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Iola Dunsmore and WMU in the 1940s

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WMU Alum Iola Dunsmore

Monday, Jan. 23 at 3:30 pm

Virtual Meeting via Phone Call

Cassie: See if we can include you in our project. Does that sound good?

Iola: That sounds fine. Just as I was jotting some things down, I realized that probably my memories are not gonna be of any use to you. But I'll tell you what I had.

Cassie: That's all right. Yes, of course. I'd love to hear it.

Iola: Okay. Could I just read to you what wrote down about my starting at Western and everything?

Cassie: Sure, yes, please. Go ahead.

Iola: Okay, I may have a little trouble because I have macular degeneration and I have to kind of live with that. It kind of makes it difficult to read.

Cassie: That's all right. Take your time then.

Iola: Okay, in 1946, I left my home in Coldwater, Michigan, and rode with a friend to Kalamazoo. She would live next door to me. I moved into a room upstairs at 627 Locust Street.

I would be sharing a room with one of seven other girls. Her name was Carolyn. It was a few blocks to campus, and we soon learned that it was a tiring climb up the hill to our classrooms. We quickly discovered the trolley and found that it would carry us either up or down the hill.

It was later taken down. I'm not sure why that was. At the top of the hill were several buildings where our classes were held. At one end was the library. I think it was called Waldo, but I'm not certain. I believe, I would spend many hours there. Another one was the administration building.

I remember another building quite vividly, but I can't recall its name. We had many classes there. There was also a school for children study for elementary students maybe at the end of the administration building. Here, students who were near graduation could do their practice teaching. That's as far as I had gotten.

Cassie: Okay, and the building that you're talking about that you had classes in, was it maybe called East Hall?

Iola: It probably was. That sounds kind of familiar.

Cassie: Yes, was it a big building with pillars?

Iola: I think so, yes.

Cassie: Okay, yeah. That is actually still there too. Yes, except now it is used by the Alumni Association of WMU.

Iola: I see.

Cassie: So can I ask, what did you go to WMU to study for?

Iola: I entered studying for I was going to be a high school math teacher. But I got bogged down a little bit with some of the math classes so I switched and I ended up taking a three-year course that was new. It was for airline stewardesses. And so I did some aviation program. I learned to fly and things like that. And I graduated from that program not with a degree, but with a certificate after three years.

And soon after that I got married. But I started doing substitute teaching because I had enough hours to do that. And then I got interested in going back into education for good. So when my children, I have four children, were in school, I started back and got my degree and got a job as a fifth grade teacher.

Cassie: Okay. And I think that your son David mentioned that your husband had gone to WMU too. Did you meet him there?

Iola: Yes, I did, mm-hm. I worked part time because my family really didn't have much money and they couldn't afford to support my education. So I did work all my time through college and I worked at a place called Barkers, which was a little eating place on one side. And on the other side, were like a variety shop. You know?

Cassie: Mm-hm.

Iola: And a lot of the students came in there to eat, and he was one of them. And so we became acquainted and started going together. And finally, right after both of our graduations, we got married.

Cassie: Wow, wow, and you mentioned, too, that you moved into a house with, I think you said it was, like, five or six other girls. Is that right?

Iola: Seven other girls.

Cassie: Seven other girls. Do you remember any of your friends at the time or any of those girls?

Iola: I really did not keep in touch with too many of them. I know that some of them are not living anymore, so I can't help you there, really.

Cassie: That's all right. No worries. And you mentioned that hill, too. Do you remember some of your first memories stepping onto campus?

Iola: Well, he lived in Vandercook Hall, and I remember them having a dance and we going to that one time. He was in chemistry, and when he graduated, he got a job at it had a different name that he became Eaton Manufacturing.

Cassie: Okay.

Iola: And he was a chemist there. He passed away in '87.

Cassie: Wow. So it's been a while.

Iola: Yeah, it's been a while. I've been a good companion with another person. And he just passed away at 97 in August. And I'm still kinda down about that.

Cassie: I'm sorry to hear that. But 97 is quite an accomplishment, too.

Iola: Yes, we kept telling each other, we can't be angry about going at this age. We've had more years than most people have.

Cassie: Right, yeah. So I just wanted to ask one last question. If you remember anything that impacted you the most during your time at WMU or any memory that really sticks out to you?

Iola: Golly. I wish I had some time to think about that.

Cassie: That's all right. If you need a few minutes right now, take your time.

Iola: Okay.

Cassie: Or if you think of anything and you want to call me back and leave a voicemail or, if I'm available, I can record that for you too.

Iola: Okay, why don't you right now, before we forget, you give me your phone number?

Cassie: Okay, yeah. Just let me know when you're ready for that.

Iola: All right. I'll think about that, because-

Cassie: That's all right, take your time.

Iola: Good ol' memories kind of come and go, and you need a little time to go through them.

Cassie: Right, no worries. Well, once you think of something, you can give me a call back. And you can leave a voicemail, or if I'm available, I'll pick up and I'll talk to you then.

Iola: Okay.

Cassie: All right, well, thank you so much for talking to me today and sharing some of these memories with me. I really appreciate it.

Iola: Okay, bye bye.

Cassie: Bye.