

The Qwertyverse: Keynotes

Interview of Judi Mucklin by Blessing Uwisike

May 16, 2024, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Hefter Center, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Description

Judi Mucklin is a resident of Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, and worked as a typing teacher in Milwaukee Public Schools from 1972 to 2011. She began and ended her career teaching business classes at Pulaski High School, and in between also taught at North Division High School and South Division High School. In this interview, Judi recalls the value of learning on a manual typewriter, notes the surprising benefits of typing for bilingual education, remembers a time when police officers were required to learn touch typing, and shares her own experiences learning from typing teacher and speed champion Cortez Peters. Judi is interviewed by Blessing Uwisike, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Originally from Nigeria, Blessing also learned to type on a manual typewriter.

Transcript

Blessing Uwisike: All right. Thank you for agreeing to do this. I will just go straight to the point and I want to hear your experience. But first of all, can you share something about your grandson and his typing behavior, maybe we can start from that story.

Judi Mucklin: Sure. I'd be happy to. Well, being a typing teacher for all 40 years of my career with Milwaukee public schools, I taught at least one class of that every, every, every day, almost, and I always believe that the technique starting from the manual typewriter all the way to the computer keyboard is very important. Unfortunately, students didn't always want to do the technique. And just yesterday at my daughter's in Chicago, my grandson who was 10, he's 10 now, 10 years old, he said, "Oh, I know how to type." And I said, "Well, can I see it? I'd like to see you do it." So he put on the program on his laptop and, you know, he could do ASDF go down to CV. He was doing it, but then I said, well, if you know all of them, let's go on to the words. And then he was all over the place. And I said, well, no, you

don't know how to type them because if you know how to type, your eyes are up there and your fingers stay on the keys. And your technique has to be a certain way. And he didn't like that. And unfortunately, I think that is the way. It has occurred in schools because they don't have a business teacher like I was. And they even at some points had business teachers that would even come to elementary schools and teach. And then all of that changed. And now even in high schools there are very few schools that even teach keyboarding anymore. So it's very sad and scary. But you know, people have relied on their phones and their iPads, and so knowing those correct keys...but when you get on a regular keyboard, which I still have one at my house...you know, I am very fast, and love it.

Blessing Uwisike: That's wonderful because back in secondary school I had a business studies teacher, and we actually learned to type using the typewriter itself.

Judi Mucklin: The manual?

Blessing Uwisike: Yes, yes.

Judi Mucklin: Yeah, I like to. Even when the electricians were in and they'd be in the electric room and I'd say, well, for two weeks, we're going to go over to the manual room because you will learn your keys better because there's no backspacing. There's no...and I don't care what your paper looks like. That's not what I'm concerned about. I'm concerned with learning the keys and operating it correctly so you learn the right way. They didn't like it though. They wanted to get right on that computer keyboard and backspace and only care what the paper looks like.

Blessing Uwisike: In our time we used to want to go to the business studies lab, because everybody had a personal typewriter. And when we are done, our clothes are stained with black ink and red ink. But our papers are also full with ASDF, LKJ, ASDF, LKJ. So it's nice to hear your experience. And how this has grown over time. So what schools did you teach at and what year?

Judi Mucklin: Okay, I started teaching in 1972 at Pulaski High School on the South side. I was there for 6072 to 78, six years. And then there was a big excessing. And then I went to North Division and I taught there for seven years. And then I took maternity leave. And then I taught at S division. And the bilingual business, I was the bilingual business teacher. And that was wonderful. Typing there helped the kids learn English better. And because I was in the bilingual program, so many kids didn't have command of the English language. And so by typing the English words, it really helped them. And then I finished my career the last six years or the last 20 years at Pulaski, which is where I started. So I began and ended at Pulaski High School. So I had a variety of students. I had all white students starting out with a few, interspersing with when they did desegregation, very few—black students—and then

at North I had 99% black students, and I had a great success with kids learning to type there and I always believed it helped their English. It helped their spelling. It helped so many areas. That typewriter helps in so many areas because, you know, I've seen it happen, whether it be their English, whether it be their reading, whatever it is.

Blessing Uwisike: Well, I think that's actually amazing. Maybe it can be explored and maybe introduced to the first year writing class and just helping students to express themselves better away from using digital tools and computers and all of that and just see how proficient.

Judi Mucklin: Yeah.

Blessing Uwisike: That's wonderful. So what differences did you see at the beginning of this teaching career in how students were learning in the level of reception and expertise till now, now that you are retired? And yes: So what difference did you see at the beginning and now at the end?

Judi Mucklin: Well, when we started on manual typewriters, like I said, they all learned great. You know, there were very few students who didn't try to do it the right way, you know, which was keeping their eyes on copy. So all heads were to the right and the fingers on the correct keys the right way. Not slanting; correct technique. Sitting up straight, feet on the floor. There was a whole process that kids didn't realize—they wanted to just get there and start typing. I would go around the classroom, check and make sure that they were sitting. We had eventually—not right at the beginning—we had adjustable chairs. So if you were really short, you wanted to make sure that you were sitting correctly so that your hands were at the right point. Not going like you know way down or way up. That all makes a difference in how people type. And then from the manual typewriters came electric typewriters and the Selectric typewriter. So the Selectric was with the ball and all of the keys were on this little ball. And we loved that because manual typewriters used to break down, break a lot. You know, if you had a key that broke you couldn't use the typewriter. Where the Selectric was really nice. And we would change the element I think is what it was called. You would change that element, which is the ball. And you could have different type fonts and everything. And they liked that. You know, I'd be like oh, would you like to try a different font? You know, because you're not only learning how to type, you're learning about fonts and you know, sans and serif and all this. Stuff and then the computer came in and we started on like Apple 2Es, where you, in order to make a capital, you didn't just hold a shift down, you had to, like, hold a shift and alt or something to get a capital letter. It was hard. But that was the computer. And that's all we had. And so they wanted to be only concerned with how it was going to print out. And I would tell them, "We're not printing anything for two weeks. I don't care what it looks like. I care about you learning the keys

and keeping your eyes on copy and having the right technique.” By the time I left in 2011 it was very hard to get kids to care about doing it correctly. Those who did made sure they cared about their grade because I’d tell them in the first two weeks, “It’s only me looking at you; it has nothing to do with your paper.” And then kids would want to drop. They’d be like, well, I don’t want to do that, you know, because it was heavy concentration. Heavy concentration and, unfortunately, as kids, as the years went on, they didn’t have that concentration level.

But we still got, you know, oh students that got into the 90s. Ninety words per minute. But you know, I always said accuracy is more important than speed. And then speed will come if you are accurate and if you keep your eyes on copy and know your keys. But it’s funny because I was just in...what store was I at yesterday in Chicago? And the girl said, “Well, I know how to type.” And she was all over the place. But she was fast! And I thought, well, I said, “Well, I was a typing teacher. It doesn’t look like you’re keeping your fingers on the right keys.” And she said, “Oh, you don’t have to do that if you’re fast.” I’m like, oh, my gosh, this is really something. And what’s happened now in my own kids, which was like 15 years ago already, or 20. They would come home and say, “Oh, we’re doing typing,” and I’d be like, “Oh, great.” And they were in a classroom, and it was like an aid, or maybe it was a teacher. And they put them on a program and they left them to go from, you know, lesson to lesson to lesson. And the teacher would many times, they said, just sit there and read the paper. They didn’t come around and monitor them and check them like yesterday with my grandson. I put the paper over him as he was [typing]. He didn’t like that, but we used to have these covers over the computer keyboard and we’d put them over that to make sure that they would want to learn it without looking.

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Blessing Uwisike: That’s wonderful. And as you spoke. I was thinking about the discipline that comes with using the typewriter; that students, or people who type these days, do not have. I mean, you mentioned having to sit in a particular way, and that concentration level to just focus on that it. I think as it eroded over the years, that discipline is kind of slipping away as well.

Judi Mucklin: It’s a deep concentration because even though you’re doing AA, SS, D, you’re still doing, and you can’t think of anything else, and then you’re going on in, you know, THE, you know, BIG. And then as the as you’re using the numbers, you know, to learn the numbers. I took a course with Cortez Peters. At Whitewater, I got my master’s at Whitewater. I got my undergraduate at Mount Mary in business education, and then I got

my master's at Whitewater in business. And we were able to take a course with the world champion and he's gone now. But it was Cortez Peters and it was all based on speed and constant timings. And your numbers. Oh my goodness. But he would always teach us the best way to do it, you know, because a lot of people were like, "Oh I I can't do that." And we were all business teachers, so it was quite interesting to learn from the world champion and he would talk about being called in by his mother. And making him type and go faster and faster every day. And he became I think he was...uh...I'm not sure where he started. Was it in Puerto Rico? And then they moved to New York and he became the world champion, Cortez Peters.

Blessing Uwisike: That's amazing. I would probably look him up. Yes, that's wonderful.

Judi Mucklin: Sure, sure.

Blessing Uwisike: Do you think till now that there are still typing teachers, because the teachers you mentioned in your previous example you said they just came and read the paper. They did not really participate to help with student.

Judi Mucklin: But they weren't business teachers. Those were like seventh, eighth grade teachers who thought of that, put the program on and they went and sat and read the paper. They weren't business teachers. If you had a business teacher who knew how to teach, you know, the method, the methods of teaching typewriting, they would never let that happen, because the most important thing is going around and checking constantly. They could be on the program, but then I would stop them every so often on a program, even when we use the program and say, "OK, now let's go to Microsoft Word and let's do the keys that I call out and I want all eyes on me." And you know, and I'd be like, "Oh, so and so, I want your eyes over here. No looking down." So there were all kind of strategies to use to get them to do it. Now, if it's being done today? I think they're just putting them on programs. So whether or not they're learning it correctly would depend on the discipline of that particular child or student, because they're going younger and younger, because high schools are not teaching it, I don't think.

Blessing Uwisike: Exactly

Judi Mucklin: They might be teaching Microsoft Office, so they might be teaching Word, but kids are all over the place.

Blessing Uwisike: Because I was wondering if we still have teachers who take it the way you did when you were still teaching.

Judi Mucklin: You know, that's a very good question and I can always get back to you on that because I have a friend who retired and she's teaching at WCTC [Waukesha County

Technical College] and she's teaching high school boys in an Industrial Ed program. So I will ask her what you know, if they're able to do it the correct way.

Blessing Uwisike: You know, typewriters are quite loud. I remember back, back then. And everybody's typing at the same time. And it's so loud and clunky. How did you come to love it? And if you know anyone currently who still really loves the typewriter. What do you think is that compelling thing that makes you prefer using the typewriter to other means of typing?

Judi Mucklin: We using the typewriter gives you a beautiful finished product. I mean, of course, if there's mistakes, that's another whole thing. But, you know, listening to it, we used to even type on the manuals, to music, and the kids would have to do like, da-da-da-da, you know, and they'd have to hit the keys to the music. It was a beautiful thing. It was very loud like you said, and I always thought I'm going to lose my hearing, which maybe that's why I'm having a hard time hearing these days. But then it was interesting. We went from all that noise to complete quiet. So there are people who love teaching typing. I know that. How many? I don't think I don't know in MPS if they've got any. But I will check on that I will check.

Blessing Uwisike: So, you personally, what draws you to the typewriter? Why do you love the typewriter?

Judi Mucklin: Your handwriting is not always the best. Everybody can't read everybody's handwriting, but when you put it on the typewriter, you've got a uniform way of...you're reading something that everyone from around the world can, you know, understand correctly. And you know whether it's indenting paragraphs or double spacing between paragraphs or whatever, it's very uniform and it's neat and pleasant to look at. That's what I think is the most important thing. It's pretty and you can make it, you know, look that way. And now with computers and printing it out, you can fix it and everything and you get a beautiful copy.

Blessing Uwisike: That's true. Thank you. I'm just curious if you knew. When you were teaching typewriting, if you were aware that it originated here in Milwaukee, and if you did, did this in any way inform maybe how we thought. Or did you let the students know since you were here for a very long time?

Judi Mucklin: I taught my whole teaching career here, but I learned typing at a manual typewriter in New York, which is where I'm from. I had a nun who taught it and she would go around with a ruler like this, and if your fingers she would tap your fingers, your hands, and hit you with that ruler. And I just loved it. And I remember going home and getting a typing book and just wanting to get high speed and everything on my own. And my friends, you

know, it's sort of like you have peer pressure. We all wanted to have a high speed. And then when I majored in business and we had some typing classes, not learning, you already had to know how to type. It was interesting how even some of the teachers didn't have the correct technique, and that's been the case all along. When, how devoted you are to teaching typing the right way, you know. Like I said, that manual typewriter was always important to me. Because they could do it with correct technique; hard, but they could. So I think there have to be people still teaching it, but I'm going to check.

Blessing Uwisike: So when you were using the manna typewriter, what are the differences you notice or what's your experience like when you use the manual typewriter, [compared to using] a computer or a laptop?

Judi Mucklin: Well, the physicality of it, because to make a capital letter, you know, you hold down the shift. I mean, you still hold the shift on the one hand make capitals with the other. And you have to hold that down if you're on a manual type and if you didn't hold it all the way, you had a letter flying up in there. So you had to really build up strength, and kids would come in and say, "I can't do it. My fingers are too weak." And I'd be like, "Well, we're going to develop that."

You know, I didn't have strong fingers when I started. Girls would come in with these very long fingernails, and I said, "Uh, oh, we have to cut those because those fingernails are not going to let you pass the class." And some of them would drop the class. Oh, yeah. They try to drop the class or I'd have a parent call and say, "s it true? You told my daughter that she has to cut her nails?" And I'd be like, "Yes, or she's ... going to get it broken in between the rows of the keys." And that was with manual typewriters. You know, it got a little easier with the computer because, you know, you didn't have to worry about the shift and all that.

Blessing Uwisike: Can you say more about the experiences you had with your students or their parents or maybe members of the school community about learning the typewriter and saying that it wasn't as easy as they thought it would be?

Judi Mucklin: Right. I had a student who we're still friends because she not only took typing with me, but she took shorthand. And she's just six years younger than I am. And we meet for lunch occasionally. She lives in Burlington, and she said that was so hard for me. And she said, "But my parents told me that I could not be in sports if I didn't take typing and shorthand because they wanted me to be a secretary." And at the time a secretary was a very good job for a woman to have. This was, you know...I was in College in the late 60s and, you know, graduated in 72. So these kids were taking typing in 72 and, you know, yes, many of them, we wanted to go to college. But the other thing was, we used to tell them because we were told by the Police Department that we want anyone who's considering

being a police officer to take typing. So a lot of the guys would—and you know, now it can be girls or guys, but at the time it was mostly guys—and they're like, I'm going to be a police officer. I have to learn to type. I just saw last summer at a festival, somebody who noticed me. He wasn't in his police officer uniform and he came up to me and said, "Do you Remember Me? I'm Juan," and I don't remember his last name and I said, "Yes. You were one of my best students." He said, "I work for the Police Department and the Special Victims Unit and everybody is jealous of me because I can type my reports out so fast and they're like, 'how do you get this done so fast?'" And he said, "Because I learned it the right way." But my other student, the one I meet for lunch with, she said, "I just never could get fast. I never could learn. I didn't want to learn it the right way." It's like learning a foreign language. If you don't have the desire to do it, it's harder. When you have the desire and you want to do it and you want that end product to be, you know, proper, then it'll get done. It's funny because some of my National Honor Society students—very smart—they couldn't do it. They tried and tried, and one girl cried. Her mother called and said, "Why are you making her do it without looking?" She said. And I said, "That's the way you learn typing." And she said, "Well, she's crying every night and trying." And I said, "Well, I'll work with her." She would come after school and we would go real slow. But she had a very hard time and then some of my students who were, like, special education learned it really well because they would concentrate on it. And it wasn't how smart you were or anything. It was just [that for] some people it was harder than others to pick it up.

Blessing Uwisike: And what speed do you type at?

Judi Mucklin: Oh, I know I got in the 90s. I know I did. In the 90s. And I had students...because at the time in the 70s we would have law offices and different businesses who would call us and say, "You know, we'd like..." And they'd be in a Co-op program, which would mean they'd be in a business class, but then they would be sent out to work in jobs and they would be like, "I want a fast typist. Please get me a fast typist. We don't have time for the slow." So you know, I had many students who would get into the 90s and. Yeah, but ... we used to say if you can get to 40 words a minute, that's good. And you know, speed comes after accuracy but some can do it really fast and some can't. But anything 40, 50 words a minute is still great.

And we used to prepare for the civil service test. So the civil service test was if you worked for the city. And we would give the typing test and then send it on to them. And the kids would come in on a Saturday morning and that was pretty much, well, we might have done some with the electric...part time with the manual typewriter. And then they would of course look for the fastest and they look for the accuracy too depending on what they were hiring them for. But yeah, the typing test was very important at the time because there were

so many typing pools. Now the bosses all do their own typing. It's more reason for them to have learned it, you know, when they were young.

Blessing Uwisike: Yes. And that leads me to ask. Actually, because of the example you gave about your students who ran into you at this event, what do you find most impactful and satisfying?

Judi Mucklin: It's just wonderful to hear them say, "That class helped me so much in college, that class helped me so much on my job." Even my gynecologist, I saw him typing away. I think I was having an ultrasound or something, and I said, "Oh, you know your keys!" And he said, "That was my most useful high school class that I took." And it made me feel so wonderful that yes, if people really did it correctly, it's like riding a bike. You know, some people will say, "Well, I don't do it right anymore." I don't understand that because once you learn it correctly. It should be with you forever.

Blessing Uwisike: Yes, it's a lifelong skill.

Judi Mucklin: Yes, yes. But it's so gratifying to hear when they say it was so hard at the time, but I'm so glad I did it

Blessing Uwisike: That's amazing. And now this whole conversation has made me want to go back and brush up my typing, because we didn't do the business. We did the business class for just one term. It's like a session. It's like a semester. Just one term and that was it. So I don't think anybody gained proficiency, but that was just a way to introduce us.

Judi Mucklin: Yeah, right. Sure. We had Typing 1, Typing 2 and Typing 3, but if they'd come into Typing 2 and they didn't know their keys, I'd be like, "Are you aware that we're going to be typing major reports, major documents and things? You don't know your keys." "I know the keys!" And it was like, oh, my goodness. Because, you know, it's not up to me at that point to check their technique, but they're still going to have to, you know, be able to give the documents and everything and they're never going to be able to keep up with the class. So that was always interesting. And even a couple in typing 3. Nowadays I don't think they have that Typing 1, Typing 2, Typing, 3. And typing used to be a semester, and then the second semester they could take Typing 2. And then sometimes Typing 3 was a whole year, because they were learning all kind of manuscripts and documents and reports and how to do footnotes and everything like that correctly. And even now, in Microsoft Word, you have to know where to go to get those footnotes to appear in the right place. I'm sure it's much easier. I haven't had to do those kind of reports, but I'm sure you know it's a matter of just knowing where they are exactly.

Blessing Uwisike: Ohh that's that's very intense. That's amazing. Thank you so much for your time. I mean, I was happy to talk about this because again, when Jason was like, oh, Milwaukee is the birth place of the typewriter. And we were like, "Wow. And it's like, we need to share this with the world to. Let them know about it."

Judi Mucklin: Yes. And I knew that even in New York she gave us. The nun gave us a little bit of the history of the typewriter, and I always thought it was so interesting, especially when we we'd see a movie about it. And then I would always tell the kids, "Are you aware that Milwaukee is where the typewriter was invented?" And some were interested and some weren't, but it was always very interesting and seeing some companies that had, I think it was Allen-Bradley had a room with all the different typewriters; how they had gone from the original manual. They had them all there, because I did a job shadowing and I couldn't believe the room with all the typewriters. It just made me feel so good that, you know, people remembered the transition from all the typewriters.

Blessing Uwisike: Yes, I think that's also very inspiring because you know, when we're talking about Milwaukee, [people] think about the cheese. They think about the beer.

Judi Mucklin: Yeah, they forget about that typewriter!

Blessing Uwisike: And I feel like that's the most important, because see how much it has contributed to innovation.

Judi Mucklin: Yes.

Blessing Uwisike: And global developments today.

Judi Mucklin: Where would we be without people typing up their documents and handing them? Whether it be at the White House speech, or whatever. Everything depends on that type-written copy.

And you did take a typing class in Nigeria and grade were you in?

Blessing Uwisike: Yes, that was, we call it secondary school. I think that would be high school here. So that was my second year in secondary school.

Judi Mucklin: Okay. And was it all on computers?

Blessing Uwisike: Oh no, it was just...we just learned how to type. So we did ASDF column LKG. And then she gave us some documents to type out. But all of us were looking and typing one by one. So I think the class was just to acquaint us with it, because we didn't have computers.

Judi Mucklin: The keyboard...not learning it? So did you ever learn it correctly?

Blessing Uwisike: I tried, honestly, but I did not.

Judi Mucklin: It's a lot of practice. It's a lot of practice, because they tell the kids, go home and practice and I even give them some old keyboards, you know, to go home and practice with. I said, "You don't need a screen or anything, just practice on that and you'll get the feel of it."

Blessing Uwisike: OK. Yeah, that I think that's what we should have done working with those. So it was only in school when we came to school that we had access to the typewriter. We didn't have computers at home. I didn't have a computer until I was in the university. So yeah. Yeah. So I think that played a role.

Judi Mucklin: I remember when I got my first typewriter. I was a senior in high school. I had just taken typing and I begged for a typewriter and we went to an office supply store and I said to my mother, I've got to have a good one, not a cheap one. And it was an Olympia typewriter. You know, there's all different brands. You know, there's Remington. There's many different brands, but I had an Olympia and it was so beautiful and I typed for the Spanish department, all my years of college, that was my job.

Blessing Uwisike: Wow. Were you typing in English or Spanish?

Judi Mucklin: Both. I'd type in Spanish. You know I'd have to type Spanish, you know. And then I'd go back because they didn't have the Enya or any of those little symbols. The computer you type, you know like Alt-5 and you get it or something. I don't even know how they do it now because I don't need it that much.

Blessing Uwisike: Yes, Shift-Command-5 on my Apple.

Judi Mucklin: And some computers might just have it and. And all those figures. But oh, I would pound down because we'd have to use dittos, you know? We did mimeograph too, but it you had to type so hard because then, you know, it had to be on the purple ditto paper. And oh my God, my hands. That hurt. It's all I did was type type, type.

Blessing Uwisike: I can't imagine it. Yes. And I think it's wonderful that you have such a career and this was one thing you focused on. You know, these days we do many different things.

Judi Mucklin: Well, right, even like when my husband did taxes, I'm like, let me type in this stuff because he doesn't know how to type and I'd be like, let me type that first stuff in. It's taking you forever because he didn't know his keys.

Anyways, well, I don't want to keep you either, so, but if you have anything else, just feel free to call me or.

Blessing Uwisike: That's amazing.

Judi Mucklin: E-mail me I.

Blessing Uwisike: Will thank you so much for your time. It's such a pleasure to have met you. Thank you.

Judi Mucklin: Sure. Of course, of course. Oh, a pleasure to meet you!