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## Nick Fugedi and the Artistic Freedom of East Hall

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WMU Alum Nick Fugedi

Saturday, January 18 at 3:30 pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

**Cassie:** Okay great, alright, so I'm recording now. If you just want to go ahead, introduce yourself and talk about your connection to WMU that would be great.

**Nick:** My name is Nick Fugedi. I attended Western Michigan from 2003 to 2008.

I was an art education and painting major. So, when I started taking my painting classes, that's when I really started going to East Hall quite a bit. That's when my love for the building began.

In the beginning, it was sort of like this unwanted stepchild of the university. It felt like it was there, and the artists took it over, so there was this freedom there. It was just a really cool spot where artists came together and they would be walking around. You could visit people's studios. There would be people sitting on the front steps overlooking the student ghetto.

It was just a really special place. But it wasn't until I think 2006 or 2007 that I won a scholarship to produce a mural right at the main intersection of campus, there on the corner where that video store used to be. I am not sure if it is there anymore.



**Cassie:** I don't think so. What road? Do you remember the roads?

**Nick:** West Michigan and—

**Cassie:** And Oakland?

**Nick:** It goes north, like where U-Club used to be. I haven't been there in so many years that I'm forgetting. Anyways, during my 4th year there, they gave me one of the graduate student studios. So, I got a key where I could go there any time.

I'm a night owl, so I would often paint until 2:00 o'clock in the morning. But it was a spooky place though because it was sort of run down. They didn't really invest in it before they invested a lot of money into it. My studio was at the end of the hall and the light was out. Some of the lights would flicker and there would be dripping water. There were a couple of

times where I ran out of there because I just got spooked. You would hear weird sounds and stuff like that.

One time, in my buddy's studio down in the basement, he had a dog. The dog just up and ran out of the studio. We were trying to get him to come back in but he sat down right at the door and would not come in. So, we always joked around that there were some ghosts or something.

**Cassie:** Yeah, so you were there when the School of Art was obviously in East Hall. That would be right before everybody left and they decided to renovate East Hall. So, you were there right at the end before all the renovations. What were some of the quirks and weird stuff going on with the building?

**Nick:** Like I said, it was just sort of like this building where some people had keys and some people were sneaking in. There was one time when I was painting and I heard this beautiful violin music going through the hallways. I gathered up the courage to check it out and followed it to this octagon-shaped atrium where they used to do a lot of art shows.

There was just this guy playing violin by himself. He said: "I'm so sorry if that bothered you." I told him that I was just checking out what was going on. He said that he sneaks in there because it has the best acoustics and he comes at night because there's usually nobody there. So, he plays a lot.

It was just a really special place where we shared spaces with the professors, too. The professors had studios there, so we would walk around and check out what they were working on. They would check out what we were working on. I just have so many fond memories of the community in that old building.

**Cassie:** Yeah, so what did a typical day look like for you on East campus? And I know you said you were there late a lot. Were you the last one there or were there other people that were there?

**Nick:** We had a lot of painting classes there. So, we would have a class and then I would just stay. I mean, it was like my second home. In my studio, I had a little bed where I could sleep if I needed to. So yeah, I was there quite a bit.

**Cassie:** Did you ever sleep there?

**Nick:** Yeah, especially when I was working on the mural because I had to crunch at the end to get it done. So after work, I would just drop by to get a couple of hours of sleep and then go to class.

**Cassie:** What are some of your earliest memories in East Hall? What was one of your first thoughts walking in the East Hall or on East Campus for the first time?

**Nick:** I love old buildings and history. So, my earliest memory is when they did some art shows there. As a freshman, I got to see all these really great artists and see them show their

work. I found out that's where their studios were. So right away, I knew I wanted a studio there. That was my goal.

I was just fascinated by the building. I had classes there and my relatives could come visit my studio. I used to sit right there, back in the day, and I always found that fascinating. Even to this day, I live in a house that's almost 100 years old.

I've just always been interested in that kind of history. I'm so glad they didn't tear it down because there was a lot of talk that they were going to. It was just so much work that needed to be done. I'm a little sad that it's not attached to the arts so much anymore, but I'm still glad that it's still there.

**Cassie:** Have you been back since the renovations? Have you seen it at all?

**Nick:** I have only peeked in through the windows. I haven't had a chance. I want to get in and check out my old studio, but yeah, not totally.

**Cassie:** Where was your studio located?

**Nick:** If you go up the main stairs where there are staircases on either side in the front, then you take a left, I was 2-3 doors down on the left side, which would have been the west side of the building.

**Cassie:** I'm wondering, what do you think impacted you during your time at Western and East Hall the most? Whether it be a person, a place, something that happened, whatever it is.

**Nick:** To me, it was just the community. It was a special place where you could go and talk with like-minded people and get ideas.

As an artist, you sort of feel like a recluse at times. You're locked up in your studio and you don't talk to people for hours. So, it was nice because you could take a break and walk around to see what everybody was doing. You could get some great ideas and then go back to work.

That's what I miss. I don't know if you get that same feeling at the new building because it's just totally different. East Hall was sort of secluded and away. Nobody came to check on you or yelled at you for getting paint on the floor.

You know what I mean?

**Cassie:** Right, you also said that some of the faculty had studios in East Hall too. Is that right?

**Nick:** Yeah.

**Cassie:** Did you ever go in there? Did they hold office hours in there?

**Nick:** Yeah, all the time they would show us what they were working on and give us tours.

It was cool because as a young person, you got to see what a functioning professional artist looked like. What were they working on? What were their studios like? It was really insightful to be able to walk into their studios any time. There was an open-door policy where if they were in there, you could go talk to them any time.

**Cassie:** Do you think the setting of being in East Hall maybe created a connection to faculty that you wouldn't have otherwise?

**Nick:** Yeah, absolutely. So, I'm an art teacher now and I try to build that same kind of community with the kids in my building. We don't have a place like East Hall, but I try to keep that same spirit alive.

**Cassie:** How do you feel about WMU now versus when you were a student there?

**Nick:** I loved my time at Western. I have very fond memories. I taught high school for a long time and I was always telling kids to go to Western. I would tell them to go meet new people and not just stick with their friends in the same clique.

So, I went and met a lot of new people and many of them are still friends to this day. I miss it. I do. I miss the west side. I live in Detroit now, but I miss Kalamazoo. I miss being two hours from Chicago and an hour south of Grand Rapids. Two hours from Detroit.

I just love the location. South Haven is right there and Lake Michigan is nearby. Yeah, I can't say enough good things about Western. I really had a great time.

**Cassie:** When you weren't busy in classes or making your art, what did you do?

**Nick:** I'm a musician. I would often be playing at different bars around or at parties. I used to play at Waldo's every Wednesday night.

**Cassie:** Really?

**Nick:** Yeah, so a lot of music.

**Cassie:** What instruments do you play?

**Nick:** I'm a guitarist and vocalist. Still do that now. I teach and then on the weekends I play out at different bars around Detroit.

**Cassie:** Cool, so you've frequented Waldo's pretty often it sounds like. Was there anywhere else that you liked to spend your time?

**Nick:** Club soda when that was open. I'm trying to think of the bar that's next to the train tracks. It's an old place that used to be a brewery.

**Cassie:** Bells is right by that.

**Nick:** Not Bells. It is the other bar, right by Bells.

**Cassie:** Hop Cat?

**Nick:** No. I can't remember its name. We mostly hung out at club soda, Waldo's and then parties.

**Cassie:** Like house parties or something? Those got pretty popular from around 2005 until Covid, I think.

I just have a few more questions for you, actually. Just two more. But if you have any stories or anything that you want to share, go ahead. I was wondering if you have any recollections about events on campus. You mentioned that sometimes there would be art shows in East Hall. Could you talk about that a little bit more?

**Nick:** Yeah, as a senior, you're required to do your senior show. I always loved checking those out. But I also loved how Western did a great job of bringing in great musical acts to the Miller Auditorium. I saw so many cool bands there.

Then of course, there was the beginning of the year bash. They did Bronco Bash and that was always a lot of fun. I just enjoyed it because I almost went to the Center for Creative Studies. But I'm glad I went to Western because I was still able to get some of that college experience: tailgating, going to football games, house parties, and stuff like that. And then still get a good education that set me up for my career today.

**Cassie:** I was going to ask too because you didn't go to a college specifically for the arts. How do you think that impacted your education? Do you think that WMU had a good art program when you were going there?

**Nick:** Fantastic. Great, all the arts, the music, the dance, the fine arts.

I mean, the professors are fantastic. The graphic design department was phenomenal. Photography—I just learned so much. And it was a cool thing about being an art education major, that you have to take all these different classes to get experience. You take ceramics, photography—you just get a taste of it.

And it has deeply affected me to this day as a teacher.

**Cassie:** Yeah, so it sounds like going to Western actually provided a more well-rounded education.

**Nick:** Yeah.

**Cassie:** Do you have any other memories you'd like to share? Or were there any topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to conclude with?

**Nick:** I can't remember everything, but I did win a battle of the bands my freshman year. That was held right by the Valley 2 pond down at the bottom of the hill. That was a really cool memory.

I'm trying to think of other memories. There are just so many. But I'm planning to get back there soon. I want to visit and check it out. So I'll be back soon.

**Cassie:** You have won the battle of bands your freshman year. So that was like your first year there?

**Nick:** Yeah.

**Cassie:** Wow, yeah, I mean, that's a good way to start your career there at Western.

**Nick:** It was fun.

**Cassie:** Well, thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today.

I couldn't see on the consent form if you wanted to or not, but if you did want to share a photo to go with your story, you can email one over to me. It can be a photo from any time. So, if you had photos from Western that you wanted to use, you could totally use those or a more recent photo as well.

**Nick:** I do have one cool story. We had to do an installation somewhere in East Hall. An installation is when you get a room and turn the whole room into a work of art.

So, we were looking around different rooms and found an old safe in the basement. It had a huge metal door and when you went in, it was all brick and a tight space. We turned it into a bomb shelter as if there had been an atomic fallout. We made it look like there was a guy standing there, scratching little hatch marks on the wall. There was a TV that just had the gray screen on, like there was no reception, and stocked up food.

That was a really cool memory that I just wanted to share.

**Cassie:** Did people like it?

**Nick:** Yeah, because one guy was a smoker and smoked cigarettes down there. He put them out on the ground. I don't think you can do that now, but it showed that the guy was anxious. You just got this sense that it was a tight space. So we had a gas mask hanging and it was cool.

**Cassie:** Wow, did you ever go up into the attic or the very top of East Hall? I forget what it's called, but it's like a little round thing. Did you ever see those signatures all up in there?

**Nick:** I've never been up there.

**Cassie:** That would have been cool too.

**Nick:** Maybe when I come back and visit.

**Cassie:** Most of them are actually still up there. It's just that now the entire area has the HVAC system because of the renovations.

If anything comes up or you have any questions in the meantime, feel free to shoot me an email. Otherwise, I will send you the link to the website when it's ready. And if you want to send that photo, that would be great.

**Nick:** Sounds good, thanks.

**Cassie:** All right thank you, have a good rest of your day.

**Nick:** You too. Bye

**Cassie:** Thanks, bye.