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Thomas Reid: Self-Proclaimed Faculty Brat

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U High Alum Thomas Reid

Friday, July 29 at 1:40 pm

State and U High Reunion at East Hall

Cassie: Okay so today is Friday July 29th. About 1:40 pm. I'm here with... how do you spell your name again?

Tom: Thomas Reid. R-E-I-D.

Cassie: Alright and this is Cassie Kotrch doing the interview. Alright and we'll just start with basically you said that you started in fourth grade.

Tom: Yeah.

Cassie: I heard you mention that earlier. So, you were at campus school and then U-High, is that correct?

Tom: Yeah.

Cassie: Okay great. And are you from the Kalamazoo area? Were you born here?

Tom: No, I was born in Chicago, moved here when I was four.

Cassie: Okay.

Tom: I started school when I was five (laughs).

Cassie: Yeah.

Tom: My mother was a professor here. She started the first... dang, excuse me if... I've got some dementia so it's...

Cassie: That's alright my grandmother does too.

Tom: Yeah it's-it pisses me off.

Both laugh.

Cassie: I completely understand, yeah.

Tom: But no, she started the first social work curriculum in the United States undergraduate group in 19- probably 1950, no, 1946 probably. So, she started working for Western.

Cassie: Is that why you came to Kalamazoo then, because she got a job here?

Tom: No, actually both my parents had a masters degree in social work from University of Chicago. There were no PhDs at that point.

Cassie: Right.

Tom: Okay and my dad was executive secretary of the Family Service Center which is for marital counseling mainly. Okay and from 1944, I'd guess to 19...it was about 1935, something like that. No, 1973. Okay when he retired and he died. My mother died in 1971.

Cassie: Okay.

Tom: So, I lost both of them, pretty close together. My dad did a lot of master screen work for people and did a lot of teaching also as well.

Cassie: Okay.

Tom: And my mother worked just right across the building that was... there's so many buildings here, they weren't here, there's no building left for the grade school, that's gone okay. And right up the stairs and if you take, just take a quick right around to the right was my homeroom when I was in eighth grade. And seventh grade too, I think I remember right.

Cassie: Okay, whose class was that?

Tom: I can't- who was it- I can't remember.

Cassie: You can't remember, that's okay!

Tom: I don't remember a lot of people in that era. (*laughs*) You're going to find us with people who are 80 years old, you know we've got some wonderful memories of what we remember. But we've lost a lot of the memories of who we just didn't have enough to do with. No, but that was really a lot of fun because every time I forgot to get something signed and bring back from my parents for school, they made me walk over to the building over there, which housed, actually, some classes. We had classes over there, science classes.

Cassie: Oh, you mean in West Hall over there?

Tom: Yeah and that social work curriculum was there for a long time. But she was actually, when she started off she was part of the... what was it? I can't remember now but in another department but until she got her own after she started getting, a dozen or half, at least about eight teachers at one point, I think at least were there. And, but I had to go over there and I'd sit outside the window, you know she'd be teaching underneath and all of a sudden the students were all looking up. So, that was just a big joke.

Cassie: You had to do that more than once?

Tom: Oh yeah. Probably about, probably once or twice a semester.

Cassie: Yeah so they knew, then what that meant.

Tom: Oh, yeah. The kids enjoyed that.

Cassie: That's funny. So I did have a question, reflecting back on your time at campus school when you were in grade school and then at U High when you were going there, how would you summarize your experience at the schools?

Tom: Wonderful. I don't think any student in Michigan could have had a better education than I did or any of my classmates. Okay it's very interesting group of people. There were three classes of people. There were faculty brats of which I was one. You had the, what we call the country club set, which was the well to do people and talent okay. And then third is about 20% of the class were kids that were recommended to come to State High at that point, okay, by their teachers in the local schools. Okay and they took a lot of pride, I believe, in having a pretty good mix of people.

Okay so, a lot of those people were pretty poor people and some were just good at what they did. Probably half of them were very good students that a teacher who knew about the school thought that they would get a wonderful education, okay if they came and they did and because of the fact that they had generally working class parents, things like that, they didn't have the opportunity in the school in the Kalamazoo school district to give them the amount of work that they needed. So, they did really well.

Okay and classes were well behaved. I mean everything I hear now, about what goes on in even grade schools. Okay I mean I've got two granddaughters 11 and 9. I was 40 when my daughter was born and I was 70 when my first grandchild came along. So yeah, my family has not populated the earth.

Cassie: Not very fast.

Tom: No (*laughs*). But, my oldest daughter was bullied by a boy who was just really nasty when she was in second grade.

Cassie: Was there any bullying here at campus school? Or U High?

Tom: I had only one incident and I was in the middle of this. We had one student who was in our class. His last name was Batterman. Okay, not the well to do Batterman's okay. His father was, I think he was a pharmacist, maybe something like that. But he was mentally challenged and they brought him into the school and he didn't take any classes with us, okay.

But he was in the rooms, with people for other things, okay, things that he could do. And I, my parents knew his father very well and, actually had helped, get the help that they needed for the child. And he was able, but, one day, one of our rambunctious classmates, okay, decided to start playing practical jokes on him.

They got behind him and they pushed him over and they started being really nasty and I stopped it. I got in, got them separated and my boy friends were mad as hell at me for stopping them because they were just having fun, they thought. But what they were doing is they just were truly bullying the heck out of him. And all the girls were just, thank you very much, I was the only one who stood up to them, okay. But that again, that was my growing up with two psychiatric social workers as parents. Yeah, I grew up with a pretty good upbringing, yeah.

Cassie: So you've talked a little bit about the students. Do you remember anything about the teachers or the faculty here at the school?

Tom: It was wonderful. From starting off in fourth grade when I first got here all the way through every class had, I'd say three or four student teachers there, okay. They're actually in order to get a degree in Michigan at the time, you had one semester, your second semester, your senior year, usually you had to actually go to a school and teach under the supervision of a qualified teacher. And that was good, okay. But, they were in there in the class, and they taught, but the teachers themselves were, they're the best Western Michigan had. All the teachers were on the faculty. I mean, this wasn't just average teachers that you would have in the public schools. These were very, very well qualified university people. And they were doing this to keep getting tenure and things like that, okay. They were actually ranked on how well they taught. And they taught incredibly well.

I was a funny student. I only did things I liked. So I got out of high school, 3.3 average. Okay. 100% in science and mathematics and the rest, I got B's and C's. (laughs) Yeah. So... and I was the best math student that the teachers had ever seen. My junior and senior year I was taking the main classes, but I also was doing college courses. Yeah, you know, I was, you know, I was way ahead of everybody and it also kept me quiet. I was a noisy student. I always asked questions and things like that and I was obstreperous.

But one of the things is when I was born I had no empathy, I could not read people's expressions. My parents worked with me very, very seriously and I became reasonable at it. I've never been good, you know, if somebody's kind of simmering at me because I'm talking too much or something like that. (Laughs) Okay, I don't see that. And so that's that's the kind of kid I was okay, I had no idea at that point. There was no knowledge, you know about childhood, funny, you know, funny kids. Okay, that was... and I was a classical nerd. Yeah, only had trouble with one teacher. And I got into serious trouble.

I was a freshman in high school, I'm not gonna mention the name. Okay, he was a football coach. Okay and track coach. And he taught American History. So that was, that was actually a required course, but it wasn't 100% required, it was just the standard course that freshman in high school went through and he spent the first, about, month doing nothing but talking about football, not doing one wink of teaching. And I knew the President of the high school. Okay. Really well, okay. So I quietly went to him one day and said "I want to drop this course" and he said "why?" and I told him exactly why. He was not teaching, I was not learning anything here and it was a waste of time. And so he called my parents, they came in.

Okay. And the teacher came in and they chewed the hell out of him and moved me over to a sophomore class.

Cassie: Was that the principal? Is that Dr. Brian?

Tom: Yeah.

Cassie: Yeah okay. Yeah, wow.

Tom: Yeah he had a daughter in our class.

Cassie: Okay.

Tom: Yeah that's one reason why I knew him but also I visited him quite frequently.

Cassie: You remember whereabouts his office was?

Tom: Yeah it was in this building on the first floor probably just at the end of this building. Or it was in the annex between, yeah that's what it was. They got rid of where the elementary school was.

Cassie: Yeah.

Tom: Okay and they got rid of the joining section between there and here. Okay.

Cassie: Yeah. So, that was whereabouts it was? It would be like right over there?

Tom: Right.

Cassie: Okay. Do you remember anything else about the buildings?

Tom: Yeah they had lots of buildings they had one over here. They had one over there my mother taught at okay, the library which that's been peeled back. I don't know what it is now.

Cassie: Well now it's just an empty- it's a facade. They kept the front of the building so that people could look at it. But it's not a building anymore.

Tom: Oh, it's not?

Cassie: No it was the business college until about mid nineties I'd say about like 94 or so when they moved the business college over to west campus.

Tom: When I started here, this was all Western was (*motions to room*).

Cassie: Right.

Tom: Where the west campus is was an 18 hole golf course, which, being a faculty brat, everything was free, football games, basketball, anything, any sport, any activities that the university had. My parents and I got to go in free, all faculty got any, anything that's going on was free.

Cassie: Did you do that often, attend those sort of events?

Tom: Yeah probably 10, 10 a year.

Cassie: Wow. Do any stick out to you that you remember?

Tom: Yeah, I sat about 5 feet away from Louis Armstrong when he came into town.

Cassie: Wow, when was that? Was it at a game or a different event?

Tom: No, it was over here across the street okay. What was that building at that point?

Cassie: The Little Theater?

Tom: The little theater that's, no, that wasn't there. It was... God, where was I? Ravi Shankar was there. I was in the front of the room, in front of the front row.

Cassie: Okay you got to watch them?

Tom: Yeah. Western used to have a lot, I'd say 4 or 5 big acts a year. And they were generally intellectual type of, they weren't having the trash and the pop, they were not the quote popular actors and things like that. And they had a lot of, let's see, plays come into town also, and so as kids, we were all in the middle of this because this was the university. By the time we got into high school they were starting to move it away. But when we first got here, we had our own little hiding place down at the end okay. And that was a building built especially for the classes, for young kids. And I remember getting there first shot for the pandemic and it was okay the name of it is... The pandemic when I was fourth grade we got the shot, Western got all the kids shots... polio!

Cassie: Polio yes right.

Tom: Yeah, okay we got the first shots and the university was able to.

Cassie: Because Upjohn was here too, that probably helped yeah.

Tom: Yeah and I had very good friends. Rick Light was in our class, John, Richard Light, okay. His father was the first MD who worked for Upjohn okay. No, I'm sorry his grandfather was, his grandfather. And his mother was an Upjohn in the original family. I mean these are kids I played with. Okay, just because they're there. Woody Budman was another one that his father was, I think the vice president of at that point and Kalamazoo was a very rich town. We had like 10, I think, paper mills. They grew on the river and they had a lot of very good

manufacturing okay. They had Checker Cab, the only checker cab plant in the country. They had Upjohn of course, which is very large.

And there are a lot of people who... and the people, the older generation, really sponsored a lot of activities in the town. They read that there's a lot of things going on that were supported by... that my dad got a lot of money from them to make the business he had. That business he was executive secretary, he was the top person there. But he was just a social worker who happened to be head of the agency for so long. And he was on a lot of committees for the individual families, deciding who and how they were going to spread their wealth. Almost all that's gone now.

Yeah, the cab company moved out of town; Gibson Guitars. This was the Gibson guitar plant in the country. We went down there, we went on a lot of tours. Probably every six weeks we would go on a tour and it seemed like about every two or three years we went to the Gibson plant to watch them make, actually have a run of the place and watch them build guitars and everything like that. And I still remember there was a guy there who was taking out the new guitars out of the last and he had the most gigantic right arm in the world because he's pulling that out like this and was doing that probably 50 times a day. So he was really an amazing person and he was there and Gibson got bought out and that's what happened. It's all the companies in Kalamazoo, who basically got brought out become just...

Cassie: Yeah, well we have just a few minutes left. So I had one more question that I wanted to ask you, which was, what event at your time at campus school or U High do you think impacted you the most during the time here?

Tom: I would say I had a lot of interesting events just because of who I was. The coach that I talked to you about, this is what I remember. I was a shot putter, okay? And when I was a senior and I played football, he never allowed me to play. I was the only player on the team who didn't get in the final game our senior year in football.

I got in one play in the middle of the season. Instead of Reese, he called Reid, get in there as linebacker. So I went in on a third down play. And instead of Reese, who was another one of our students, and I knew, I was a lineman myself and I knew how to take care of a hiker. And this guy stood up too far and I bulldozed him down. And I got to the quarterback before the fullback got to it, I took the hand off and I made it about 50 yards down the field, got taken out of the game never to play again (*laughs*). And when I was a shot putter, in my senior year, we had one of my best friends Mike Decker was all state tackle and you're throwing the shot, throwing the shot about 55 ft. And a junior at that time was, I can't remember what his name is now, he was about 54. And here I was a shot putter and best I was ever gonna be was third place on it.

But the first event of the season, the previous weekend I had gone down to Kenyon college which is where I went for my freshman and sophomore year in college, and got back in and the game was that Monday night and he says you're not going because you weren't here in practice on Saturday. And I went into Dr. Brian and said he told me he's not gonna let me go.

And he said you went down to Canyon, didn't you? My parents were good friends with him. I said, yeah, he says he has to, so he had to take me along. And the other two— there were 5 of us shot putters, the two really good ones, the up and coming captain of the football team and the present captain of the football team were the other two. We went down and I got third place. Which we never expected. On the way back he starts making fun of it and I just laid into him. And the really nicest one was I got my letter that year because in the state, in the conference meet, I finished third place. Also from all the nine schools I think in the and so okay that got me my letter and he had to give it to me. And when he called out my name, all my friends stood up. That was wonderful.

But I lived my life that way. I've ruined more things, people who are stupid. And I've done it behind the back without them knowing. I had one that the company was screwing a customer. And I knew what was going on and I just quietly went into the president of the company, never heard of me, and I said here's what's happening on the way out the door. So I mean, and this is the kind of thing that I found at the school here, the teachers were wonderful and the kids were good. Yes, we did some rowdy things. I mean I knew every nook and corner of this building and all the buildings around all the five buildings around here all had basements. And if you knew how to do it, you could go between buildings, through the basement.

Cassie: Well this has been a pleasure talking to you today and thank you so much for sharing some of your memories and your stories. If you're interested in meeting up again to do this again, I'm working on the project again until like October. So if you wanted to schedule another time to meet and talk for more, if you think about new things or anything and you want to jot them down and get back with me later, you can do so. I believe you have my phone number and my email, correct?

Tom: Yes I do.

Cassie: Okay, great. All right and I do have yours too in case. But if you feel like doing this again, I'd love to do it. Just give me a call or email any time.