

Undercover Teacher

Getting School Job Is Easy As ABC, Reporter Learns

Staff writer George N. Allen has just emerged from two months as a teacher in one of the city's "difficult" schools—John Marshall Junior High in Brooklyn. Mr. Allen was assigned to obtain a teacher's job at the school, JHS 210, to learn first-hand the experiences of a teacher there, the attitudes and aptitudes of the students, the day-by-day problems of classroom instruction. School authorities, fellow teachers and students knew nothing of his true identity. This is the fourth of a series of articles.

By **GEORGE N. ALLEN,**

World-Telegram Staff Writer.

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Getting a job as a teacher in our city's school system is a relatively simple procedure, so hard pressed are school officials for teachers,

I simply walked in off the street and my credentials were readily accepted by officials of the administrative headquarters of the Board of Education at 110 Livingston St., Bklyn.

I presented a transcript of my undergraduate record at Columbia University. Later I passed my teacher examinations for a city license. Then I took the required courses during the summer. And on Sept. 4 I climbed the steps of John Marshall Junior High School—a teacher.

No Background Checkup.

At no time during the two months I was in charge of a classroom did anyone ask why I wanted a job that called for the instruction of a class of 30 boys and girls. Nor did they inquire into my psychological fitness for the job in the months before I went

to work. My background, apparently, was never checked before I started classroom work.

I found it puzzling and disturbing that as far as I know none of our educational authorities took the trouble to find out what kind of person I was.

I recall clearly that the major point drummed into us by a professor in adolescent psychology at Columbia Teachers College was that an adult could not understand or deal effectively with children unless he was himself reasonably well-balanced psychologically.

The teaching situation, the professor emphasized, where one adult is molding, instructing, punishing or trying to help 30 or more unstable adolescents, is a situation in which the psychological state of the adult is of paramount importance.

School regulations state that if a candidate lacked college courses in education at the time of the examination in February, he had until Oct. 1 of this year to take them. If he did not, said the rules, his teaching license would be revoked.

Not Asked About Courses.

Up to Wednesday, Nov. 5, the day I resigned from John Marshall Junior High School in Brooklyn, nobody had asked me whether I had taken or completed these courses. I later learned that there is usually some delay in making these checks but that the authorities always get around to it.

The authorities, however, did make sure they knew one thing about me. One of the earliest requirement made of me was that I sign a loyalty oath.

I took my first step into the teaching profession on Jan. 30 when I presented myself at the Board of Education headquarters.

"I want some information about obtaining a teaching job in the New York City school system," I told the first clerk who approached me.

I was given a sheaf of application forms and was told about the general requirements for any teaching post. The examination for junior high school English teachers, I learned, was coming up in a few weeks and the courses I had origi-



George N. Allen.

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Getting a Job Is Easy as ABC, Reporter Finds

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nally taken in college made me eligible to take this test. I decided my new career would be teacher of English.

I bought copies of previous examinations for this position, as applicants are urged to do by school officials, took a week off from my job as reporter for the World-Telegram to cram for the test, and tackled the exam late in February. There were two written sections, a speech test and a physical. I passed all parts.

In June the mailman brought my passport into New York City's classrooms—my teaching license. On July 7, I began studying in Columbia Teachers College to make up the education courses which I lacked. Aug. 15 brought the news that I had passed these courses.

The day had come to look for a teaching job.

I picked out two schools which had been advertising regularly for teachers. One was Junior High School 64, the other Junior High School 210, both in Brooklyn. Jacob Landers, principal of No. 64, was the first to invite me for an interview.

Mr. Landers was disappointed that I didn't have teaching experience, but he subsequently offered me a job anyway.

Offered Job.

"You sound all right and you look all right, Mr. Allen," he said, "so I am offering you the job. What do you say?"

Since this was my first interview with a school principal, I decided to hold off on giving a definite answer. The next day a letter from Florence Hornung, principal of Junior High School 210, invited me to come for an interview.

On Aug. 22 I went to JHS 210 (otherwise known as John Marshall) at Rochester Ave. and Park Pl., Crown Heights. I had to wait in the outer office while a candidate for a gym teacher's job finished talking with Mrs. Hornung. As he left, he apologized for appearing for an interview in shorts and a T-shirt.

"Not at all," said the principal. "After all, that is pretty much your working costume, isn't it?"

I walked into the office to find myself facing a pleasant, smiling, middle-aged, motherly woman. She greeted me warmly and immediately launched into a description of the various vacancies she had on her teaching staff.

Desperate for Teachers.

"The only question seemed to be which teaching job would be best for me. I attributed this to the acknowledged shortage of teachers. I felt that Mrs. Hornung, as a person who had volunteered to be principal of a school in a difficult neighborhood, was desperate for teachers.

Would I be willing to teach social studies or mathematics or perhaps art? I protested that I couldn't draw a straight line.

After much discussion of what I could or would teach, Mrs. Hornung finally offered me a straight English program, saying:

"Well, the main thing I to give you a job to get you into the school. Then we can work out what it would be best for you to teach."

Mrs. Hornung explained that the school population in 210 was 45 percent white, 45 percent Negro and 10 percent Puerto Rican.

"There are some very good children in this school," she remarked. "Children of school principals and other professionals.

No Blue Jeans Permitted.

She added with a smile: "All the boys wear neckties and we don't tolerate blue jeans. When you see the children in assembly, they look very nice."

Mrs. Hornung explained she had taken over 210 early this year after the suicide of her predecessor, George Goldfarb, because she found the school to be "an intriguing situation."

Winding up her dissertation on her school's good points, she threw in this clincher:

"We have a good setup here. I have three assistant principals—all men—and I have all the police protection I want."

Then she asked: "By the way, you live quite a distance from this school. Why do you want to teach here?"

I told her that I wanted to teach in a challenging situation.

Mrs. Hornung asked if she could put me down for a job

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK		OATH OF ALLEGIANCE FILED CHAPTERS 882 - LAWS OF 1954
File No. <u>159287</u>	SUBSTITUTE LICENSE	
Subject or Rank	<u>English</u>	Date <u>6/1/55</u>
<u>George H. Allen</u>		In <u>Gr. High</u> Schools
I am hereby licensed to serve as a substitute in the schools of the City of New York, in the capacity indicated above, in accordance with the By-laws of the Board of Education.		
Signature of Licensee	<u>George H. Allen</u>	<u>William Jansen</u> Superintendent of Schools
EXCERPTS FROM BY-LAWS AND REGULATIONS OF BOARD OF EDUCATION		
Section 108 Each * member of the teaching staff *** including substitutes, shall record his time of entering and leaving the school in the time book or on the cards provided for the purpose.		
Section 242 * Terms of Substitute License. Substitute license shall be issued by the Superintendent of Schools, subject to termination at any time by the Superintendent of Schools. A substitute license shall terminate at the end of the school year during which the license terminates the day (70) set for compulsory retirement of regular teachers in day schools. A substitute license issued on condition that the holder thereof shall meet prescribed reservation requirements by a designated date, shall terminate if the licensee fails to complete such requirements by such date.		
Section 251 Substitute Service—Grades 7-12. A substitute certificate or license to serve in a high school shall be valid for service also in grades 7-12 if the subject covered by said certificate. A substitute certificate or license to teach common branches in day elementary schools shall be valid for service also in grades 7-12 in common branch schools.		
Section 254 Substitute Service—Evening Schools. A substitute license or certificate to serve in day schools shall be valid for service also, in the same grade of school and in the same subject, in evening schools.		

This is staff writer George N. Allen's substitute teacher's license. His address has been blacked out to preserve his privacy. The license is signed by William Jansen as superintendent of schools because Dr. John J. Theobald had not yet assumed his duties when the document was issued.

TOMORROW: Welcome, 'Teach.'

Staff writer George N. Allen describes his first days as a teacher in John Marshall Junior High School.

in her school, saying: "I would love to have you on my teaching staff." I told her that I would let her know.

Subsequently, my editors decided this was the school I should enter and I wrote Mrs. Hornung that I would accept. I told my wife that the decision had been made.

"Good luck," she said. "I hope you don't find too much trouble where you are going."

I told her I expected some trouble but I also expected the school would have its share of good, hard-working students eager for learning.

And so, on the morning of Sept. 4, I reported for my first day in my new profession. A few minutes after I entered the school I was introduced to one of my new colleagues, a veteran on the teaching staff.

She looked me over carefully, then spoke with a wary smile:

"Oh, a new teacher! You look like a strong one. We can certainly use a few around here."

Psychiatric Session

The Assn. for the Psychiatric Treatment of Offenders, a national voluntary organization for the rehabilitation of psychologically disturbed lawbreakers, will hold a free public discussion, "Is Homosexuality Curable?" Wednesday 8 p.m. in the Academy of Science, 2 E. 63rd St.

Joins Museum Board

Peter Gimbel, natural history enthusiast and skin-diving expert, has been elected to the Board of Trustees of The American Museum of Natural History, it was announced today by Alexander M. White, museum president. Mr. Gimbel, with White, Weld & Co., investment banking firm.

Principals' Study Gathers Dust

A high school principals' report recommending methods of combatting juvenile delinquency in the city's schools has been gathering dust in the Board of Education's musty files ever since the report was completed more than four years ago.

Only one of the report's 10 major recommendations has been acted upon and Dr. John J. Theobald, Superintendent of Schools, said today the board has no immediate plans to implement any of the remaining recommendations.

The report was developed after 17 months of study by a committee of eight high school principals headed by Asst. Superintendent Maurice D. Hopkins, then principal of Jamaica High School, and was made public in February of 1954.

Mr. Hopkins said today the committee's report "apparently was pigeonholed." So far as he knew, he said, the board had never adopted or approved the report despite the endorsement it received in professional circles.