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Daniel DeRyke and a Continuous Connection to WMU

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WMU Alum Daniel DeRyke

Friday, Feb. 10 at 3:00 pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Cassie: Okay, we are recording, so go ahead and introduce yourself, and then we'll talk about your connection to WMU whenever you're ready.

Dan: Okay. I'm Daniel DeRyke. People call me Dan. I started at WMU in the business school when I was a senior in high school, actually. I went to Western, got my Bachelor's of Business Administration, majored in accounting.

And when I was in high school, I took the one accounting class that was offered, I went to high school locally in Kalamazoo, and I did very well. The instructor at, the teacher at my high school suggested that I look into going to because I wanted to take more classes, and he suggested I look into going to Western.

And so actually, my first semester on East Campus was as a senior in high school, which was pretty cool. It was something that I kept pretty much a secret from everybody that I was in class with. I didn't want people knowing that I was still in high school.

Cassie: Yeah.

Dan: But, and I only took one semester, I took it in the fall and enjoyed it tremendously but I knew that my last semester as a high school senior was not something I was going to want to be off of the high school campus very much, wanted to kind of enjoy that.

So I only took my one first class, Accounting 210, while I was still a senior in high school driving back and forth. That was in the fall of 1974, graduated high school in '75, started as a freshman in the fall of '75 and spent... I'm a student that did a little of everything in terms of resident situation.

I lived at home as a freshman and commuted. I lived in French Hall as a sophomore. I moved into apartments with three buddies my junior year and then got married right before my senior year. So I lived with my new wife my senior year and commuted onto campus.

So did all of those things. Because I was a commuting student, I spent a lot of time during quite a few of those years. I spent a lot of time driving to East Campus, parking down in what everybody called the student ghetto and walking up the hill behind East Hall and basically spending the majority of my day, whatever days, usually it was probably three full days a week. I would spend pretty much a lot of it right on East Campus. I want to say that the cafeteria that I used to hang out in was at Walwood Union.

Cassie: Yeah, that's correct, yeah.

Dan: Spent a lot of time at Walwood Union. There wasn't a lot of availability of food like there is now on campus, especially on the main campus, cuz the buildings at East Hall and West Hall and North Hall were pretty old buildings, they didn't have vending machines and things.

So a lot of us just hung out over Walwood Union between classes, but yeah, that really just really loved the setting of East Campus and did my fair share of complaining about the heating and cooling systems in the buildings. You got to the point where you knew that if you were in the winter semester, you wanted to sit next to a heater, if you weren't in the winter semester, you didn't want to sit next to a heater.

But, yeah, like I said, primarily because I was a commuter for what really amounted to three of my four years on campus, I picked, obviously, French Hall to live in because that was the closest dormitory to East Campus, I could just walk right straight up the hill. And I had classes over on main campus, but for my other general studies and some of the electives classes that I took, but certainly spent a tremendous amount of time over on East Campus, and then, so got very familiar with the parking challenges over there and walking up the hill.

Cassie: Yeah, so it sounds like you spent a fair amount of time in a lot of the buildings on East Campus, including East Hall, Walwood Hall, you talked about the radiators, but I'm wondering, do you remember anything else about any of the buildings at that time?

Dan: Well, I learned something well after I graduated that, something that I didn't know while we were on campus, but the cupula apparently was something or cupula was something that some students used to get into and scribble their name on the wall of the cupula.

Cassie: Yeah.

Dan: I don't know if you knew that.

Cassie: I did, I've seen them, actually before, yeah.

Dan: Did you? Okay. Cuz the company that I'm president and part owner of, we're a construction company, and when we got the contract to do part of the work when they renovated and turned the East Hall into the Alumni Center.

Cassie: Wow.

Dan: That was how I found out about the guys on the construction site, told me that they wanted to know if my name was etched in any, was my name one of the names that were etched in the walls or written on the stairway in the cupula?

And I said, "Gee, I didn't even know you could get in the cupula when I was there." But like I said, when I saw the building renovated, my memories of the marble steps leading upstairs and the big curves in the steps from being worn down by all the kids, those are things I remember.

The gymnasium at the other end of East Hall, again, was something that you knew was there, but I don't know that it was really, while I was there, it really wasn't in use much, but hung out a little bit in the lobby of North Hall when I was attending some classes over there, a lot of it was business law classes.

So the fireplace, certainly when I heard that they were salvaging the fireplace and moving it over to East Hall, I thought that's probably pretty appropriate because that was kind of a landmark, something that most students remember from their time there. But, yeah, like I said, the casual time was my free time was spent a lot of time, if it was nice outside, you found a spot on the steps outdoors, either on the front or back of East Hall or you sat on the grass.

I sometimes thought that when I was on East Campus in the fall on a nice sunny day, I said, this must be like it is, must be like what it's like to go to Harvard because it struck me as that very old campus feeling, but just a really, really enjoyable, I think students are missing out by not having classes over on East Campus.

I realized that the age of the buildings makes it very difficult to. And again, we did a lot of complaining about the condition of the buildings and especially the heating systems. But deep down, I think most of us as students over there really, really enjoyed having some of, kind of we felt a little bit special by being over on East Campus versus being just part of Main Campus.

Cassie: Right, yeah. And moving away from the buildings and the feel of campus more towards the people there, do you remember any of your professors or faculty during your undergrad?

Dan: I would probably remember almost all of them.

Cassie: Really?

Dan: I was with Beta Alpha Psi, which is the accounting fraternity. And so Dr. Welkie was our advisor and he taught auditing class, was one of the auditing teachers. I had Dr. Newbig, I had Dr. Shepherd, I had Dr. Roselle, Dr. Everett, Dr. Hines, which at the time, he was just an assistant professor. Because this was more years ago than I care to even tally up. (Both laugh).

I really enjoyed some of my finance classes, I'm now I'm drawing a blank. He was the hockey coach at one time, but he was the finance professor, Edwards, Dr. Edwards. I really enjoyed, in fact, actually started making an effort to become a finance minor, I don't think I quite made it, I think I fell one class short of having a finance minor. But it was really because of his instruction that really, really enjoyed the class that I had with him.

So, I remember quite a few of them. I still get back to campus a little bit. And when I first graduated from Western, I went to work in a CPA firm and I actually did on-campus

recruiting, for my first three-four years out of college, I would go back onto Western campus and do interviewing of some of the students.

So, no, I have very, very fond memories of the professors that I had there.

Cassie: And of all of those professors that you remember in the faculty, who do you think had the biggest impact on you?

Dan: Probably Dr. Welkie, because it was funny I never had Dr. Welkie in class, but because he was our advisor for Beta Alpha Psi.

Cassie: Right.

Dan: And we were, at the time, the year I was president of Beta Alpha Psi, the year before that was the first year we'd ever achieved superior chapter status, which is something that the Beta Alpha Psi Organization measures all the chapters by. And so there was a lot of pressure on our group of officers to repeat, and we spent quite a bit of time.

Probably my favorite in-class professor was Dr. Newbig, I really, really enjoyed him. I also loved Dr. Newell, he was my auditing professor. As a candidate for the CPA certificate, at the time we were there, the group that I was with, the CPA exam and preparation for the CPA exam, Western was just outstanding at preparing you for the exam.

And Newbig and Newell and Welkie and all the others, there was just something that was for the core group of students that were accounting majors, they were just so, so helpful. And did a phenomenal job preparing us to sit for an exam that very few people passed on the first try, and a lot of Western students were able to pass on the first try, so.

Cassie: So, aside from the fraternity then and the classes that you took, the full-on classes, how else did you spend your time around WMU in the Kalamazoo area?

Dan: Well, I spent obviously a lot more time on campus my sophomore year because I was living in the dorm.

And actually, I was one of the few students that they kind of dragged me kicking and screaming from the dorm because I actually loved living in the dorm. My three buddies that I ended up living in an apartment with had already lived two years in the dorms, and they didn't want a third year.

So, when I lived in the dorm, I probably went to a lot more athletic events. I've been a big follower of the basketball team for many, many years. In fact, when I was a freshman, I believe we had the phenomenal year where we went 25 and 3 and we went to the NCAA Tournament.

It's just a super exciting period of time. Once I got off campus, I probably spent less and less time going to some of those activities. I also worked a lot. I juggled multiple part-time jobs, and one of my part-time jobs was being a banquet waiter at the student center.

So whenever there was a big banquet, I worked as a banquet waiter and did that for a couple of years.

Cassie: Wow.

Dan: Did that quite a bit of my sophomore year and my junior year, that's once I got, I did a little bit of it, but not as much as I had been doing.

So, yeah, I would have to say I probably didn't have a lot of social time because I juggled at least two part time jobs. I was working at Wing Stadium, which at the time was relatively new. I was balancing that job along with my job at the student center and studying for classes and then, so.

Cassie: Right, do you remember any of the events that you waited at or worked at the student center?

Dan: No, I mean, we did quite a few very large banquets at the old student center, because I understand now they finally announced that they're gonna open up the new student center.

Cassie: Yeah, it's coming soon, yeah, right. It's been a long time coming, yeah.

Dan: Going to be about a year late.

Cassie: Right.

Dan: We did a lot of 200, 300 person banquets, and our job was basically just to serve and to clear. And it was a very fun job because, again, I was working with all people, some nights we had, there were probably 20 of us working as waiters and waitresses, and it was all college kids.

So, then afterwards when you're doing the cleanup and everything, we had good bosses, they didn't let us get too carried away, but it was one of my favorite jobs. I still remember my couple of the bosses that I had that were full-time employees of the university that had the, maybe sometimes unenviable job of trying to manage 20 college kids.

Cassie: Yeah, so I have a few more questions for you, and they're getting into a bit tougher, more challenging questions, so answer them however best that you'd like to the best of your ability. But reflecting back on your time as an undergrad at WMU, how would you summarize your experience?

Dan: I had a phenomenal experience. I ended up with I was only able to talk two of my three sons into going to Western. My oldest son went to-

Cassie: That's still pretty good.

Dan: One son went to University of Michigan. But my other two sons went to Western. There was only one rule in our family, I said I will pay for you to go to college anywhere except Central. If you go to Central, you're on your own. (Both laugh)

No, I had a phenomenal experience, and I've stayed very active. I've been on an alumni golf outing committee up here in the Grand Rapids area, I've been involved in that for probably going on 20 years. And I just have a real connection to the university, and a lot of it was... I don't know how much different it is today than it was, I hate to say this, 40 years ago, cuz it's been that long. But it was a very special, I was one of the first people in my family go to college. And I hate to even say how much the tuition... I think tuition was \$22 a credit hour.

Cassie: Wow.

Dan: And I lived at home because I couldn't afford to live on campus and pay tuition too. Cuz I paid my own, my mom couldn't afford to put me through school. And so it meant a lot to me, the education meant a lot, but it was a phenomenal time.

Yeah, college is a great experience, but at Western it was very, very special to me.

Cassie: And what do you think impacted you the most during your time at WMU, whether it be a person, or a place, something that happened?

Dan: I think the quality of the education at the business school specifically. I'm not a super competitive person, but I like being challenged. And the professors were very, very, they pushed us I think just in a very, very good way they pushed us to excel. And there were some classes I didn't enjoy, but I look back on it and of all my business classes I only had one professor in four years that I didn't like.

All the other professors I really felt a good connection to them, they cared. Like I said, I was going to a large university, but I didn't feel like I was going to a large university by being on East Campus and that was probably the really beneficial part to me.

Cuz I probably if I had wanted, if I could have afforded it I am sure I could have got admitted to, like, a U of M or something, but I'm glad I didn't. I'm glad I went to Western, got a tremendous education, made a lot of connections that I still have, maintained those connections with people that I didn't know them before I started going to school there, really haven't had a lot of connection with them in a work setting, but I still stay in touch with them.

And so I think the quality of the education and the closeness of the faculty with the students was what made it really, really special.

Cassie: And how do you feel about WMU now versus when you were a student there, how has your perspective changed on that?

Dan: There's been up and down periods. I live in Grand Rapids now, and there was a period of time where I was frustrated that Grand Valley was outshining Western, certainly in the Kent County area, and I think that's not quite nearly as overpowering as it used to be. I think Grand Valley with a lot of help from some big financial supporters really exploded in growth and popularity there for 10 or 15 years, but I think it's beginning to get a better grasp on things.

So I have been in touch with Dean Deshpande over at the Haworth College of Business and been down there recently, taken a tour, my wife and I have done some gifting to the university. And I feel very good about the university where it's at right now. I know it's a tough, tough market, it's tough with the costs the way they've escalated in the last 10-15 years.

So I still feel very, very good about it, like I said I have two kids that graduated. Well, I have two sons and two daughter-in-laws, cuz both of my sons met their future wives at Western.

Cassie: Wow.

Dan: And so I got four of them are graduates of Western. And it was very enjoyable for me to go back and watch both of them graduate. But yeah, my wife is a graduate of Kendall College up here in Grand Rapids. Cuz she actually kinda helped put me through my senior year at Western, and then once I graduated and got started working then she went back.

That was her first time going back to school, and she went back and got an associate's degree in design once we moved up to Grand Rapids. So her loyalties, I dragged her to all the basketball, I have season tickets to basketball, and season tickets to hockey, she tags along with me.

And so yeah, I think my connection is pretty strong and will probably stay strong for a long, long time.

Cassie: Wow, yeah, and those are good sports to have tickets for, basketball and hockey. Especially hockey right now, I think.

Dan: Yeah, hockey is fantastic. Basketball teams, that's challenging, I've had season tickets often for the last 20 years, and we've had a lot of good years, and we're struggling.

Last few years we've been struggling, but it's still fun to watch college basketball.

Cassie: Yeah, right. Then did you ever go to any football games as well?

Dan: I generally get to about one, maybe two football games a year. When we were students there was a tremendous, I mean, this again, going back 40 years, there was a lot of hate towards the football team.

And it was that one year that I stayed in the dorm, I probably went to three or four football games cuz it was easy to go to and everybody was close, and you could go, and if you didn't like it you just left the game. But to drive down from Grand Rapids down to the football game.

I have a lot of friends that are die-hard tailgaters that go to every game. I got two guys I know that they travel, they follow the team around and go to some away games. I've just never been as big a football fan as I have been basketball. And I'm a huge hockey fan, I'm a huge Red Wings...

Well I really learned cuz I worked at K-Wings Stadium and I worked for the team, developed a real love for hockey, which blossomed into a devotion. My kids are devoted Red Wings fans, and now with the Broncos doing so well, it's great. Great sport to watch for them.

Cassie: Right, I just had one more question I wanted to ask. Do you have any last memories or stories you wanted to share or were there any topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to conclude with?

Dan: I can't think of any topics. Like I said, I'm very pleased that the university did something to which I guess, they really, a couple of buildings... it was probably impossible to knock them down because they were determined to be historic buildings over on East Campus. But, I like what they've done with making it a place to go for certain events for alumni.

No, I can't really think of any stories, like I said, I think just the overall setting, the atmosphere of East Campus, like I said before, it's something that the students over on Main Campus just they're missing out a bit by not having that.

Now in the wintertime, I would say nobody's missing out on the wintertime. The wintertime was not that much fun, but fall and spring were just really, I have a lot of great memories of being over there with friends and sometimes just finding someplace to go get something to eat quick and quick study before my next class.

Like I said, the atmosphere, which I think that the faculty had a lot to do with having it be as close knit of the group as it was. And like I said, I think my youngest son, who ended up with also being an accounting major, just has I don't think he had the same experience I did.

A different kinda experience, but I think he missed out by not having the time in a smaller setting.

Cassie: Right, yeah. Well, thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today and sharing some of these stories and memories that you had, I really appreciate it.

Dan: Okay, no problem, glad to help.

Cassie: Yeah, and we're expecting that the website and the project will be completed the soon. So when your story is up, that will be with everybody else's story, so I'll send you the link so that you can go read some of those.

Dan: Okay.

Cassie: All right.

Dan: It asked for a picture, I don't know if you need me to send a picture to you or not, but, you just let me.

Cassie: Yeah, if you have any photos that you'd like to accompany your story, please go ahead and send them over.

You have my email and you have my phone number as well, so you can text them over or email them over, whatever works best. Some people have been using more recent photos, and some have sent recent ones and photos from their time at Western and things like that.

So whatever you'd like to include with your story is great.

Dan: All right, I'll give that some thought and maybe send you something.

Cassie: Okay, great. All right, well, if anything comes up in the meantime, feel free to reach out, but otherwise have a great weekend.

Dan: Okay, you too, thanks, Cassie.

Cassie: Thank you, bye.

Dan: Bye.