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## Jeff Gauthier & The Liberator

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U High Alum Jeff Gauthier

July 30, 2022 at 2:25 PM

State and U-High Reunion

**Cassie:** Today is Saturday, July 30th, about 2:26 p.m. This is Cassie Kotrch and I'm here with Jeff Gauthier, is that how you pronounce it?

**Jeff:** GO-THIER or if you're French Montreal Canadian as my grandmother and her family was, it's GO-TEA-A. Madam Eva would probably turn over in her grave if she heard the pronunciation of GO-THER.

**Cassie:** How do you spell that last name?

**Jeff:** It's G A U T H I E R.

**Cassie:** Great. Okay. So, I saw that on the sheet, you're here, you're at the school from 60 to 66. So, you joined in junior high?

**Jeff:** 7th grade, 12 years old. Okay. Came out of the public school system.

**Cassie:** Are you from the Kalamazoo area?

**Jeff:** Yes. I was born in Bangor and then the folks moved to Kalamazoo after my dad left the teaching profession. Teaching and coaching with his career and he joined the Sutherland Paper Company here in town. Industrial management, industrial relations management branch of it. Human resources is probably more fitting now I guess. And so my brother preceded me. My brother Gary graduated 1960 and started in the seventh grade as well. So, I followed him. And what would be called junior high in high school was at the campus school and it was a unique experience.

I feel fortunate. Now as I've probably gained some wisdom, I hope, and experience and raised a couple of kids. It was probably even more of a favorable and probably very lucky that I had that opportunity. Which when you're a kid you're like: "Yeah, whatever, my folks said, hey, you're going to state high." So, yeah, my brother went there, and I was looking forward to it.

**Cassie:** Why did your parents decide that you and your brother would go there?

**Jeff:** Well, I think it was their background in education. Both my folks were college graduates. They graduated from North Central College in Naperville, Illinois and for 25 years my dad was a high school history and economics teacher and coach. Very, very successful high school coach in the state of Michigan and in Bangor here, west of town.

And so, education was a big thing and I think when they somehow became aware of the campus school and what it offered and the strength of faculty. And for my dad, of course athletics was a big part of his life. And they were well respected athletically and both my brother and I were pretty darn good athletes in our own right.

It seemed like a good fit. My mom being a French major in college and romance languages and the insistence that she had when I came here and went through the program was that I take Latin and very few programs in public schools, they carry very few foreign languages and most certainly what some would argue a dead language, they didn't have. And my mother was absolutely convinced that Latin was a firm foundation for English and for sentence structure and writing skills and just life, life!

I think I had Latin for five years, I even had four AP programs or whatever. I took one of my Latin courses at the university, so I was with college students over here, which was a bit of a disaster. I'm not sure if I was at that point. It was like my fifth year or something, I was about, you know, had enough toga robes to last me a lifetime, but I think she was right. I think my career though wasn't engaged; it wasn't as a professional writer. It's been a major, major piece of my career being able to write and so I think she's right. She deserves the credit. So, I think that was her influence: "Send them off Latin school!"

It was small classes and faculty here was second to none. I mean, extremely well prepared teachers, many of whom had joint appointments at the university. Of course, it's athletic history, fit into our interests as well. I think all this made for a nice package. They seem to be happy, my folks did with their decision and the results of their decision. I mean my brother and I both graduated, that's a start

In terms of college preparatory. Absolutely. My brother went on to attend college, so he didn't secure a degree, but I did and got a graduate master's degree as well. So, you know, looking back on the critical thinking and the kind of expectations, putting the bar at a high enough level here on in the campus school program, I think probably made the difference with me or at least it didn't hurt for darn sure.

My parents were clearly supportive and encouraging and perhaps even demanding. That always helps too. But I think with what was offered to me here, the opportunities I think was pretty cool, pretty cool indeed. it gave us, you know, lots of good classes, lots of science and math, but I had music and interest in music.



When I arrived, I was already playing the saxophone and continued playing here at the high school and I still play it to this day. I was able to do that, play sports and sometimes I play football and at half time, I'd go out and march in the band. We were a little short on people, you know, it's a small school. We had the pep bands and basketball.

I was not a basketball player. I mean, I like the sport and I was a good athlete, but it wasn't my sport, so beginning in high school I took a break from basketball and concentrate on baseball and football. My friend Edgar and I became the student managers of the basketball team. We love dressing up in our sport coats and ties, taking care of the of the team and traveling around with them. That was that was really a fun part of my career. And I can remember we played South Haven. It was one of our archrivals in basketball, well, archrival in any sport actually. It was a bigger school and it was a big game. I don't know the significance of it, but it was a big game.

So, Edgar, I and some of my other athletic chums, with my parents' permission to borrow the family car, we started—and somewhat blessing of school administration, maybe—we started off in the morning, we were able to skip classes for the whole day. We bounced a basketball from East Hall all the way to South Haven in time for the basketball game. Along M43 right on through Bangor, right on down the road, and it was, basketball season.

There wasn't snow on the ground, but it was cold, and it was kind of, typical, late autumn. The school gave us approval and let us do our thing and we were pretty pumped about it and proud of it. We did it and as far as I know, no one got hurt, nobody had an accident and my folk's car survived.

It was kind of like a sag wagon and a bike race we kind of carried stuff to drink, soup and sandwiches. Then we made our way down in M43. Occasionally, the ball would go off the edge of the road into some bar ditch, we had to go fetch it and get it back on, things happened.

I think we left here 7:30 in the morning and got there probably, I think, 4:30 - 5:30, somewhere late in the afternoon so we didn't dally around. But that was part of the experience here, of being able to figure out who you are and what you're made of and what's important or not.

Before we started recording, we were talking about the school newspaper. It reminded me that along with my best friend Edgar, I put together a competing newspaper called the Liberator. For which we solicited op-eds from our classmates that we didn't feel would have gotten published or may have actually been turned down by our more conservative school sponsored paper. My dad actually helped publish the paper with his secretary in terms of running off it on a mimeograph.

**Cassie:** When did you start this, was this just your last year?

**Jeff:** No, I think it might have been our junior year, I think. I don't think it was at the end of our stay here. I think it was probably our junior year.

**Cassie:** And you run it for a year?

**Jeff:** Yeah, I think it was about a year, as we were talking earlier, I was trying to remember how many additions we had published. I don't know, I found one in my little box of mementos that might have been the inaugural one. Because it had some pretty interesting editorials in advice for some of my classmates. When I read them now, as 74 years old, I'm thinking: "Wow, that's pretty darn mature writing for a high school junior."

It tended to focus on the need to kind of redefine our community of students. Folks had kind of gotten indifferent. Some of our athletic endeavors at that point in time weren't quite as sterling as they had been in the past. All of a sudden attendance by students had fallen off a little bit and folks were just kind of moping around. So, the opinions and the editorials that we published were solicited seemed to be more reflective of: "Hey, suck it up. Let's get our student community back together and let's support each other." It was kind of moving really, it was really interesting.

**Cassie:** What were people's reactions to that?

**Jeff:** Well, I'm trying to remember, but I think they were favorable. I remember some parents of students somehow got a copy, who knows, kids brought it home or something. And somehow our paths had crossed, and they were kind of: "Hey, that's pretty cool, glad you did that." I mean we weren't trying to create trouble or anything, but we were just trying to maybe be a little bit more better citizens about the whole thing.

We weren't trying to diss the school paper. It served its purpose, it was a training ground for putting together really professionally done school paper. I mean, photographs and the whole nine yards. It was very nice. There were a lot of businesses that didn't have newsletters as good as that. But it got me interested enough in the writing piece that I am looking at my little box and preparing to come here and visit with you. I saw that I'd written some sports articles for their student newspaper when I went over to Western to study, which I completely forgot about. It's like: "I can't believe that." So, I guess my mom's push for getting Latin was probably pretty good.

The students here had a lot of opportunities. We had theater, we had choir. I don't think we had show choir, some of the things that the schools are doing now, that are really quite a production. I believe, thinking title nine didn't exist, but I think we had women's tennis. I think the girls also had a synchronized swimming group because we did have a pool in the bottom of East Hall. We had a men's golf team; I don't know whether the women did or not. I know we weren't playing softball. Some of those sports where women, girls are able to endeavor now. We had band because I did play in the band, and we had Jim Hawes, I believe was our band director, Graduate University of Michigan. No one held that against him. He was awesome. A band's man, musician, and teacher.

**Cassie:** Do you remember any other teachers that stood out to you in your time there?

**Jeff:** There was Ms. Gish. I remember my brother had her and I had her. She was a teacher's teacher. There was Carl Engels in chemistry. There was our sophomore basketball coach, Lyle McCully, I believe taught geometry. One of the math teachers. Barney Chance. Our basketball coach taught us typing. And there was Shane Holtz, which is our industrial arts teacher. We had 8th grade teacher; I believe his name was Brian Fogel and he was an interesting soul.

Before he got into teaching or maybe as a summer gig, he was a federal smoke jumper; that would jump out of planes to fight forest fire. I can remember him bringing pictures to class of him in his flight suit and garb mask, almost like the gladiators would wear, to protect them because they would parachute out into the forest to set up these fire lines and stuff. Sometime during that period he put on a little slide show and we were just in awe because you think your teachers are kind of squares and here this guy was jumping out of planes and fighting fires up in Montana, I think, or some godforsaken place.

**Cassie:** Was Engels the one that would give you a piece of chalk and then he would say: "Chalk and talk."

**Jeff:** I'm not sure if I remember that. I know that he had a son, I think his name was Jack, that was a gifted athlete. He was a student at the school, he was a couple of years ahead of me, I'm pretty sure. I think he was a very good tennis player as I recall, having trouble, it's fuzzy. But Roy Walters, our football coach who is a graduate of Mankato State, which always stuck in my mind for some reason. Then one of my professional gigs was working for male clinic at one of their hospitals that they own in Mankato. Manual St. Joseph. Mankato is now called Minnesota State University, but it was Mankato State at the time. But anyway, Walters taught physical science, I think rocks or something, geology. I know I had one of his classes.

For some of the other faculty, if I saw their names, I would remember them but in terms of spontaneously spitting them out other than once I've shared with you, I am not sure if I can remember all of them.

Ms. Carter, our librarian. For her, if you moved your eyelids, that is too much noise. We were still using the Dewey Decimal System and a part of her role was to teach us how to do that and use it. For a high school library, it was good and she was a librarians librarian and she had expectations of decorum in that library and that's the way it was going to be run.

We had student teachers because of the basic premise of the school, which I always thought was pretty cool. Although I think sometimes the pranks that were pulled to kind of haze those student teachers by some of our folks, present company probably included, always made for stories to be told.

But that was an expectation that we would have student teachers and I think there was always probably a bell curve in every class in terms of grading. But overall, the commitment to study and academics by the students at the school seemed to be fairly high. I mean, we all

had our classes, some of which struggled with a little bit. We had our strengths and weaknesses, but overall, it was a pretty heady bunch of kids with good skills, good study habits and fair amount of competitiveness to do well and get good grades. That was probably the nature of the gene pool that the school attracted.

I remember our dances that we would have in the gym, which was always a hoot.

**Cassie:** The old gym that was connected to the building, the one with the track?

**Jeff:** Yeah, the one with the track and the swimming pool underneath. That was the one.

**Cassie:** Was it the Latin class in there?

**Jeff:** I don't recall it being in there. I always thought it was on the second floor, someplace just to the South. It seemed like there was a door from the second floor that would get you onto the track at that level. It is fuzzy.

We had a student, whose first name was Jim, who was a year or two ahead of me. I wish I could remember, but I think he came close to breaking the four-minute mile. I can remember him being committed to running in a truly professional way on that track. That sound of that elevated track up there. I wish this evening when we get together—I'm hoping that somebody will remember who he was and what his name.

**Cassie:** We can always try to look at the yearbook and find him.

**Jeff:** Yeah, I bet he will be prominent in track and field. His gift for running and being that competitive was certainly pretty amazing.

I remember snatching cafeteria trays. Those were slippery little puppies, and then going down the Davis Street hill on lunch break on those trays. My gosh, you would go down there like a screaming eagle.

**Cassie:** I had a few people telling me that they lay like cardboard on the hill—

**Jeff:** Yeah, those plastic-coated Formica-like trays! Those were slick, and of course, they were not intended for going down hills. Occasionally, some of them would crash and burn at the bottom. But the hill was part of our culture here. It sticks in my mind that there were 144 steps and going up and down them was part of our conditioning for football. Somebody may be able to confirm the number.

Yeah, and we used to have two-day practices before the season started. The hill was where the trolley used to be, but it had long since gone. I think the tracks might have still been there though.

**Cassie:** Yeah, they retired it in the 1940s. There are still poles with mechanics on the top. They are still actually there, yeah.

**Jeff:** I'm often reminded of it when I'm in Dubuque, Iowa, where I'm from now. On the Mississippi River, there is a trolley that goes up the hill from the river, and I always think: "Wow, it almost looks like Davis Street."

Thinking of our experiences, no one ever liked cafeteria food. It was cheap, but it seemed like a lot of wieners and hot dogs or something, macaroni and cheese, and fish sticks on Friday. I do not know. But anyway, I cannot remember whether it was strictly prohibited or strictly discouraged to go over to Walwood, the former student union. Yeah, they made the best greasiest hamburgers in the world, and their grilled cheese was to die for. So, we'd go over there for lunch, not on campus, with a bunch of the folks that were athletically part of that collective. And then we would eat.

And every now and then, I'm not even sure if it was every once in a while, one of the faculty members would come over there to give us the boot or take our names or do something. But it did not keep us from going over there on a fairly frequent basis. We obviously had to pay a little bit more for whatever we were eating than we would have at our school cafeteria. But either it was the quality of the food or just that we were sneaking out that made it more palatable. I do not know, but that was part of the culture here of doing that.

But it was unique, I think, because of the university location and stewardship from the university for the campus school. In our building, there were college classes going on, so there would be a co-mingling of college students and high school students. The student teachers were still a major part of the link to the university.

Some of our theater experiences was at little theater down the street there and which being able to, having that kind of facility access to it. Our home football games were at the football field that k college used angel field and our home basketball was at the read fieldhouse of WMU.

So we had some of this integration that kind of made you feel like wow this is kind of uptown place here that, I think probably at that age we kind of took for granted like okay. But looking back on it, for that those relationships have been put in place so that a high school could use those facilities, I think that was pretty special.

And obviously somebody put the effort into it and had a little bit of the vision and necessity being the mother of invention. I mean when you don't have really, we had a gym and it was great for practice but it didn't allow proceeding or anything and our practice field on Davis Street was fine for football.

But there was no place for, it wasn't a real playing field, it was more of a weed patch sort of. But so I think those relationships really gave our school some of its character and uniqueness.



Some of our theater experiences were at the little theater down the street and having access to that kind of facility was great. Our home football games were at Angel Field, which K College used, and our home basketball games were at the Read Fieldhouse of WMU. So, we had some integration that made us feel like: "Wow, this is kind of an uptown place here." I think probably at that age we took it for granted, but looking back on it, those relationships that had been put in place so that a high school could use those facilities were pretty special.

Obviously, somebody put effort into it and had a little bit of vision. Necessity being the mother of invention, I mean when you do not really—we had a gym that was great for practice but did not allow seating or anything, and our practice field on Davis Street was fine for football. But there was no place—it was not a real playing field; it was more of a weed patch sort of thing. So, I think those relationships really gave our school some of its character and uniqueness.

**Cassie:** Well, yours is unique because your class was the last class that U-High had.

**Jeff:** We were. I'm not sure we understood the gravity of that at the time other than while we're, everybody by then wanted, you get senioritis, you want to get out and do your thing. And the sadness of it, the emotional part of it, I'm not sure was fully understood or appreciated until later on when we come back for reunions and from time to time.

We were. I am not sure we understood the gravity of that at the time, other than because of senioritis that we all wanted to get out and do our thing. The sadness of it, the emotional part of it, I am not sure was fully understood or appreciated until later on when we came back for reunions and from time to time.

In 1966, they turned the lights out when we left, at least for the high school and junior high. They kept the elementary piece a little longer. But looking back on it, the reasons for it—you have to run it like a business—made good sense. Other communities that I have lived in and studied in, like the University of Iowa in Iowa City, had a campus school with a similar demise. In Cedar Falls, Iowa, the University of Northern Iowa had a campus school that also met its end due to the same economic considerations. And I suspect it was the same around the country. In fact, knowing I was coming here today, I looked up to see if there were any other lab schools still around. There are still some, like the University of Chicago in Hyde Park in Chicago. Stanford may still have one, and there are a few other major university campuses that do. There are also a couple back east that are affiliated with more of a liberal arts college campus. So, there are still some, but whatever I was reading painted the picture that they've died off for economic reasons. The fact that the growth of public schools has given other opportunities. Also, other technologies and ways of preparing teachers means you don't just put them in this situation alone.

But yeah, good memories pretty much, in spite of those teenage years being kind of a hormonal nightmare for any kid growing up at that age. But I think it worked well for us, for me, and I think a lot of it is a credit to the faculty and the professionals who were here to support the school. The staff, not only on the academic side but also the other folks who

made the school run: the office and administration, and even our custodians were vital in keeping an old building like ours with its clanky radiator heat and quiriness. Wasn't 1904, the cornerstone?

**Cassie:** Yeah, it was over 60 years old at the point.

**Jeff:** Yeah, so it was getting long on the tooth, and at some point, those decisions started to be formulated about whether to put money into it or not. And I am sure that conversation was starting to happen long before it closed its doors in 1966, as it should have. I mean, you are running an enterprise; you have to look at those things. But the people who made it work while we were here, I think, are kind of unsung heroes.

**Cassie:** Do you remember their reactions or the community's reactions to the school closing down?

**Jeff:** There were, I think, some op-eds in the paper that were sad and people were saying it's another tradition gone and that sort of thing, with the same reality that you have to pay for it. Again, when you're in high school, you don't think so much about the long-term impact of some of those things. You are kind of trying to get through the day and maybe tomorrow at best. But as I recall, listening and reflecting on my folks and some of their views; they were just so happy that we made it, that my brother and I were able to graduate right at the cut off.

Given the experience I had in public schools from kindergarten through sixth grade. A lot of growth was going on in Kalamazoo. A lot of school district changes. And I think I attended one to four or five different elementary schools and never moved. Including an elementary school for a year temporarily in a junior high because the elementary school hadn't finished construction yet. That instability, the lack of continuity, was something my mom especially—well both my folks, because they were both well-educated and sensitive to those issues, were lamenting over the fact that it is just not helpful in a good way to learn when you're being moved around constantly.

So, they were really happy that once I got to seventh grade at the campus school, I had continuity all the way through. Same building, many of the same teachers, same friends and colleagues. And so, their wish came true, and I am glad it did.

**Cassie:** And you went to WMU right after?

**Jeff:** I did. I went right over. I started a major in paper technology, I guess, leaning on the fact that my dad joined the paper industry. Which is basically a chemistry major in an academic environment. It turns out, after organic chemistry, I was just, I didn't think there'd be another life.

So, I switched to business and computers were just coming into this world in a big way. They had a program in their management section of the business school to basically explore the adaptation of computers to business processes. And it seemed like that was at work for me.

And I ended up with a Bachelor's in Business Administration in Corporate Finance minoring in Computer Management.

**Cassie:** At that time were the business classes those run out of North Hall?

**Jeff:** Yeah, I believe Dean Schneider might have still been the dean there. And the only reason I remember Dean Schneider partly because my dad was an adjunct faculty member and was well acquainted with Dean Schneider, more or less friends.

And so, he taught some stuff up there over the years. And then, when I was here, my classes were over there.

**Cassie:** Do you remember anything about North Hall? Of course, the only thing that is there now is the facade.

**Jeff:** The facade, I saw that on the picture upstairs. And I was pointing to my companion who is sharing this experience with me this weekend. I said: "Sheila, here's the footprint. It was a much bigger building." I remember there was a business school library over there because it seemed I spent some time there.

**Cassie:** There was, because the fireplace that was in that library is now the fireplace that's in Heritage Hall in the Zhang finance room.

**Jeff:** Okay, I remember seeing that room. What I am trying to remember is, since we were using the punch card system and having to walk around campus with all these punch cards wrapped up in rubber bands, God forbid we drop them. And I am trying to think whether that computer was in the basement of that building. I am thinking it was. And I am thinking, given that I have a little fitness watch that I wear, it's got more computer power than that which took up four or five hundred square feet.

I got a good education at Western, a good foundation. But I had to work my way through college. It was necessary to pay the bills. And I was in the medical field. I was an emergency medical technician, an ER Tech at Borgess all those years and really enjoyed that part of it.

So, I took my business and said: "Shoot, I'm going to get involved in hospital administration," and got a master's degree in hospital administration and carved out a career with that. It worked. It was enriching for me, not so much monetarily as it was just in terms of things I did and enjoyed doing. If you can make a living doing what you enjoy, it is really rich. So, it all started on this campus, and it is kind of special.

**Cassie:** What events, people or maybe even places on campus, do you think impacted you the most during your time here? It can be an event that does not have to be a school event, but something that happened in your life, a person or a place even with whom or at which you spent most of your time.

**Jeff:** So much of my life up through grade 12 was involved in athletics. So, clearly all the football games and baseball games and practicing and all of that. I was a walk-on football

player for Western as a freshman. I had both regional and state honors in both football and baseball, but no real scholarship offers. So, I did what I thought I enjoyed doing and unfortunately, injuries tended to shorten that opportunity a little bit.

During the high school years, it seemed like just getting through the classes and life in general was what—I wouldn't call a struggle—but you know, when you're that age, you're just trying to figure it out.

When I was an undergraduate at Western things in those years—the race riots in '68 and I was an ambulance technician during those times. We had some pretty significant civil unrest in Kalamazoo and being in the midst of that and working in the emergency department. Those kinds of experiences were pretty vivid.

For me, at a fairly young age, I mean late teens. I mean, I was a young student. I came here when I was 12 years old in seventh grade and at the beginning of my senior year, I was just 17. So, there was our nation and those of us in our nation did a lot of growing up fairly quickly during some of those years. And as it turns out, I am not so sure we finished doing the growing up.

But Kalamazoo was an interesting town. It is industrial and had some unique industries like pharmaceuticals and the paper industry. The university itself was a unique enterprise in itself. The hospitals, the two that are still here, somewhat of a similar persuasion in their competitiveness and their specialty areas were very prominent in the community's life. And from what I gather, talking to a few folks, they still are. For so many communities they would be lucky to have two hospitals, lucky to have a hospital for that matter, which a lot of communities are struggling with.

But in the industry, the paper industry, that is a chapter turned now. Nothing like it was in those days. I think the Kalamazoo River has been reclaimed as something that's a little more desirable in terms of our environment than it was back in the day when the paper sludge and sulfur-based paper waste were being pushed out into the river. It seems horrible to think about. But that is sort of the way things were done. "Hey, we got a river great, let's build a paper mill." I mean that is kind of the way the industry worked until it became realization like "Whoa, that's pretty nasty stuff." And I am pleased that somehow collectively they figured that out.

From what I can tell, I drove over the river earlier this morning and it looked a lot better than it did when I was growing up and it does not smell like it did then. That was nasty stuff. We survived those events in a way, but it was a collective survival. And it was based on I think a collective community of caring people whether it was faculty at the campus school or the leadership of the university that until 1966 allowed that campus school to exist.

So, I think there are some folks, as they say up the food chain, which deserve some credit. I think they could have pulled the plug a whole lot sooner than 1966. It is kind of nice to come back. It is still nice at my age to be able to remember something.

I may not be able to remember what I had for breakfast this morning, but some of the memories I have. It will be nice to see some of the chums, student colleagues tonight.

**Cassie:** A lot of people once they start talking about it, it all starts rushing back.

**Jeff:** Yeah, it was nice. Yeah, it was a nice break from summer too, your timing was good. And yeah, for us, we drove a little under 400-miles drive. It was not that bad, yeah, drive through part of the metro Chicago area, but it is what it is. But we got here. Weather has been cooperative, so looking forward to this evening.

Thank you to the university and your colleagues for kind of making this happen.

**Cassie:** Well, thank you for agreeing to talk to me today too.