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# BUSING

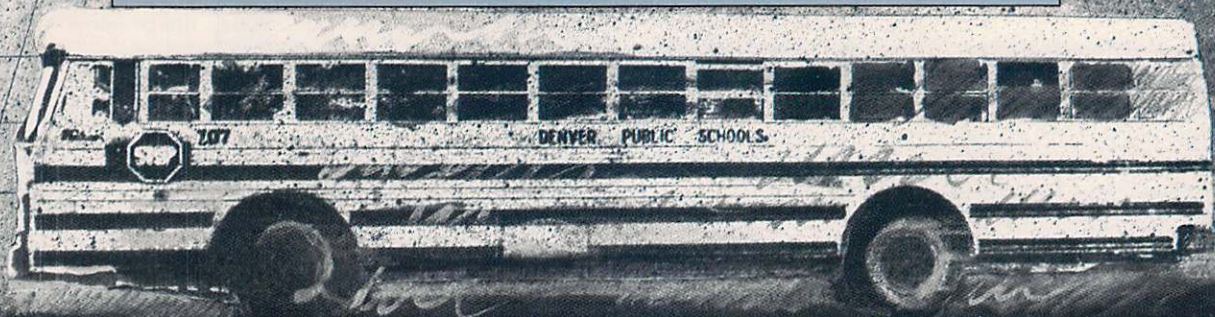
## WITHOUT TEARS

BY TED CONOVER

I

SAW THE SCHOOL bus approach last month and a familiar, queasy feeling came to my stomach. "Here goes," said my sister Margo, fifteen, taking a deep breath as it stopped in front of us and the door opened.

She had good reason to be nervous—it was her first day of high school. I did not—I had graduated from Manual High School five years before, and was going





with her to renew old ties and see what had changed during my years away at college. Yet somehow, the memories of my first day at Manual wouldn't leave me alone.

It was, after all, a jittery moment in the history of the Denver Public Schools. Under a court order announced the spring before, all the kids from my white, semisuburban section of southeast Denver were to be bused to Manual. Manual, the ghetto school up north somewhere near Five Points. Manual, the perennial basketball power. Manual, so named not for a Hispanic (Manuel) or a Jew (Emmanuel), as many surmised, but for Manual Training High School, Denver's former vocational education center. Manual, the school attended by the son of our black cleaning lady.

When we arrived at 28th and Williams, Margo hopped excitedly off the bus and walked into school. She is my third sister, the last of the four kids in my family to go to Manual.

I lingered outside; the scene was so different. My friends and I had not been so optimistic. Maybe it was the long line of police cars across the street from our row of yellow buses, or the CBS television camera crew that filmed our ascent up Manual's steps. The adults had been expecting an explosion. Cops and cameramen waited almost voyeuristically for us kids to go crazy and head for each others' throats. After all, it was happening in Boston, Massachusetts; Pontiac, Michigan; and Louisville, Kentucky. It had happened in Denver just four years earlier, when race riots had closed newly desegregated George Washington High School for a week. Manual, Denver's dark, dangerous educational nightmare, seemed like a disaster waiting to happen.

But just before I climbed the steps on that first day, I had seen a black kid lean out the front door and shout at the cameramen. "Y'all go home now, y'hear? This is just gonna be a regular school day!"

It was a foreshadowing. Somehow, Manual was to work as other desegregated schools did not. In an age of trouble, we would be calm.

One reason was that, over the summer, people had been laboring to forestall an explosion. An orientation program organized by Manual administrators and parents from both sides of town provided employment for thirty students-to-be. They worked on joint

projects and, in discussion groups, shared anxieties about busing and tried to allay them. After one such meeting, one of the workers—a friend of mine—went so far as to speculate to me that the blacks were as afraid of our coming as we were of going there. Through friends in the program, whites began to understand blacks, and vice versa, before they saw each other.

Manual busing happened backwards from the norm—whites went to a black

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school. So many blacks were being bused out of the old Manual attendance area to desegregate other Denver high schools that whites were needed to fill the gap. This made a good deal of difference. Our reception was warmer than what blacks had experienced at white schools. When blacks went to George Washington, for example, they knew they were not wanted. Few preparations had been made for their arrival, and they even had to pay their own bus fare to get there. Already a minority in Denver, they were an extreme minority on the G.W. scene. They resented it, and fighting resulted. Whites approached Manual's blacks on their own turf. Many of us were scared, yes, but few were resentful.

Principal James Ward was another reason the change went relatively well. Huge and imposing, Ward was perhaps the first black person I saw at Manual whom I knew I didn't have to fear. He was also the first person we saw every day upon entering Manual, for Ward's

office was not really the room with his name on the door but the Manual foyer, where he would sit on a stool in front of a bust of Martin Luther King all day long, answering questions, settling disputes, and letting us know that somebody was in charge.

"The first thing I wanted every kid to see was the leader," he told me.

The first day of class, Ward brought everyone into the auditorium and talked to us. Sweating profusely as usual, hoisting up his pants, Ward spurned podium and microphone and strode across the stage. We were hushed, as he spoke in a voice like thunder: "Some people in this city have been saying that Manual can't desegregate, that we're going to have trouble. Well, I believe we can prove they're wrong. This school's going to fly!"

We weren't going to take sides, white against black, said Ward—we were just going to be people. And, by doing better than other schools, we were going to show the skeptics, and the world, that Manual had it together.

The "we" was important, because Ward, along with certain parents and teachers, helped us realize it was our fate. We could fight and make the news or we could get along, make the best of things, and maybe learn something. We had a stake in what was about to happen...

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Leaving the auditorium, I saw a school unlike any I had seen during ten years in the Denver Public School system. During the lunch hours, soul music blasted from the juke box in the lunchroom and filled the first floor halls. Dancing was disallowed, but some black girls became very good at dancing while seated, to songs like "Fire" and "Play That Funky Music, White Boy":  
Then there was dancin', and singin',  
And movin' with the groovin',  
And just when it hit me  
Somebody turned around and shouted,  
"Play that funky music, white boy!"

Outside, unlike most other Denver public schools, smoking was allowed on the patio. Hall pass and attendance policies were only loosely enforced, making Manual virtually an open campus. Across the street, older blacks shot craps around picnic tables in the park and, near the back steps, drug dealers encouraged us to get high.

To those of us accustomed to the prison-camp discipline of G.W., all of this was disconcerting at first. We ac-



cepted the fact that Manual was just more relaxed. Not only did the administration and staff impose fewer rules, but socially, we had a blank slate.

"Here you're free—people will speak to you," Ward remembers a white girl saying to him.

Manual seemed to have no cliques. Whose little brother or sister you were didn't matter, nor was there pressure to conform to the jock-freak-hick-nerd schema that stratified society at so many other Denver area high schools. White Manual students were a brand new species—no one knew what we would be like, and deciding how to be was left almost completely to us.

Ward's instructions to forget our colors were well-intended, but could not, of course, always be followed. While Manual's halls, lunch room, and physical and vocational education classes were well-integrated, a *de facto* segregation persisted inside academic classrooms. Classes that were "tracked," that is, divided into groups according to ability, underscored differences in the backgrounds of blacks and whites. "Accelerated" classes were, and still are, virtually all white; in regular classes, whites were frequently a minority among blacks and Chicanos; and remedial classes were often all minority.

Violence, often sparked by outsiders, further obstructed integration. White kids were continually shaken down in the bathrooms; some of my friends tried to last the whole day without a visit to the can. As the survival instinct became better honed, we learned to avoid other solitary situations, such as the parking lot at unusual hours, where one of my closest friends had his watch and wallet taken; or upstairs hallways after school, where one day five blacks accosted me and, in a scuffle, took my down parka and wallet. Tearfully, I ran downstairs to the foyer. Ward immediately dispatched assistant principal Ed Calloway to the scene of the crime.

Such encounters turned a small number of my friends into out-and-out racists, and a few left school. For others, though, they were a part of growing up, a *rite de passage* from sheltered southeast Denver to what teacher Jerry McCracken said had been created by busing—"a sampling of the real world."

Aside from the tracked classes and lonely restrooms, remarkable things occurred. I actually began to like some of that music blaring from the juke box,

and I saw friends trade in James Taylor records for Earth, Wind & Fire. On student council and the newspaper staff, I met blacks and Chicanos and became friends with many. Other whites I knew did, too, and among them were some unexpected alliances: When Walter Vest, a transfer student from Kent-Denver Country Day School, was beaten in a stairwell during that first spring, one of the first to his rescue was David Bennett, a tough basketball

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player who launched a search for the attackers.

Yet, even as we realized the potential for friendship, both blacks and whites became aware of its limits. My sister Beth, now a Manual senior, said, "If you get to be friends, you feel your differences so much... it hurts because you know you can't change your background, and they can't change theirs."

A case in point was offered by Roma Noble, a former cheerleader who is black: "Me and this girl... were really good friends, but her father didn't like blacks, and so when we went over there, he wouldn't say anything to me."

Some sports suffered with the advent of busing, but the Thunderbolt basketball team was still strong enough in 1975 to take the state championship for the fourth time, and drew as many whites as blacks to its games. The football team failed to win a single game, but, as teacher Dick Jordan remembers, "I never saw a school that would bring out so many fans for a losing team."

At these events, we were exhorted by the funkiest, most soulful groups of cheerleaders between California and St. Louis. Their spirit was infectious. To the occasional shock of spectators in the other stands, Manual whites joined in hollering:

Manual [pronounced MAN-yul] is superb!

Manual is superb!

We're rough, we're tough,

and we're bad enough;

I say we're superb!

And, like black preachers addressing their congregations, the cheerleaders would call out the name of a friend, teacher, or a whole group of people in the stands, and be answered: "Sophomores!" they cried.

"Yeah?"

"Sophomores!"

"Yeah, baby?"

"Introduce yourselves, right on, right on, introduce yourselves!"

"We are the sophomores, and we're glad to be here at this Thunderbolt jam!"

Omar Blair, a black school board member, attended some similar contests recently and commented, "White kids have really assimilated into that school. You go to those games and see them boogie along, having fun—it's beautiful; it brings tears to my eyes."

At music assemblies, we heard gospel music unlike anything I had heard in my life, and were introduced to male falsettos singing like Smokey Robinson, only better. My sister Beth, who just returned from six months of study in Japan, says, "It was almost like being an exchange student—you see another way of life."

The difference is that at Manual, we changed the host country. Many black graduates I spoke to recently are glad for this, saying it upgraded the quality of education and better prepared them for life in a white-dominated society. Others, however, got a stronger taste of the white man's world than they liked.

For them, the white presence caused a number of problems, some having to do with academics. Fewer vocational education courses were offered but, more significantly, according to guidance counselor Beverly Biffle, "Acceleration became a criterion of status." Because so few blacks were in accelerated classes, many began to perceive themselves as less important than whites, and "devastating" self-image

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problems ensued.

"You get the feeling that remedial class is your station in life," observes Jim Ward, now the DPS director of alternative education. The unfortunate alternative is single-ability classes, which either bore the advanced students or strain those behind.

Another result of the white presence was that Manual seemed to belong less and less to the surrounding community. "The school left the community in some sense," says Ward. "It's not the mecca it used to be."

Before, local blacks had a strong sense of pride in Manual. A move to change the school's name and get rid of the vocational overtone failed, according to Ward, because, regardless of its origin, the name "Manual" had come to mean something proud and familiar. Blacks had found something to love in an institution others disdained.

Also, whites came to dominate the PTA, and seemed, in the minds of many blacks, to have a disproportionate influence on the operations of the school. "People who live in the immediate area feel intimidated," says Bob Patton, Manual '58, and a member of the school board's ad hoc committee. "They don't want to look ignorant or economically inferior, and tend not to participate as they would if it were a community school."

Omar Blair agrees that in the case of Manual, and in desegregation generally, the sacrifices blacks have had to make are greater than for whites. "In the long run," he says, "most of the kids, regardless of color, will be better adults. They will know how to live with each other. It all has to start somewhere."

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My sister Margo began last month at a school different in small ways from the one I attended. More whites than blacks (51 per cent to 39 per cent) go there now, whereas before the split was virtually even. The juke box is gone, and students no longer wander through the halls. As Assistant Principal Galen Vanderlinden notes with some pride, "Now, we're more structured here."

Whether that is a gain or a loss remains to be seen. The spirit of experimentation that marked the "vanguard years" is diminished; there seems to be less vitality. Teacher Jerry McCracken has observed "less carefulness" in inter-

racial relations as new students take getting along more or less for granted.

Still, Manual remains unique for its diversity. Students graduating from Manual seem to espouse a set of values not found in graduates of suburban schools—like tolerance, flexibility, and respect for the dignity of alternate lifestyles. They also seem more worldly and street-wise.

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The experience was not entirely good for me, but it was mostly good, and none of the twenty Manual graduates I spoke with recently would do it over again any other way. As Manual teacher Dick Jordan observed on a television special on busing at Manual, "The public schools do not offer many of the kinds of experiences that change your life."

Manual did, and does. When I arrived at college in the East, I felt in profound ways different from classmates who had received more traditional educations. I was proud of that feeling, and hope that, a few years from now, Margo will have it, too. ■

*Ted Conover is a free-lance writer and recent graduate of Amherst College.*

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business," said Titsch. TPI got back on its feet and it didn't take long.

In 1978 *Mobile Times*, a magazine for land mobile radio licensees, was first published, as was *The Mobile Radio Handbook*, an annual directory for the industry. With the profits of *Cable-Vision* and the other new publications and the help of Cherry Creek National Bank, TPI acquired more new products and started others. By 1979, TPI could boast of publishing fourteen magazines, but by then it was time to readjust the company's priorities.

"We went through a consolidation in the company," said Titsch. "I either spun off, killed, or sold products I didn't want." At the time, that meant the axe for six magazines, including *Colorado Magazine*; *Colorado Woman*; *Watch*, a TV trade magazine; *Colorado Green*, a landscaping magazine; *Northern Real Estate*; and *Tailwinds*, the in-flight magazine for Rocky Mountain Airways.

"I was in one of my thrashing stages," says Titsch. "I am a totally free-spirited manager." It was clear then, if it had not been before, that Titsch's policy dictated that if products were not profitable, they were not for Titsch.

Another problem Titsch had to face was his lack of experience in publishing consumer magazines. Trade publishing is one game, and consumer publishing is something else entirely.

Merrill G. Hastings has reason to be skeptical of Titsch's ability to successfully penetrate the consumer side of publishing. He saw a product that he had developed into a strong consumer magazine go down the tubes rapidly in Titsch's hands. *Colorado Magazine* once had a paid circulation of over 180,000. But despite Titsch's efforts to manage it with some of Hastings' staff, the circulation declined precipitously and it was eventually sold to *Rocky Mountain Magazine* for its mailing list.

Titsch himself admits that it is the trade side of magazine publishing that he knows about and that he does not have "the personality" to run a successful consumer division. Many of the people he had hired to run that division claim that he did not listen to their advice, thus the swift demise of many such publications. "He runs his own show," said one former consumer division staffer, "and there's not much room for suggestion." (continued on page 126)