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Kathy Scheiern: International Business on East Campus, Goat Eyes, and More

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WMU Alum Kathy Scheiern

Friday, Jan. 20, 2023 at 3:45 pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Cassie: Then I will start recording. Okay, so we're recording now and just go ahead whenever you are ready.

Kathy: So you wanted my name first? It's Kathy and the last name is Scheiern. So it's a short and weird which is kind of the way I describe myself. Thank you.

Cassie: Okay, what is your connection to WMU?

Kathy: Well, way back in the day, I graduated high school in 1974, when I was looking for colleges to go into, I had to fund it myself. I had some part time jobs and all the rest of that, but it meant I stayed in state because out of state tuition was horrifically expensive at that point.

And I was looking at schools that were big enough to offer me enough. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. So I wanted a bigger school that would offer me a broader sample of things to check out in the first couple of years when you're getting all your prerequisites, etc. but wasn't so big that coming out of a rural community, it felt overwhelming. And Western Michigan seemed to fit the bill really nicely. So that's how I ended up there in the first place then because I was paying for it myself. I went through the undergraduate in three and a half, three years, three and a half years.

Wait, no, two and a half years. Give myself credit, two and a half years. I was a crazy person. It was kinda I figured out that I could put a whole bunch of credits into one semester and then I only had to pay that much housing for that much one semester.

So whether I did 5 credits or 15 or 20 credits, at one point I was running 18, that my housing costs were the same. So more credits in the space and working and being a crazy person in honors college, etc. So I like WMU really well but if I had to do it over again, I



would take a little bit more time and enjoy the college experience a little bit more cuz I really didn't get to do that.

But what happened was I finished the undergraduate with a double major in Spanish and math and still didn't know what I wanted to do. And so a friend of mine who is in the business college, go East Campus, said "Hey, you should talk to one of my professors because he's looking for somebody who speaks Portuguese" (which I spoke Spanish, but) "Portuguese and knows computer programming which was part of my mathematics stuff, and knows accounting." And I'm like, well, I've got two out of three. And he's mixing things that I'm looking for a way to mix. So I'll go talk to him, and I talked to him and he was sorry.

What he said was that I could put together all my interests in a career in international business. And I went, that's really cool. That's where I'm gonna go. Except I had none of the prerequisites to get into business school because I'd been doing math and Spanish and computer programming and advanced differential equations and all the rest of this stuff.

So my Honors College project was actually, I told a friend recently that I am the founding grandma, although nobody knows it, of computer language. He was studying at Grand Naine for Google because in 1977, my Honors College project was a computer program that generated linguistic meaning phonemes for people to interact with on a computer way back in the day.

And he looked it up, he got a copy of the paper, he cited it. It's kind of like "Hah hah!", well, anyway, but back to East Campus. So I took a semester that was kind of in between and took a whole bunch of the prerequisite classes to get into what was then a Master's of Science in accountancy, okay?

And I went to the marketing department and said, give me one book I can read and clap out of marketing. And they were kind of, well, okay. And they gave me this book and I went to management. I went to the management department, I said, give me one book I can read and clap out of management.

And they did the same thing and I did. So those basic entry kinds of classes I got club credit for which is how then I went into the graduate program, into the master's program, and graduated in a year. So I spent a year and a half on East Campus.

The first semester was picking up some basics that I had to go to class for, and the rest of the year was me taking all the classes I need for that. And I took a basic computer class as part of it. And because this is how old this is, the computer center still ran punch cards for some programs but basic was on the terminals.

So it was brand new at that point, and the professor and I don't remember who was teaching it, well, this is where names escape me, but the professor who was teaching it, if you had it in on time, you got full points, but you lost a point. It was only ten points per program.

It had to work and you lost a point for every day it was late. So the dumb terminals would go down and the people couldn't get their basic programs done. So I put together a punch card deck because all the commands were in a specific order. So I'd have the answers to all the basic questions and all the basic sign outs, and then I'd punch card in what my program was.

And then I'd throw my deck together and turn it in at the Window for them to run my programs. And I was the only person turning in my programs on time. And they were like, how are you doing that? And I'm like, I'm using punch cards. And they're like, you can't use punch cards with basic?

And I'm like, yes, you can. You can use punch cards with anything that has a particular order to it. And the guy that was teaching international at the time, again, I don't remember his name but the one who talked to me about how you could be in international business with us, was very helpful throughout that period. And he was one of the ones that taught those computer classes and he would just smile. (Both laugh).

I think there was a Professor Morris who taught tax. Does that ring bells?

Cassie: Yeah, it does, yes.

Kathy: Okay, so I had Professor Morris for a tax class and he ended up hiring me to help him.

He also had a tax practice outside of teaching at Western Michigan University. And he ended up hiring me to help him with what I initially ran into as shoebox returns, where somebody shows up with a shoebox full of all the receipts and says, "Help. I need my taxes done" which is how I got started on taxes way back in the day. But he validated that.

But I get a lot of validation out of the professors on East Campus that this was a good fit for me because with my computer background, with my math background, I was able to bring those skills to the business college. I remember there was a cost accounting class, and I had been doing advanced mathematics, advanced everything.

And so I go into cost accounting class, and I'm like this is algebra, right? And he'd throw these big long cost calculations up on the board, and I'm like, okay, well, that numerator is that denominator, so you can wipe that out. And I'd simplify the thing down to a much shorter and more easy to remember formula.

And then I'd wreck the curve in the class because he'd give these tough cost accounting classes and because I had the math and the formulas, he gave me the A, but he threw me off the curve. He said, because you have an innate... and that was another class too, where it was advanced cost accounting, and it used some differential equations and some calculus, and I had had all that.

So everybody else who was a business major was struggling, and I was a math major. So again, it comes back to I have very fond memories of East Campus because they really laid the groundwork for my future career by allowing me to bring together what was, up until running into East Campus, the professors on East Campus and the skill sets and everything

on East Campus, it was kind of like, well, this is over here, and this is over here, and this is over here, but here all these things can come together, and I did. I started in public accounting, and then I got jobs with large corporations doing international auditing and accounting and finance and all the rest, traveled all over the world, used the Spanish, used the math, used the accounting.

It was fundamental to my career and has been and still is. So it has been quite the ride. And it all comes down to getting introduced to East Campus and having professors on East Campus who not only saw my abilities and validated them, which is good when you're looking for a career. But also showed me how things that seem disparate really came together into a career.

Cassie: Right, yeah. So it sounds like these professors are really what impacted you greatly and what you chose to do. So your life, career trajectory, but also the confidence that you had to go out and do these things.

Kathy: Yes.

Cassie: Sorry, I was wondering what do you think impacted you the most during your time at Western?

Kathy: Wow. You mean during the time at East Campus, or overall at Western?

Cassie: I guess overall.

Kathy: The peers. I came out of a rural area, and I was the valedictorian, and my siblings were valedictorians, and it was a small school and blah, blah, blah.

And when I came to Western, it was kind of like, hey, cool people. People I can have stimulating discussions with. People who will engage in fun, creative stuff, people who will challenge you to think, professors who will give you feedback and validate when you're doing well. I mean, Morris hired me temporarily, right?

I was doing work. I was painting houses and doing house cleaning. I was doing whatever I could to get money to go to school. But being paid to do taxes was in alignment with some of my business goals, some of my career goals and that he saw, "Hey, you're good at this."

His class was actually tax research and tax defense. It was tax law, okay? And so it wasn't fill out the forms kind of thing. It was the way I was thinking as I approached defending people against the IRS. I laughingly said, I'd become a tax lawyer, except I would intend to win, and then I'd have to live offshore because the IRS would hate me.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: But it was that opportunity to get beyond the box, that opportunity to think broadly, that opportunity to explore all this richness for somebody who's intellectually curious kind of thing to take a look at all of this. The Honors College did that, East Campus did that. My

undergraduate classes did that, the Honors College classes did that. There was... Dale Porter was a professor in the Honors College, and he taught a class was called methods of inquiry. And it was a whole semester on how to write questions that could be answered. Yeah, it was fascinating. Absolutely fascinating, and then the second semester was a two semester course. The second semester was on finding the resources. Not just going to the library, but community resources, business resources, people resources. Finding the resources that you would then interview to answer the questions. Not answer the questions, okay? Write questions that could be answered, that could be researched, and then find resources that would allow you to answer them.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: Okay, and I was doing one on, my questions were centered around geological ridges like oil and gas and uranium and gold and all the rest of that and their impact on third world nation's, economic impact.

Like, if you're a poor country, but you have these geological resources and then the big companies come in and strip mine and your people are put to work, what happens? Those were my round what my questions were related. What I most liked about Western was that it wasn't too big, that you got lost, but it wasn't so small, but what you didn't have a plethora of opportunities if you wanted to go that direction, which I did.

Cassie: Yeah. So you were only on East Campus for about a year and a half, it sounds like, right?

Kathy: Yes.

Cassie: At most, so in that short time, what do you remember about East Campus?

Kathy: The buildings were fabulous and falling apart. I remember pigeons flying around in the canyon. Pigeons flying around in one of the classrooms. I remember the long hike from the regular campus up the hill, kind of thing. I was in great shape.

Cassie: All those steps.

Kathy: Hiking up the hill.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: They said that the buildings were old style, whatever architecture they were, but they were beautiful buildings, but they were badly in need of repair and replacement and all the rest of that.

So it was an intellectually rich experience in a kind of an environment that was like, wow, these professors and this student body needs better buildings than this.

Cassie: Right, yeah.

Kathy: Plus, you had to walk all the way down to the computer center to get any computers down because every was done in the mainframe. There was nothing up there that you could work with.

Cassie: So, you were mainly in East Hall, it sounds like?

Kathy: Let's see. There was East Hall, North Hall. Wasn't there a West Hall?

Cassie: Yeah, there was a West, yeah.

Kathy: Yeah, there was, East, North, and West are the three of them that I remember.

Cassie: Okay.

Kathy: So, for whatever reasons, East Hall was the majority. But I have, like I said, come back to North and West also as, and there was also up on that hill, the international student dorm, which I lived in for a while.

Cassie: Right. Yes. I've heard about that.

Kathy: So that was fun too, to live with the international students cuz we had a collective kitchen.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: So you go down to the kitchen and cook your meals, and everybody would be fixing. So, I first ran into Saffron. I first got introduced to Indian food. I thought it was wonderful. Other people sort of smelled funny, and I'm like, yeah, isn't it cool? (Both laugh) I'm a weirdo, what can I say? At the beginning.

Cassie: And it fit with international business too! It fit with that.

Kathy: Yes, it served me really well in international business. I know that at one point when I was doing international audit, they would always take you out for local specialty. God help you. Local specialty may not be something that you consider to be food in your company.

So my attitude was, we're all human beings. We have the same digestive tract. If they can eat it, I can eat it. So there were things whereby it's kinda like, at one point in Mexico, I got served a specialty of Monterrey, Mexico, which was cava de cabra, which is cooked goat head.

And the eyes were considered the specialty. And so as the guest, I got both the eyes. And I'm looking at them and they're looking at me, and I'm thinking, what do I do? I'm pretty sure I could eat one, but I'm not sure I could eat two. Fast thinking, I said basically, "As the guest, I cannot possibly accept the fullness of this honor without honoring my host. And so I will

share one of these with my host." Tough up, you know, he's happy camper. I'm honoring him with the delicacy of one of the eyes, and then that way I only have to eat one.

Cassie: Win win!

Kathy: Exactly. It was great. I mean, I would not choose to have eyes as a regular form of whatever, and I wasn't ready to eat two of them, and it was a good thing to honor him. I mean, it was a win win kind of solution. But I think that experience in the International Hall was plus just my general curiosity. Right? I want to know stuff. I'll try stuff. Still do. That will be that stood me in good stead when I was in those kinds of positions.

Cassie: And so you were only there for a short amount of time, so obviously you were pretty busy with classes and work, paying for it yourself, but if you did get any free time, what did you do?

Kathy: Let's see. Well, the Honors College would from time to time, they did a canoeing weekend and they would do other things and I would go with the honors college on things. I was there during one of the I'm sure there have been blizzards since, but there was a huge blizzard that winter, and we were all snowed into the dorms.

And some of the interesting people were climbing up on the roof of the dorms and jumping off into the snow banks, which is, I think, at a six story dorm, that's not the brightest thing to do, but nonetheless. We had a multidorm snowball war. There were musical kinds of things.

I ushered at... What's the name of the big performance theater there?

Cassie: Miller Auditorium?

Kathy: Thank you. Miller Auditorium. I ushered at Miller auditorium so I could see programs. Nice way to be able to participate in something without having to pay for it. Poor college student kind of thing.

So I did ushering. I hung out with some other people and hung out with international students and learned to cook some interesting kinds of things in the international dorm that year. It was, you know, and, you know, there wasn't a lot of free time to do other things with.

So, I was I was mostly trying to learn things socially, trying to cooking and and interactions and, you know, the collective kinds of stuff and sitting down and talking to people about what their interests were, what they did or just hanging out about talking about the issues of the day kind of thing or whatever.

Cassie: Okay, and I just have a few questions left. But something that I did want to ask is how do you feel about WMU now looking back on your time versus when you were going there?

Kathy: I went on to get a doctorate, not at WMU, but elsewhere. And I think that my experiences at WMU stood me in excellent stead for getting through the doctoral program,

not only doing all the coursework, but actually being stubborn enough to get all the way through the dissertation, because that takes an extra level of OMG.

I look back at it very fondly. The Dave Roselle. Okay. He was a hoot. Loved him as an accounting teacher. I remember writing papers and getting them published when I was there kind of thing in accounting newsletters or accounting not big journals kind of thing. But Dave and some of the other professors would sponsor to say, hey, take a look at what our students work are doing. I got into Beta Alpha Psi. I was the College of Businesses graduate student representative on the student board. I don't remember if was elected or appointed, but I I got to do it. And I also in I taught undergraduate accounting.

Cassie: Wow.

Kathy: So, as a grad student teacher, I was teaching the introductory level accounting for business majors. Not bookkeeping, but accounting for business majors. And the breadth, the scope, the depth of the experiences that I had at WMU from the publishing and the hiring for the tech stuff and the teaching other students as a grad student kind of thing and all the things that went with it.

It just laid such a tremendous foundation for my life that I will always be very grateful.

Cassie: Is there anything that, we've talked a lot about what Western did for you and what you really loved about it, was there anything that you didn't like about going to Western?

Kathy: I really wish people wouldn't dump their goldfish in the pond.

Cassie: They did that?!

Kathy: Yeah, they did do that, yeah.

Cassie: The ponds by the valleys or?

Kathy: Yeah, out by the valleys, the goldfish would grow to the size of the pond.

The goldfish stay small in a small bowl, but they're carp if you put them in a big pond, they grow to be big fish. And I always felt that was just kind of not cool. I remember a math professor that was not the usual caliber. Everybody was failing, including me, which it was kinda like, this is bizarre.

And so he had these awful office hours at, like, 06:00 AM in the morning cuz he was Polish, he really didn't want to talk to anybody. And so I showed up at six o'clock to say, "I'm not getting it, I need help." And his answer was, "I can't help you any more than I do in class."

And so when the office for dropping classes opened up that morning, I walked over and dropped this class. I went, this is a complete waste of my time. I found out later the only person who passed the class was a Chinese woman who had taken the class previously at another university and already knew the material, and she only passed with a C.

So it was every now and then you run into, what for me at that point in time, was the one offs, the one bad professor, or the one bad experience, or the one pain in the ass person, right? That you had to deal with kind of thing. But for me, they were not the norm, and so they don't really stand out.

I mean, I had to think about it when you asked the question, because the pigeons were not exciting, and wearing my coat in class was not exciting. Not wanting to sit near the windows because the breeze is coming in, in the wintertime was not exciting. But there were so many other ways in which it was a truly exceptional experience that the bad stuff doesn't really stick out.

Cassie: Yes, the great far outweighs any bad experience?

Kathy: Yeah.

Cassie: Well, I don't have any more questions. Just wanted to ask if you have any other memories or any last thoughts before while we wrap up that you wanted to share, any topics we didn't touch on?

Kathy: I'm obviously not going to class there now, I don't know what it's like now, okay? But I will say that at that time, what they provided was exactly what I needed, and for that I will always be very grateful.

Cassie: That's good, yeah. Well, thank you so much for agreeing to talk to me today, and sitting down and waiting patiently for me, I really appreciate it. (Both chuckle) I didn't get a chance to look too much at your consent form, I did see that you sent it over, but if you were interested in having your photo accompany your story, just let me know. You can send that over to me. It can be a recent photo or if you have a photo from the time you were at Western that you wanted to use, we can do that, too.

Or a photo from any time, really, any photo that you'd like to accompany, you can just email it over to me. But otherwise, I will update you with a link to the project website when it's done.

Kathy: Cool.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: And just a quick question, what's the goal of the project?

Cassie: What was the goal? The goal, I think, is to create a collection of personal stories that have a connection to East Campus or to WMU, while we start to lose more and more buildings on East Campus, more and more of those artifacts that aren't there anymore.

Kathy: Okay.

Cassie: I think the personal stories create or add something that a lot of the written records and just pictures of the old buildings can't. So some of the stories of people that lived in

these buildings, and had some of the most impactful experiences of their lives in this area and at this school.

So really, capturing that, I think, is the goal of this project, and making it into a website that people can go visit, and then also that future researchers can go and look at as well.

Kathy: Well, then I had two more things, one of which is that on those buildings, people would congregate in those big open hallways and talk.

They'd sit on the steps when the weather was nice and talk. They made use of the architecture to group in a way that, I don't know, it was kind of like these big open spaces encouraged big open kinds of interactions, which was kind of cool, and I remember those.

I also remember not wanting to sit on the steps because it didn't matter how warm a day it was, those things are cold, cuz stone steps are cold.

And the other thing was some of the international students would jump the fence into the, there used to be, I don't know that there still is, but it was a facility for the mentally, not so with it.

Cassie: Yes, the Kalamazoo State Hospital.

Kathy: Yes, exactly, used to be across the street from the international place.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: No, it was pretty much across the street, and it was fenced, right? To keep the people in, kinda thing. They'd go there was where in the back there was a big lawn, and the international students would jump the fence and play soccer in the lawn. (Both laugh)

Cassie: Wow.

Kathy: Yes, and then they get chased out because they're not supposed to be there. But it didn't stop. I wasn't doing it, I was like, first of all, I'm not jumping no fence. Second of all, I really don't want to run into that particular kind of problem. Yeah, not good.

Cassie: Yeah.

Kathy: Yep, so.

Cassie: Okay, well, thank you so much again for talking to me today. And if you have any questions or anything else you wanted to add, feel free to email me anytime.

Kathy: Okay, cool. And I'll look for a picture. I think most of my pictures are pre-pandemic, because I've been doing much since then. And pre-pandemic I was using henna to make my hair red, so you might get a picture of me with red hair.

Cassie: Okay.

Kathy: But obviously this is more normal. (Both laugh)

Cassie: Natural.

Kathy: Yeah, I figured as much, you have the coloring for it natural.

Cassie: Sure, you're natural right now, too, we're both natural.

Kathy: Yeah.

Cassie: Well, thank you so much, it was so nice meeting you, and have a great weekend.

Kathy: Thank you, you too.

Cassie: Thanks, bye.

Kathy: Bye bye.