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## Gary Vermeulen & The State High Fight Song

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State High Alum Gary Vermeulen

July 29, 2022 at 2:20 PM

State and U High Reunion- East (Heritage) Hall

**Cassie:** Okay, great. All right, so today is Friday July 29th, it is about 2:20 p.m. This is Cassie Kotrch and I'm here with Gary. How do you pronounce your last name?

**Gary:** Vermeulen.

**Cassie:** Vermeulen

**Gary:** Yep, Dutch. There used to be a page of or more in the phone book of Vermeulens.

**Cassie:** Yeah, I know a Vandermuelen but I don't know Vermeulen.

**Gary:** Yeah, there's some even up by us.

**Cassie:** Yes, yeah. Alright, great. Well, if you wanna share what you have first and then I'll ask some questions after that we can go ahead and do that.

**Gary:** Just a note of State High pride and it's about our football team. We lost our very first game as freshmen to Battle Creek zero to six and we lost late in our senior year to Portage seven to 12. We won all our other games for the four years we were here and that was State High and our class was the last State High In '57, then it became you High.

**Cassie:** Right.

**Gary:** Fred Stevens, by the way, was one of our coaches for all four of those years and he was an alum of Western and just recently passed away just last year. He must have been well into his 90s. Wonderful man. Anyway, onward and upward. Approximately half or even less of the students that graduated from State High, started out at campus school, which was a great school.

Anyway, let's see here. Just the overall experience is what I would relate to and that was for all the years that I was here. It was more than just the academic instruction, It was rather similar to an extension of our family at home, and our home life. I guess, if you will, the mores, folkways, and paradigms, I guess you can just call it "good behavior" was instilled in us and exhibited by the staff here.

And it was also helped along by student teachers, which was why we existed, we were... at one time it was called the training school. I don't know if anybody's mentioned that, but we were called the training school because they trained their student teachers in house. Of course, they send you out wherever, but, and hence the demise of our school.

So anyway, onward and upward again. This came about, as I said, from our family life and even though probably politically not correct, also from our church and Sunday school. But it wasn't taught here, it just exuded itself from the instructors. It was an amazing thing. Three of the instructors I had here in high school, I went back to Western later on, graduated from here, but three of those instructors went on to become professors at Western, got their PhDs and I had, I was lucky enough to have them as instructors, as professors in college again. That was Jack Frye, Clarence Hackney, and Ray Doer. They were, I say they were all just great people, chokes me up to think about them.

They're all gone now of course, but anyway, I hope that other instructors from this institution when they closed it down in what 61?

**Cassie:** I think '66 was the last graduating class.

**Gary:** '66?

**Cassie:** Yeah, '66 was the last graduating class of U High.

**Gary:** All right.

**Cassie:** And then the campus school, the grade school, shutdown in '69, so the grade school went on for a few more years after U High.

**Gary:** Good.

**Cassie:** Yeah.

**Gary:** So anyway, I hope they- others went on to pass along their gifts to undergrad students at Western. Just great people.

**Cassie:** Yeah. You answered some of the questions that I had for you, but I was wondering... you mentioned three teachers who later became professors that you particularly were close with or liked. Do you have any memories with them at all, or any other teachers or faculty?

**Gary:** Ernie Weber was most, a lot of our classes were in the basement in high school, in junior high, see we became integrated with other junior highs in the area because K-five, it was just in house people.

And then middle school/junior high or whatever you call it, 6, 7, 8 we got an influx probably doubled the enrollment of the school. And, as I said, a lot of the classes were in the basement because there were two sections. So, Ernie Weber was a math teacher also. He'd say step to the board, chalk and talk!

I don't know if any of the other kids/alums have mentioned Ernie Weber or not, no, he was... and besides what they exuded in there walking up and down the halls and seeing you they were brilliant people just, well of course they were they were professors at Western, but and Ray Doer had a farm out here towards Oshtemo on West Main.

And he told us a couple of things, I think this was in his college class that I had him, I had him for a couple of college classes. He said we mow a path from our garage to the side door and we mow a path, I don't know somewhere else. The rest we leave to the wildflowers and the rabbits. And he also said on one of the field trips, I think college field trips... He says "you look over these farms you can tell whether they should be farmed or not because of the topography, and with the erosion".

But he says "you can also tell who's the boss at this farm. If the barns look wonderful, then the house maybe needs a little attention, then he's the boss. If the house is beautiful and the barn needs a little work, she's the boss." I know in our 50th reunion, we still had two or three instructors from our high school that were still with us.

One came to it, Bill Jurors, William Jurors. I think he went on, I don't know if he did or not, anyway. So anyway, those are specifics of some of the instructors and then of course, my kindergarten teacher. I recall her and my second grade teacher, Miss Bender, who had traveled to Egypt and every year she would have an Egyptian tea and the parents were invited, and we all brewed tea and served it to the parents.

Then, when you were a fifth grader, you were the big kingpin in the school. Then in the Rotunda, which was a beautiful place. It's too bad it's gone. But in the Rotunda they had a Christmas program every year, and I was in the play. I still recall a line or two.

"The crowds in the city are great tonight, is it not so Caryot? Yay, Judah, they have been passing since sunrise, clouds of dust on the road all day. We could see them from the hills."

**Cassie:** Wow!

**Gary:** So fifth grade, you do, they put it in you.

**Cassie:** Yeah. It's still in there!

**Gary:** And I say, not just from teaching. These other teachers all helped with the production of the play. And then the angels would flutter out on the balcony over the Rotunda and the spotlights would shine on them.

**Cassie:** Wow!

**Gary:** They'd repeat (*whispers*) passages from the Bible.

I don't know if you dare do that now. I taught school myself, taught and coached for 20-something years. I don't know how teachers do it nowadays. I've not gone back to it because it's pretty tough to not be able to do what you could do then and be in charge.

And I don't know what your high school was like, or your grade school, but I hope it was a good experience. I hope there was no...

**Cassie:** Well, I'm not from the Kalamazoo area

**Gary:** No, I supposed not.

**Cassie:** I'm from the lakeshore.

**Gary:** South Haven? Saugatuck?

**Cassie:** Actually, Spring Lake, if you know where that is.

**Gary:** Yeah!

**Cassie:** It's right by Grand Haven

**Gary:** Sure, sure. We got a financial advisor up there.

**Cassie:** Yeah. So were you born in Kalamazoo?

**Gary:** Born and raised in Kalamazoo. My dad had a trucking business, pardon me. He became ill and passed away and I took some time out of school about 10 years and ran that. But then I went back, that's why I had these teachers as professors, cause I went back later.

**Cassie:** When were you born?

**Gary:** About what?

**Cassie:** About when you're born.

**Gary:** 1938, 8-8-38. That's my birth date.

**Cassie:** Wow! And, Sorry... My question was going to be when you were either at campus school or here at U High, what did a typical day look like for you?

**Gary:** Well, we entered through the front. We went directly to classes. If you got here early, you didn't hang out in the halls, you went to study hall. We had a student managing the hallway and study hall. We didn't have teachers proctoring anything, they taught.

In fact, I was President of the monitors club or association that governed the behavior in the halls and in the study hall. But it was... You went from class to class according to the bell ringing. You didn't fool around in the hall you could go to your locker. Didn't slam your lockers.

I mean, it was instilled in you to just behave. There was no bullying. Well, once in a great while, but those people, we monitors got them. *(laughs)*

**Cassie:** Yeah. *(laughs)*

**Gary:** So anyway, and then as soon as school was over, we went to athletic practices in our gym which was down at the foot of the hill over here-

**Cassie:** Oh, Oakland Gym? Right over here?

**Gary:** Yeah, well, if you went to Waldo Stadium, it would be downhill a little bit. That was the gym for western.

**Cassie:** Yes, which is now the Seelye Center.

**Gary:** Yes, thank you! Thank you, it is. I have relatives by that name. Yes, but that was our gym. There was however, a swimming pool in the basement here and there was a gym down here with a track above it suspended banked severely. But, for some reason or other, we didn't use that. I don't remember why we didn't.

**Cassie:** Do you remember anything else about the buildings on campus?

**Gary:** We were not supposed to avail ourselves of any of those places except downstairs was a, I guess you'd call it a snack bar or, what they call it, the co op store or something.

You could purchase treats, snacks, Twinkies. And we were big shots cause the college used it mostly cause all this was the campus back then and we go in and rub elbows with the college kids and get a Twinkie.

**Cassie:** So we have just a few minutes left. But I did want to ask another question real quick before we leave. If there are any, what events at Campus school or State High at the time, what event impacted you the most at your time here?

**Gary:** Well, elementary school, the play. And, of course, time on the playground. We had a game that ended with knocking myself cold. It was called slide tag. You had to touch the person while they were on the slide. And it was a huge slide. I don't know how many steps up to... but when you're small everything's huge. Anyway, you get to the top and there were handrails and you take that next to the last step.

Then you grab the handrail, pick your feet up and swing them out and throw yourself forward onto the slide without using the top step. Well I overshot a little bit to keep from getting tagged-womb! And when I came around, all the playground was empty. My PhysEd teacher Rita Cohen, wonderful lady, another one, Rita Cohen was standing over me saying "you'll be alright Gary, you'll be alright." That was the last of slide tag. Too bad, it was a fun game.

And then in high school, of course, football and then baseball we ran from where we'd change over in the gym, the Seeley Center. And then I think we carried our cleats and wore tennis shoes.

We'd run up to the practice field where your center is and then run back afterwards. So I remember the athletics from high school. I don't think we did a play in high school. We might have but I don't recall it.

**Cassie:** Did you have any dances?

**Gary:** Oh Yes. Yeah the sock hops and that we did use the gym that was down here at the end of the hall. We'd use that for our sock hop because you couldn't go on the floor with tennis shoes and we used it for assemblies too. I remember Jack Frye, Ray Doer, Mr. Ingalls, who was the physics teacher. They came up with a school song and they taught it to us down there. Am I looking over right? Yeah, it was far above the busy humming of the bustling town. Have you heard it?

**Cassie:** Yeah.

**Gary:** You have?

**Cassie:** Yes actually.

**Gary:** Yeah, that was our high school song. Well the words are also... and the tune is from Cornell. I have some friends that went there and that's their school song.

It's far above Cayuga's waters. But anyway did you hear it, did you know the rest of it or did somebody tell you the words to it? I haven't written.

**Cassie:** Some of them I don't remember. I know the tune though. It's like, *hums...*

**Gary:** (singing) ...busy humming of the bustling town stands our noble alma mater, looks she proudly down. Lift the chorus, speed it onward, louder praises cry: hail to thee, our alma mater, hail o' hail State High.

**Cassie:** Yay! (claps)

**Gary:** It was a take up. And those guys... like I said, Mr Ingalls, Mr Doer, Jack Frye the music teacher. And maybe Miss Dodie who was our grade school music teacher. She might have had a hand in that, even, but they put those words to that tune and I don't know if U High carried that song on or if anybody... but we thought it was awesome because it was Cornells. And we copped it.

**Cassie:** Well, did you have anything else?

**Gary:** No, I'm sorry my two minute session turned into... I appreciate your doing this. My God, what a dedication you put in. Are any of those books the yearbooks from State High?

**Cassie:** Oh, you know... we have the old brown and golds, but I actually looked at all the yearbooks before coming here. They are all at the Zhang Legacy Collection Center which is the building I was talking about right by the hospital down here.

**Gary:** Oh, up here?

**Cassie:** Yeah, just about five minutes down Oakland Drive, not even.

**Gary:** Okay because my daughter has my four years of high school yearbooks and she's not here. She's in Florida. So yeah I should have gotten them from her.

**Cassie:** I think they have at least one copy for every year.

**Gary:** Oh Wonderful.

**Cassie:** Yeah right there. So they have U High in '66 but then they have back to State High and then they have back even more and they also have books there that were written by historians, either WMU professors or something that go through the entire history of the schools.

So there's one that was written on the 50-year anniversary of campus school.

**Gary:** Oh of campus school?

**Cassie:** Yes, correct.

**Gary:** So that would be in the early 50s?

**Cassie:** Correct. Yes, that's about when I think it was 53 or 54. Yep and there is a book that we have over there actually that goes through the entire history of it basically.

**Gary:** Can alumni or whoever wants to go up there and look at those?

**Cassie:** Yeah, yeah, it's open. I think the summer hours are Monday through Friday 9 a.m to 4. And anybody can go in there and you can ask them to pull it from the back. They have just stacks and stacks in the warehouse. It's climate controlled to keep everything in good condition.

**Gary:** Should you wear white when you...?

**Cassie:** No, they bring it out and they'll bring it out and you can read it right there in the reading room. The reading room is beautiful. It overlooks a little garden that they have there. You can't check any of it out, but you can read it right there in the reading room.

**Gary:** I could also get my daughter to send mine back to me. I should have done that before this reunion. Well anyway, thank you again. Kathy, was it?

**Cassie:** Cassie.

**Gary:** Cassie. I love your hair.

**Cassie:** Oh thank you!

**Gary:** My wife's hair was that color. It's still sort of that color.



Oh, and the other thing that was a no, no, but like I said, we had to be the good guys. But we did it sometimes, the trolleys that were out here? That was for college students only. And in the winter. Yeah although we'd run the stairs to keep in shape.

But, we'd hitch a ride on the trolley. And, in grade school, this hillside out here, the playground was on a ledge halfway down from here to the street and that's where we went. There were steps going that way too. And that's where we went for recess in later elementary. And anyway, we would take cardboard and make paths through all those trees and we'd slide on it.

**Cassie:** Wow yeah. If you wanted to take a look out there, the old trolley, you can still see where it was because they have the poles with the old mechanics still attached to it right out there.

Yeah. So they still have some of the remnants out there. And of course then down here are the remains of President Waldo.

**Gary:** Oh, really?

**Cassie:** Yes the cremains actually, if you go right out front here because this was his office right here.

**Gary:** Yes. Yes, okay.

**Cassie:** So his cremains are right underneath here outside, right on the stairs there.

**Gary:** That's awesome.

**Cassie:** Yeah.

**Gary:** It's nostalgic of course.

**Cassie:** Yes, of course.