Denise Hunt and the Impact of Band

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WMU Alum Denise Hunt

Friday, Jan. 27, 2023 at 1:30 PM

In-Person at Heritage Hall

Cassie: Let’s get started. Okay. So I’m recording now, so go ahead and introduce yourself whenever you’re ready.

Denise: My name is Denise Hunt, and I am from Portage, Michigan. So I came to Western right out of high school in 1985 and graduated in 1989 with a business bachelor in Business Administration.

Cassie: Okay. And so why did you come to Western? Why did you choose Western?

Denise: Because it was away from home, but still home. And Western was an excellent college, so university, and it was just I felt more comfortable with that option of being away from home. But not quite away from home.

Cassie: You could still go home and do your laundry.

Denise: Exactly.

Cassie: So how would you summarize your experience at Western, your undergrad?

Denise: I loved it. I loved Western. It was a blast. And especially right off the bat, the memories I have the freshman year, I’m sure many people would share is, like, the most impressionable.

And when I came on campus, I was in the marching band, and so we came on campus early, and I was in a four men, four woman dorm room of Siegela Draper. And I was like, my gosh. That was kind of scary because I was the only one there not band members.

But at the same time, it was amazing because I had the whole floor to myself and just felt like I was all right. But before that before that was the orientation, and that’s when I felt like my journey was beginning. Like, this is a new adventure. This is exciting.

I’m becoming who I’m going to be. So that was fun in the Valley dorms.

Cassie: So where did you live the other three years? Did you live in that dorm?

Denise: I actually stayed for two years in Siedschlag/Draper and then moved to Davis Hall my junior year.
And that was a completely different environment because that was coed by suite, whereas Siedschlag is by female, Draper was male, and then we were connected by the hallway. So it was not quite as crazy in terms of the culture environment that goes on.

Cassie: Right. You grew into it a little bit.

Denise: Yeah. I remember the songs that would come in a cafeteria, like Def Leopard and stuff. And it’s like, wow, that kind of stuff. You come out of it and go, that was just amazing to live through that, because it was a great life training place, really, right. Dealing with people and your stuff.

Cassie: You mentioned orientation and moving into the dorm for the first time early. What are some of your earliest memories of being on campus and starting classes?

Denise: Yeah, so my first classes, I remember my environment class and first impressions of the different teachers, what they shared.

That professor, he came in with shaving cream on his face and a razor blade, and he talked about Gawashi Gore like, well, this sounds like it could actually be interesting. And Gawashi Gore, I can't find it in the dictionary. But he said that has to do with waste. And that never left me.

Cassie: Wow. Quite a first impression.

Denise: It was, yeah. No, I have to say that wasn't my favorite class. As time went on, that’s hard... environmental stuff wasn't my thing. But that made a big impression. And then in my Managerial economics class I remember: Welcome to Managerial Economics.

Just how we said it. Never forgot that. So we have been a bit of an accent. Never forget that. And of course, band, we had our first note this large. I can't remember how many member band we was like three or 400 members. And the first tuning note was like, my gosh, amazing.

So just those first experiences.

Cassie: And where were most of your classes?

Denise: So most of them well, mixture in the beginning because I did my general eds right away, but I did pre business too. So most of my classes later were on this campus. But a lot were on the main campus.

Cassie: Back and forth.

Denise: Yeah, back and forth. Walking up that hill, burning those carbs.

Cassie: Going up all those stairs.

Denise: Yeah, it was kind of painful. (Both laugh)
**Cassie:** Was that difficult in the winter?

**Denise:** Yeah, I did enjoy it very much, but I imagine probably got some help with friends maybe who had a car.

But I did it and then I did have a car. I think my last two years I had a car. So it was like relief.

**Cassie:** Yeah, great relief. So what do you remember about the buildings on East Campus during your last two years when you were especially here a lot?

**Denise:** Yes, well, definitely East Hall and North Hall, which is now gone a facade. So that’s shocking. Yeah, they completely changed. This redone, this, which is so beautiful. They were definitely older historical buildings. And I remember classes were hot sometimes. And I remember being involved with presentations. That was my senior year having to do our presentations.

That was a tough year with working with groups and management projects and that was pretty intense. So it must have been here. I can’t remember.

**Cassie:** Intense environment for intense projects.

**Denise:** And that season– Yeah, that was pretty intense– I didn't actually go with the band to California because I took the senior year off, which I regret now.

**Cassie:** Really?

**Denise:** Yeah, because we went to the California Bowl. Like really?

**Cassie:** Yeah. That was a bad year to miss I guess.

**Denise:** It was. But I was really engaged with my classes.

**Cassie:** So what did a typical day look like for you on campus?

**Denise:** You know, that was a long time ago (both laugh), but I tried to space it out so I wasn’t too overstressed.

But I remember as a freshman I got a scholarship because I worked so hard. And I said, you know what, that was great, but I’m not gonna work that hard. I want to enjoy myself. So I made sure that I didn’t have enough credits to make sure that I had that taken care of and keep me going, but that I can stay involved.

So as far as a day I would go around and Nas Hall. I think that’s one of them, canals hall. And there were different buildings we had to go. There was the communications maybe that’s where the communications classes were.

**Cassie:** I think there were some.

**Denise:** Knauss hall and elsewhere.
That’s counseling now. So just trying to think… the environmental classes were in a different building and then I have to come here. So I got great walking everywhere.

Cassie: Stayed in shape.

Denise: And I worked at Bernhardt Center. I was at the Candy counter, which no longer exists.

But that was fun because that was the hub of the campus. Get to see what’s going on next to the bookstore and food. And I was always tempted to buy Virginia Slim menthol lights because it was full of cigarettes. I didn’t do that, thank God.

But it was such a temptation.

Cassie: Temptation to be there?

Denise: Yeah it was.

Cassie: So you talked about how you balanced it a little bit more when you came here. So what did you do in your free time?

Denise: Well, went to Miller, offered to volunteer. If you volunteered you could watch the shows, and so I enjoyed doing that.

I remember the romantics concert, and then there was… the band had parties. I wasn’t a huge partier, but we did have band parties and my friends would get together and do stuff and eat out and go to games. Of course, band was at the games all the time. Loved all the games, volleyball and basketball, hockey.

Hockey was big time, and hockey is still big time.

Cassie: Yeah.

Denise: Big time, so enjoyed that. Okay, there’s just Miller Auditorium events. Yeah, I said that. Studied, and I studied.

Oh! I remember the dances. Our dorms would have dances.

Cassie: Really?

Denise: And then Davis Hall had a spring fling and that was fun.

Cassie: What did that look like, those dances when they set up?

Denise: The dorm would actually host it. So they’d have, I guess a little committee. I wasn’t on that but then we would dress up for spring.
It’d be like in the winter or something like that. We’d dress up spring clean. We had a DJ, I actually dated a DJ for the one year. So I was kind of helping him in dancing. He didn’t dance too much at that time, but he was busy.

But the other year I got to dance with a guy that I really enjoyed. I dated him for three months in that season while I lived in Davis Hall. And McGonagles was a big place to go to.

**Cassie:** I’ve not heard of it.

**Denise:** So that’s on Stadium Drive, a lot of people. It’s a big bar which is no longer there. And Yeah, Yeah Waldos, is it Waldos? Is it the other one?

**Cassie:** Yeah, Waldos is

**Denise:** I didn’t go there very much, but occasionally I went there too so mixture of things. Anyway I would go home too as well.

**Cassie:** Right, yeah well, it was pretty close. So did you have anything that you wanted to share that you had prepared or anything?

**Denise:** So I mentioned just arriving on campus and the biggest thing was when I joined the marching band Scott Boerma, who is currently the director of marching band excuse me, director of university bands and a professor of music here on campus. He was the drum major, and he was amazing, him and Troy Cummings. They were so talented, but especially Troy really was very gifted. And that was an amazing year because we went to the Indianapolis Hoosier Dome for the high school Grand National Competition. We were the exhibition band there.

And he had written some arrangements along with the director of the marching band at that time. So it’s awesome to come back. I found out that he was the director of university bands when I went to Western Pit and Bronco game this past fall. And we’re like, my gosh, he’s the director of bands.

So I signed up for the alumni band just this year and did that or I should say in October I did that.

So I got on M Live with a picture of me slapping the hand of a band member. And that was fun, but that was amazing. And Richard Suttendorf, professor Richard Sutterdorf is the position that Scott Borma took, and he was an amazing professor.

Of all the professors, I remember him the most. He loved music, and he could bring it out of people. And just the way he moved, just the way he would orchestrate, and he cared about students. I wasn’t a music major, but I felt valued by him. He knew me as a person.

So that was probably the most impacting professor of all. And all my friends were music ed. So I mentioned to you, I think all my memories are primarily with the music and my ed friends because I came to Western for pre business and I got right into it.
I was encouraged to go business and education. I needed that support in order to do that. So business was the direction. So my memories are more in all the extracurricular, all the other stuff of Western. And that's sad in one way, but at the same time, I've been fine in business.

I took many tests saying, okay, am I in the right area? Yes, I'm doing good. But education, I think, is an area that I probably would have really thrived in as well. I've often considered going back. So I had lots of good memories with friends in the education and music education.

We just had a great time. I just remember so many good times. The pride of being in the band, wearing the band jacket on campus and feeling pride.

Cassie: That's a school pride.

Denise: Very much, even though football was a struggle.

Cassie: Right.

Denise: It was a big struggle back then. But I still enjoyed being the band. We were doing that, and then I told you about my first impressions.

Cassie: Sounds like you were very involved on campus too, around all the action, like working at Bernhardt Center, being in band, getting to go to all the games and everything, but then also taking classes here.

And that's a very wholistic sort of-

Denise: Yeah, it was full. Yeah, it was a full life.

Cassie: Not most students get to experience classes on both campuses and be involved and things like that.

Denise: Right, they need to take advantage of everything that the university has available because there is so much available, and I enjoy partaking.

I had a Japanese roommate my senior year, so that was international experience and learning some Japanese. And just her culture and how she was so humble and so sweet and she just thought I was like this starry eyed girl. And she drew pictures of me and herself and how she was just so humble about herself and she was so precious.

And I also connected with a guy who was blind, and she was blind in the band. So I would help her walk around the campus and learn how to do that. And she was an amazing person to be able to pick up music just by listening and she would listen to me.

So that was kind of like, whoa.

Cassie: Yeah.

Denise: So it was a lot about a lot about band.
Cassie: Yeah, it exposed you to a lot of different people, it sounds like many experiences.

Denise: Yeah, my best friends were. And we're still connected with some of those folks and they're roommates actually.

Cassie: Really?

Denise: Yeah,

Cassie: So you mentioned the professor who was most impactful person to you probably.

Denise: Dr. Sundorf.

Cassie: Right, what else do you think impacted you the most during your time at WMU? What event do you think or thing?

Denise: Well, graduating was pretty exciting. That was in the summer of ’89, and that was hot. But a lot of my friends were actually there too, cuz I was worried that not graduating in winter normal session.

Cassie: Like spring?

Denise: Spring, I think yeah. And so I went the extra semester but there were still a lot of people there and that was good and we were in Waldo Stadium.

Cassie: Really?

Denise: Is that right? It’s been so long. But in the ground area, there were a lot of students there. And watching my friends get to graduate was nice, very nice. So that was very impactful, of course. And nothing is standing out, particularly there, cuz they’re are just so many different.

Okay, I can't think of anything.

Cassie: That’s okay. I just had one or two more questions, so if you want to share a few more thoughts or anything, and then I can ask my last few questions?

Denise: Yeah, let’s talk about that. I volunteered there. Let’s see. I love my communications class. Now, I can’t remember if that was the business communications or if it was the education general ed, but I loved that class.

Cassie: Was it on main campus?

Denise: Yes.

Cassie: Like in Brown Hall maybe?

Denise: Maybe it was. It was Knauss Hall, is that?

Cassie: Knauss, yeah.
Denise: What goes on there?

Cassie: Well, I'm not sure anymore, but it's next to Dunbar, and they're in the same area.

Denise: I think Dunbar was French, or in my French classes. I took French as a French minor.

My grandfather, is his last name. So I really did that because he was French. And I thought maybe I'd teach, but that was-

Cassie: Feel that connection.

Denise: Yes, I never really did anything with it. But that's okay. It's just a family thing. So I did that. And that teacher was very unique, too.

I really appreciated her. She stood out as just so different. She was colorful in her clothing and just her personage. She was just a very unique individual. Yeah, she stood out. I think I pretty much hit on all the things that I really wanted to share.

Cassie: Okay, well, I just had two more questions then, while we're nearing the end of our time.

One question that I wanted to ask was, how do you feel about WMU now versus when you were a student here?

Denise: My gosh, it's grown! That has grown. And it's amazing to look at the pictures, just walk around and see how that it has improved. And they've changed up the campus, and I was sad to see some of the dorms gone. I was like, my gosh!

What happened to, I don't know if it was Davis Hall, that was gone, or if it was French?

Cassie: So many, yeah, well, there was all the little three, yeah.

Denise: (Gasps) Shocking, and I think there was another dorm next to Draper Siedschlag that I think that's all gone too.

Cassie: A lot of dorms have been torn down just in the past three years, I think, because it started when I transferred here, yeah.

Denise: Wow, yeah.

Cassie: And then new one's being built, obviously.

Denise: Right.

Cassie: Yeah.
Denise: So it's nice to see it freshened up, yet see some of the old historical buildings. And I am proud, it's just like, why haven't I been part of the alumni for years? I graduated, I lived in town for many years and I may have done it once. I'm like, I'm gonna do this, it's a blast!

And just talking to other students, and it was so much fun.

So I'm proud of Western, and I hope that they will continue to grow and be the excellent university that it is, so.

Cassie: Yeah, so do you have any other memories that came to mind while we were talking, or any last topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to talk about?

Denise: If I had more time to really ponder my pictures, I have lots of pictures, but they're in storage.

Cassie: Okay.

Denise: That would definitely help rekindle some stuff just going to my brains. But I loved living on campus. I think that's a great experience. And I will share with that, that it had its trials too, because with individuals you had to work that out.

You get placed with people that weren't necessarily maybe fit with your character. And so working that out.

Not just the educational piece of it, but just the life experiences that you get living on campus, and the choices that you have to make that you're faced with.

So it's a big opportunity, and it can make some people, it can break some other people. It could cause havoc in some areas.

But I found that I was able to learn with those experiences, and thankful though, some of them were challenging. Classes were challenging too.

Some were not so challenging, but others were. So all that mixed together added for, I think, the full experience that I had here at Western, and a great experience.

Cassie: Yeah, well, thank you so much for coming in to meet me and talk with me today. If you do go through any of those pictures, feel free to send some over to be included.

And if you have any thoughts or stories that pop up into your head after you leave here today, feel free to just email it over to me and I'll include it with your story too.

Denise: Okay. I will do that.

Cassie: Okay, well, thank you so much again.

Additional memories added via email by Denise:
I learned to play Euchre while living in the upperclassmen dorm. Originally, it was hard for me to catch on to but a lot of people played it, I enjoyed it when I did play, and there were tournaments so it got fast and serious. I'm glad I learned it and have enjoyed playing it throughout the years with family and friends.

One class that I'm thankful I took was a Food Science course with Professor Donna Van Westrien. She was a board member of the School Employees Credit Union (now know as Arbor Credit Union in Kalamazoo) where my father was president at the time. She encouraged me to check out the class when I went to WMU. The class was CRT 165 Food Science Principles. I enjoyed it and it helped make me a pretty decent cook.