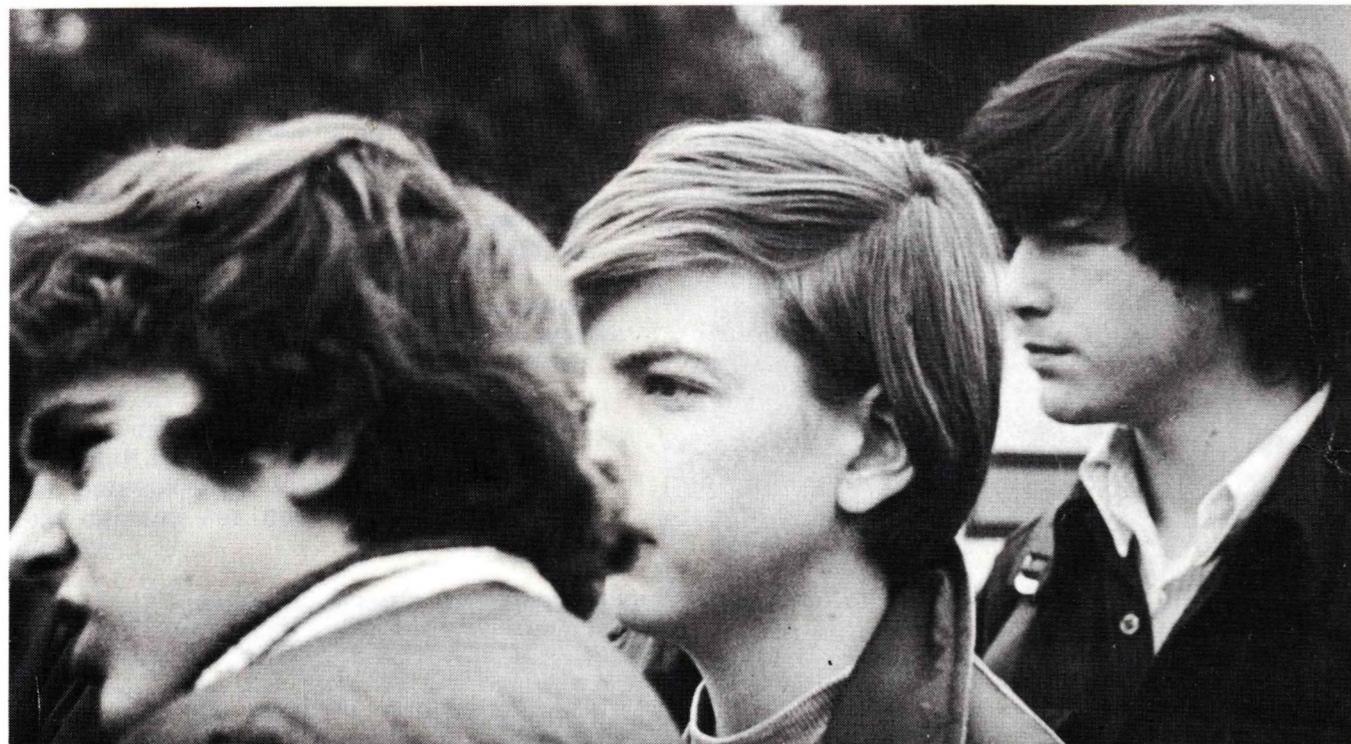


When you look at what the life of Ravenswood has come to, you get the feeling of helplessness, of being out of place. And isn't that only accurate after 17 grim years? After turbulent times of ups and downs, changes, despair, and constant fighting to stay up, the doors of the blue and gold are finally closing for good.

Ravenswood should not be the one. We are too fresh, our concept is new. It doesn't take a change within yourself to adjust to Ravenswood, but an adjustment is necessary at those hill schools if surviving is your desire.

At Ravenswood you come together, you're not here just for a showing. And although we have had our share of racial problems, we have not been a scandal, and with that in mind we, the students and teachers at Ravenswood, will accept this closing with dignity.

Delphine Baldain, student



Three years ago I attended my first graduation. It was from the eighth grade, and I spoke there, too. I was idealistic. I talked about life, liberty and unalienable rights.

I've grown a lot since then. I'm not very idealistic anymore. I've attended a "desegregated" school where whites sit in one courtyard and blacks sit in another. I've learned firsthand the difference between integration and desegregation.

No, I guess I'm not much of an idealist now. I've seen a school a lot of us poured our guts into, erased right off the map and I'm mad as hell. I love this school and I love the people who live here. I love them for what we were and for what I know we could have been. I don't want to have to say good-by.

But I don't have much choice in the matter. I don't think we ever did, really. We've always

been a pawn, something for them to point to, a way out of their responsibility.

Yet, it's been a good five years. There was so much love and so much joy. We're all the better and stronger and more alive because of it. When they forget Ravenswood, we will still be different. A bit more challenging, less complacent. A little happier, perhaps. Because we have shared a dream.

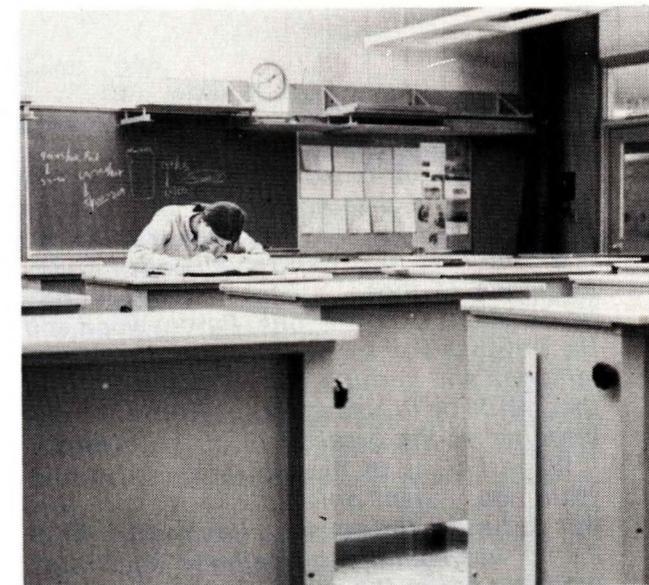
Sartre once wrote: "One always dies too soon or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it ready for the summing up. You are your life and nothing else."

In spite of what led up to the end, what is important now is what we were. Our lives and dreams here should die as we lived them—Ravenswood and Proud, keeping our heads to the sky.

Annette Lamoreaux, student

If Ravenswood were a person, it would be Reginald Hobart Schultz, born here in East Palo Alto some 17 or 18 years ago. He led a rather normal American life, doing what normal Americans do, until just six years ago when something very unusual happened to old Regi. He underwent a sudden change, and became a very liberal person. He got involved in exotic sports like mountaineering and SCUBA diving, he started taking trips all over the place, and he scheduled his time in very strange ways. In the beginning Reginald had many followers.

All of this extravagance cost money, so Reginald had to get extra financial support from his father, Samuel Ulysses Horatio Schultz. At first none of Reginald's five brothers really knew what direction their brother was headed, and they didn't really mind that he was getting a little extra share of the family wealth; but then the cost of living went up, and things started getting tighter. Reginald's brothers began to resent



Reginald's spending of the family wealth, even though they claimed to approve of the things he was doing with the money. Things got tighter still, and the family funds had to be cut back, and back even more, until it became very difficult for Reginald to continue his new-found life style. He pleaded to his friends for some support so that he wouldn't have to return to his original antiquated way of life, but they all refused him in his time of most desperate need, because things had gotten tight for them too and they weren't just sure where Reginald was heading with his dreams.

Then one day there was a family meeting, and the family decided that they could no longer support Reginald because he wasn't living up to family expectations, and he was using up all of their money. Reginald was spiritually ostracized from the family, and nine months later, on June 17, 1976, Reginald Hobart Schultz died from starvation and lack of love.

Jim Hancock, student

Dear Jack

.....In large part I view Ravenswood as a failure. Or perhaps, tragedy would be a better word. It is something I had great hopes for and that never lived up to those hopes. In fact in many respects, I think the final outcome has even repudiated the very existence of those hopes. I speak in particular about race relations. Ravenswood and the Ravenswood experiment was about race relations and nothing else. To lose sight of that would be to protect oneself from the real meaning of the breakdown of the school.

When I went to Ravenswood, some four years ago, I went only for one reason, that was to further the cause of integration. Even then it was something I believed in, though probably not in the same way I believe in it now. Ravenswood has failed because the aims of my transfer and those who transferred with me have not been met. And the fault lies with most everyone. The manifestations of the failure are everywhere. But nowhere are they as evident—and as sickening—as in the attitudes of the people of Ravenswood today.

If we accept the premise that Ravenswood was about race relations and then we examine prevalent attitudes among the students and staff there now, the failure and the tragedy are clear enough. And they hurt, because I take them as a slap at what I believe in, more strongly even than when I first volunteered to go there.

I see two basic schools of thought at Ravenswood today in terms of race relations. The first is, of course, the same old fuzzy-headed liberal belief that there is no difference between the races and that all can live together in harmony. The second is the reactionary attitude that the differences are

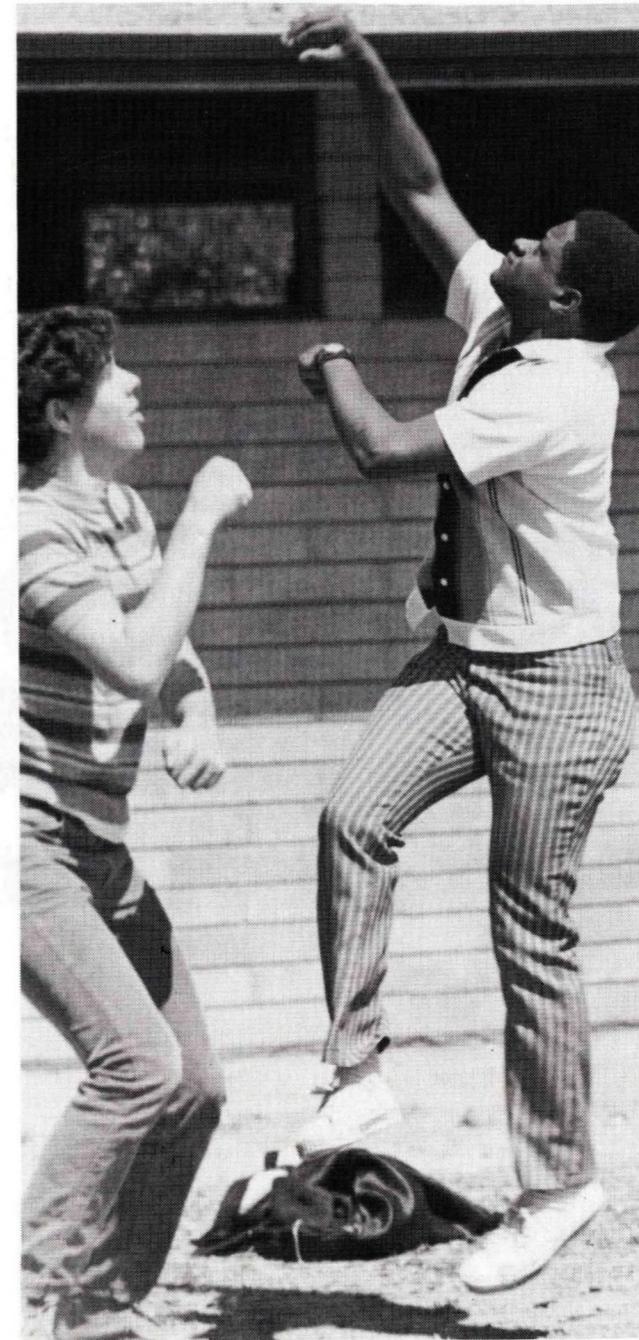
so great that they are irreconcilable. The latter belief is I think, an outgrowth of this era of semi-integration. It is terribly potent politically, and I think, terribly dangerous.

In my eyes the answer to this problem which I have seen crop up so many times is that from the very outset people should be aware of the inherent differences in black and white kids and be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to construct a situation where both of them can learn. This doesn't mean that we should co-opt black culture and society anymore than we should reject white culture and society. It means we should be aware of what both are and what they mean in terms of kids attending school. We should work within the framework of both cultures, and we must be prepared to accept the differences. Further, education should not be designed to eliminate these differences since this inevitably leads to yet more hatred.

Admittedly, I have no particular plan. But I am not ready to abandon hope. I have seen in a few people a fantastic ability to deal with people, black and white. It occurs to me that those people are the ones who know what they are working with and against and proceed from there to do their best. They are not the ones that are fighting the ideological battles within themselves.

The fact that many liberals are losing faith in desegregation only strengthens those who violently oppose any desegregation. And we both know who suffers then; it isn't us that suffers, it's the black kids and black families.....

With the warmest regards
and affection,
John (Gomperts, student)



Dear John,

....This letter is mainly to clear up a few misconceptions on your part, but to concur with the general tone and sentiment you express.

The first misconception is a crucial one I think: that most students and teachers came to Ravenswood for "race relations," i.e., desegregation. I know I didn't. Most teachers I know didn't come for that purpose. They came for an innovative program, new philosophies of teaching, turned-on students. Many—perhaps most—white students came for the same reason. I believe you represent the exception. It was certainly a laudatory motive for transferring to Ravenswood, but again, I think you were the exception.

I agree with your contention that many teachers and students came with stereotyped liberal attitudes, and when black students failed to evidence any educational improvement they became soured on integrated education! Sure, these people were naive to start with, and so their disillusionment is predictable.

I must agree with your view that I've become increasingly conservative on matters of race, education, and related social questions. But I think my stance is the product of thought, analysis, and research not simply reacting to my Ravenswood experience.

....One statement in your letter hit me with a sharp impact: "I also mourn because I see that the people who are going to suffer are the blacks. And that has happened too often....When all else fails white people can always resort to shitting on the blacks..." I'll try to remember that when I go back to Carlmont. If I can, then I will have salvaged something from the last five years.....

Sincerely,
Jack (Fasman, teacher)

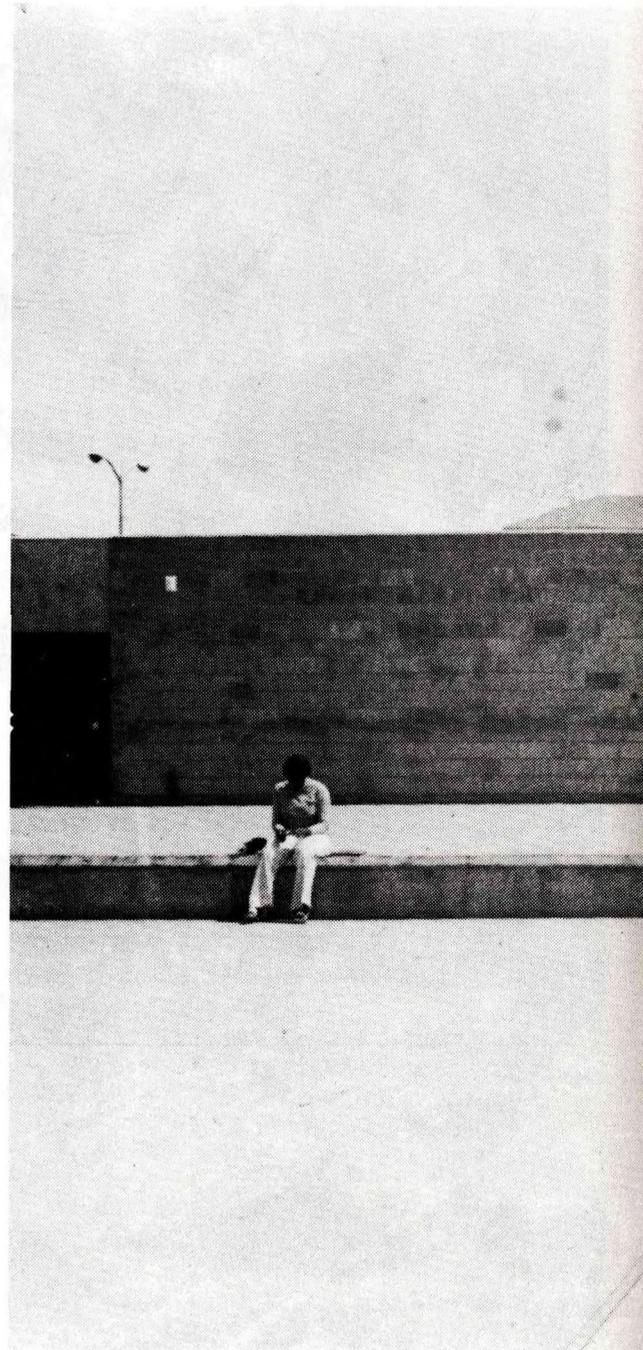
Many things have touched my life these past two years...experiences that have altered my perspective and, to some extent, beliefs and values. The whole spectrum....good, bad and some poignantly beautiful.....all the way from Coretta Scott King and Cecil Williams to the "Righteous Ones" and the death of a dear friend...a sit-in in the administration building and four square in the academic courtyard.

I have come to know, with certainty, that behavior can be modified and that even attitudes can be altered if the reward is great enough. Perhaps, most of all, my certainty that belief congruency **does** enable people differing in background and incentive and motivation to work together has been strengthened. And further, how great to work at a place where diversity has recognizable worth.

It's difficult to explain to an outsider what the magic of the Ravenswood experience consists of. It's participatory democracy, it's being an innovator, it's working harder than you've ever worked before, it's really getting to know people of another race and culture and losing some of that ethnocentricity and not even realize that you're losing it, caring about the kids and the future of Ravenswood almost 24 hours a day, becoming fiercely protective and vocal about what is really happening here, the constant deadlines, it's frustration and exhaustion, but most of all it's caring.

I wish I could stick around...I'll hate being replaced...I'm reluctant to have that happen....I've enjoyed being made to feel indispensable, and liked and needed...it was a nice trip....I'm glad you let me share it with you.

Jan Strom, secretary



Enrollment statistics

YEAR	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	BLACK ENROLLMENT
1958-59	629	21 per cent
1959-60	817	28 per cent
1960-61	876	34 per cent
1961-62	906	37 per cent
1962-63	967	45 per cent
1963-64	1,205	49 per cent
1964-65	1,285	60 per cent
1965-66	1,214	60 per cent
1966-67	1,173	67 per cent
1967-68	1,149	75 per cent
1968-69	997	87 per cent
1969-70	849	94 per cent
1970-71	781	94 per cent
1971-72	1,125	51 per cent
1972-73	956	54 per cent
1973-74	906	53 per cent
1974-75	823	60 per cent
1975-76	650	65 per cent

Principals

Donald L. Bogie	1958 - 1963
Malcolm J. Taylor	1963 - 1968
Earl Meneweather	1968 - 1971
Clarence Cryer	1971 - 1974
James Van	1974 - 1976



Photo courtesy of Lyne Johnson, Ravenswood Post

THE AUTHORS

GREG GAVIN, 15, a sophomore at Ravenswood, was a voluntary transfer from Woodside, 9 miles away

ROSAN GOMPERS, 14, a freshman at Ravenswood, was a voluntary transfer from Menlo Park

CAROLE HALL, a resident of East Palo Alto, taught English at Ravenswood for seven years

A black and white photograph of a street scene. In the foreground, a tall utility pole stands on a concrete base. The street is lined with trees, and the background shows a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat desolate.

"Ravenswood was new, not because of its strange setup, but because of the unique spirit and constantly conflicting values of those who were there."

"Next year our black, beautiful, soulful school is going to turn into one of the biggest hippie fields in the district....."

"Ravenswood has changed my life."

During its short life Ravenswood led an often turbulent existence. It came into being and closed amid controversy. In between it was different things to different people. But whatever it was, Ravenswood was not a run of the mill high school.