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Sharon Alsbro, Emboldened for Life in Germany

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U High Alum Sharon Alsbro

July 30, 2022 at 12:25 AM

State and U-High Reunion

Cassie: Okay, so today is Saturday July 30th. My name is Cassie Kotrch. And I am here with Sharon Alsbro.

Sharon: Yes.

Cassie: Okay, and how do you spell your last name?

Sharon: A-L-S-B-R-O.

Cassie: Okay, great.

Sharon: Do you want my maiden name?

Cassie: Sure, yeah.

Sharon: Gildea. G-I-L-D-E-A.

Cassie: Okay, great. You said you came in seventh grade actually. So, were you from the Kalamazoo area and you came to this school?

Sharon: Yeah, I went to West Main until seventh grade.

Cassie: Okay, so what brought you over to Campus School and U-High? Or State High?

Sharon: Yeah, actually we were in the elementary building then, in seventh grade.

Cassie: Okay, why did you transfer over to the school?

Sharon: My parents had gone to State High. And my grandfather went to State High. So, I was a third generation.

Cassie: Wow, ok. So, they wanted to bring you in in junior high to maybe make the transition to U-High or State High easier?

Sharon: Seventh grade you mean? Yeah.

Cassie: Yeah, in the seventh grade.

Sharon: Yep, yeah because you had to go somewhere.

Cassie: Yeah, so, reflecting back on your time at Campus School and State High, how would you summarize your experience at the school?

Sharon: It was great. Um, golly I don't know. We practically knew everybody in the school, especially the ones I had choir with. So, I had grades ahead of me in there and knew people from that. And I saw Jack Frye at our last reunion. Now he has passed away. But it was nice to see him. It was a good experience. You always had work to do, always had homework. And I guess that was good. It prepared us well for college, that's for sure. But we were always having fun too.

Cassie: You said that your—was it your dad that also went to State High before?

Sharon: Both my mom and dad went.

Cassie: Oh, did they ever tell you any stories about their time at State High?

Sharon: Not really, except that I had the same Latin teacher as my dad had.

Cassie: Really?

Sharon: Yeah.

Cassie: Who was that?

Sharon: Ms. Kraft.

Cassie: Oh yeah, mm-hm.

Sharon: Yeah.

Cassie: Was her classroom the one that was by the gym?

Sharon: Yep.

Cassie: And you had to walk along the track?

Sharon: Around, yes. Yeah. (Both laugh) You already heard this?

Cassie: Yes, uh-huh.

Sharon: Yeah.

Cassie: Do you remember any other teachers? I know you mentioned Mr. Frye as well, but any other teachers?

Sharon: Yeah, I remember, well, this biology teacher. My gosh, I can't think of his name right now. Anyway, he took a trip every summer. He took the school class on a trip somewhere. And so, when I was between my sophomore and junior year, he took a camping trip out west to the Badlands. I remember we had the bus from school. It was a school bus. And Ernie was the driver. Ernie drove everywhere. He was the shuttle bus driver for Western and he was always there. But I think they called it Ernie's Drive. In fact, that's a little cut-off place.

Cassie: Yeah, Ernie's Lane?

Sharon: You said it, yeah. And he was great. And our bus broke down when we were in Illinois, coming back home. I can't remember the name of the town. But I think we were there for about three days waiting for the bus to get fixed. And they let us camp there. We camped out in the middle of town, in the park. And they were so nice because they held a dance for us one night. They changed movies that wouldn't normally have changed, but they changed it. So, we didn't have to watch the same movie two nights in a row. Everything was just nice. Yeah, I remember that. And then—

Cassie: Was that teacher Mr. Deur?

Sharon: Yes.

Cassie: Yes, okay. Because I think somebody else mentioned that too, yeah.

Sharon: Mr. Deur, I think when I was maybe a senior, he took a group to Europe. And they traveled around Europe. Yeah, and they went on a ship tour to get there. I remember that. But I didn't go. Let me see. Mr. Weber, an algebra teacher. He was awesome. And his thing was he'd throw the chalk to you and say: "Chalk and talk."

Cassie: Yep, that's exactly what a few others said too.

Sharon: Yeah, he'd get up there, and you had to go to the board. And explain those problems we were doing ourselves or whatever. Yeah, he was a fun guy. Gosh, I cannot remember her name. The language teacher, she taught Spanish and Latin. Or no, Spanish, German, and French. And she was really good, I liked her a lot. Our second year, she made us ask questions and do everything in Spanish. And if you didn't, you had to put money in a pot. And at the end of the year, she had a party with the money.

Cassie: That's cool.

Sharon: Yeah, and you know what the funny thing was? I didn't know that I knew very much Spanish for one. My husband was stationed in Germany and we went to Germany. I had more Spanish words popping into my head just because I didn't know German.

Cassie: That's funny.

Sharon: Yeah.

Cassie: Do you remember anything about the students at the time that you were here? Anything about the student body?

Sharon: We were a great class. If you notice, on the list of classes coming, ours is the biggest.

Cassie: Right.

Sharon: And we've always been close and knew everybody well. I don't remember anything... Nobody got in any big trouble. But no, I don't remember anything in particular. Just that we were a close, good class and we had fun.

Cassie: Who were your friends at the time that you were here?

Sharon: Well, Karen was one of my best friends. She still is all these years later. And she's here today. She went through the school from kindergarten on. She didn't want to come and talk. I don't know. Yeah. Her name was Karen Wilkins at the time. And then there was a group. Priscilla, Todd and Mary Lou Allen and who else. Then there was Judy Grody at the time, it's Coleman now. Is there anybody else in my class doing this that you know of?

Cassie: I don't know, all I know is that—

Sharon: That Gary did.

Cassie: That Gary did, yeah. But I do have three more after this and then I am actually working on the project into October. So, I might get more within the coming months hopefully too, yeah.

Sharon: There are a couple of friends that I have lost track of. Joan Blanchette was one and I do not know where she is, she hasn't ever come to these. There were just a lot of us that kind of hung out together during times, yeah.

Cassie: What did a typical day look like at the school? Did you have any favorite pastimes?

Sharon: Well, you know they had the monitor system.

Cassie: Right.

Sharon: I was always a monitor and a lot of times, my post was down in the basement across from the audiovisual room, which is where Western classes came in and watched their movies. So, I sat and watched them from the hallway. Yeah. So, one hour was monitoring, the rest of the time was pretty much taken up with classes and we did have gym class and we had to go swimming. I did not like that. It was first thing in the morning and then, you know, your hair gets all messed up by the end of it.

Cassie: Yeah. I did hear from another woman who I spoke to yesterday that the swimsuits were atrocious.

Sharon: Yeah, they were.

Cassie: As were what they called gym suits, yeah.

Sharon: Yeah, the gym suits too, right. Yeah, I don't remember the teacher's name. I didn't care a lot for her. So, I guess that's why. I should have listened to her then though because she told us how to walk and tuck our butt under and I never did and now I have got back problems.

Cassie: Yeah, bad posture, I do too.

Sharon: Right, so I think I might have had study hall once in a while, I do not remember why. And English, I remember this, the speech teacher. I hated him because I did not want to get in front of people and talk. My mom even came in and talked to him because I was so afraid to get up. I think he was an alcoholic actually, which we found out later. And then one of the English teachers was always reaching down—that's the kind of stuff you remember, right?

Cassie: Do you remember any events that happened at the school, like any plays or dances?

Sharon: Yeah, well I was in the musicals because I was in choir and the choir was an awesome experience. Because he taught us, we sang real classical music, and we were even on the radio one time. I had one of the leads in the opera when I was a senior, it was the opera Martha. I remember that.

When I was in seventh grade, we had a different choir teacher then. She came over and got three seventh graders, she knew we all sang well. Hannah had us be in the play they were putting on at the high school. We were the three little girls. I can even remember the music. So yeah, mostly those kinds of events I was just always in, but I never was in a play. You know, we had the little theater, which was across the street, we went there. That was where our performances were.

Another one was Mr. Charles, it was Barney Chance, he was a typing teacher and a coach. I think he coached basketball but I'm not positive. He was a good guy.

I had another teacher that I did not remember. I think Earl Bore was his name, I think he taught driver's Ed. He just was not one that we were very close to, you know. But I will be darned because when I was transferring to Western or I had transferred from Michigan State, I needed to find a certification officer for teachers. So, I did not know him at the time. I did not remember him. I walked in the room, and he said: "Sharon Gildea." I mean, by then I was married and had kids.

My education at Western was interrupted by many things, like traveling because we were in the army for a long time. So, I was always trying to catch a few classes here and a few classes there but did not finish. So finally, I am about to finish and he had to see what classes I still had to take. Because he remembered me, he checked off a bunch of them that I did not have to take. He probably figured we had a good education here in high school so we did not need to bother.

Cassie: Do you remember anything about the buildings at the time?

Sharon: Yeah, sure. Well, we started in the little building which was the elementary. It had a rotunda and a track around it. We were up on the upper floor. Down in the basement was the cafeteria. There was this one little room that was the gym, was tiny.

Cassie: Yes, I heard about that.

Sharon: Yeah, I remember we practiced, we had a chorus line in high school and that's where we practiced. I do remember that. And I was not a cheerleader, but I was always in

there cheering. And I mean, I loved basketball, but I liked football too. And I sold refreshments during the football games. And then our basketball games and stuff were done in the little gym, women's gym. And so that's where the biology classes were across from.

Cassie: Yes, in West Hall?

Sharon: Yeah. And then we had to go over into... behind the little theater for typing. So, then you come from the elementary to the high school building and there was one floor coming across, like a breezeway, where the principal's office was. And then we came in—I am not sure if it is still there in this building because everything is different now.

But our eighth-grade classes were done in a hallway and then we were separated from the high school. Yeah. And then the thing I remember most about—we had student teachers, always. I mean we were like in a fishbowl. We had chairs in the back of every room where the kids could come for observation. And then we had student teachers in all the classes, that was just the way it was. But, it did not faze us, I guess.

I remember one time down here, our gym was down there, and I remember one time the elementary was putting on a play because I remember one of the lines was about “the time has come, the walrus said,” or something like that. I cannot remember what they were putting on but somehow, we were there watching it or helping out or doing something.

Our Latin class had a toga party down there. I mean they were always doing things to make it more interesting and keep us involved. I think we took a field trip to Chicago every year.

Cassie: Wow.

Sharon: To the museum, usually to the field museum or the science and industry. Yeah. And we had a good bus for that. Yeah, a Greyhound or something.

Cassie: We have about five minutes left and there was one more question that I wanted to ask you which is during your time here at the school, seventh through twelfth grade, what event or what person do you think impacted you the most?

Sharon: It is hard to say—probably what we did in music in the choir. Yeah, because then when I became a teacher and I taught language arts, I had to direct plays all the time, which are usually musicals. Yeah. It is good background.

Cassie: Do you remember the choir leader when you were in choir? Who was the teacher when you were in choir?

Sharon: Yeah, Mr. Frey. Yeah. I went to the Methodist church, and he was also our choir director, so that helped.

Cassie: Yeah, right. Do you have any other memories with Jack Frye?

Sharon: Yeah. When we were maybe juniors, maybe sophomores. His wife was pregnant and had a baby and we were kind of all involved with that with government present and everything. Just nice, friendly stuff. Like he was a friend. Yeah.

Cassie: Wow. Well, that is very nice. Well, if you did not have any other memories or anything, I am done with all of my questions. So, if you had anything else that you wanted to share.

Sharon: It has prepared me for life because I married someone who was in the army. We went all over the world. So, we lived in Germany for three years. Then we went to a lot of different places in the United States. He went to Vietnam twice. So yeah, he made it a career and then after he got out, he taught. So, I was just much bolder than I would have been probably.

Cassie: Well, thank you very much for talking to me today. If you have any old classmates that are on the fence about them just let me know. If you would like my contact information too, I can give that to you because I will be working on this project into October.

Sharon: Are you a student at Western?

Cassie: I am, yes. I actually graduate with my bachelors in December. So, I'm almost done. Yeah, yep.

Sharon: And then what are you going to do?

Cassie: Well, after that it's either grad school for my masters or work.

Sharon: In what though?

Cassie: I'm hoping to get a master's degree in producing for television or film. Yeah, so my major right now is film, video studies with a minor in journalism. I was an editor at the Western Herald and worked on radio for a little bit and then television and such.

Sharon: Yeah, very good.

Cassie: Yeah, it's fun. But if you think of anything else then you can always reach back out, like I said, I'll be working on the project.

Sharon: Do you want some of those pictures?

Cassie: Yeah of course.

Sharon: I worked on the yearbook, so I have some pictures of like homecoming and a couple of things I think our chorus line.