



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

East Campus Oral Histories

University Libraries

2-2-2023

Paul Buckman: Campus School Kid Returns as WMU Student

University Libraries
University Libraries

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/east_campus_oral_histories



Part of the Oral History Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation

University Libraries, "Paul Buckman: Campus School Kid Returns as WMU Student" (2023). *East Campus Oral Histories*. 40.

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/east_campus_oral_histories/40

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Campus Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Campus School and WMU Alum Paul Buckman

Thursday, Feb. 2 at 4:00 pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Cassie: All right, so we are recording now, so go ahead and introduce yourself whenever you're ready.

Paul: My name is Paul Buckman, and I am originally from Kalamazoo, Michigan. So, I grew up there and am from a large family there and some of us attended University High in Western Michigan, some of us didn't. And I went to University High through 6th grade and that's when they closed.

Cassie: Okay.

Paul: And then I ended up going back also to Western Michigan. That's where I did my undergrad and my graduate work. And I started there, I think, in the early 70s, maybe '73 or something like that. I went part-time at night, lived in married housing,

Cassie: Oh, okay.

Paul: At Western, my wife and I both went to school at night. I got my bachelor's in accounting there in 1979. And then I continued night school for graduate school up on East Campus and got my master's of business administration in 1982.

Cassie: Okay, and so you went to the campus school then for was it kindergarten and then 6th grade is when you left?

Paul: Yes, and two of my brothers went to University High. It closed before I got that far. When I was in 6th grade, basically, it closed.

Cassie: Yeah, how did you feel about having to move out then? How did you feel about it?

Paul: Yeah, cuz I loved it, it was a great school.

Cassie: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah, really good, and my wife went to Western Michigan as well.

Cassie: Okay, so what are some of your earliest memories of East Campus then? I know that's going back to when you were younger, when you were at campus school, but what do you remember about the buildings that you were in and the teachers that you had?

Paul: To this day, I remember my favorite teacher that I ever had was my first-grade teacher at Campus School or University High, whatever her name was Mrs. Bosma.

And she was just about the nicest person I think ever created, and she was really great. So, I have really great memories of that. One of the memories I have, which is kind of funny, because it really dawned on me when I was in graduate school, but I had one of my graduate school classes in the same room where I went to kindergarten.

And when I was in kindergarten, we used to take naps in that room. And it was so funny to me sitting there 20 years later or whatever it was, and sitting there taking graduate classes in the very same classroom.

In fact, even at the time, they even had chalkboards that were the ones that were there when I was in elementary school that were kind of low for kids.

So, they still had those this was before they did any real renovation, I think. Anyway, so I have those memories. There used to be a playground, and it was a black-top playground out just adjacent to the north campus built to North Hall. And we used to come down, we had a big rotunda in North Hall, and we'd come down the stairs cuz I think first, second, and third grade were on the lower level, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade were on the upper level of the rotunda.

And we'd come down and go out in the playground every day and play on the blacktop. And the other thing I remember is when we'd have when people were running for class president or class, we used to have these rallies in the rotunda, and all the people running for a position would put big posters up in the top level of the rotunda around the circle, and they were like big banners.

And then we'd have like, a school assembly down on the bottom floor, and that's where we would do the announcement, who the winners were, and all that kind of stuff.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: And I remember we had a library that was down on the lower floor. I think it ended up moving over into the other part of North Hall, down where the high school was eventually, and our gym class was down in the basement. We also had a cafeteria down in the basement.

And then another side story I remember is growing up is when I was a kid in those ages, every summer, we used to do a sports school up at UHigh, and it was run by Roy Walters and Dean Chance were the two teachers at UHigh that taught it.

And basically, it was kids from around town that would go up there for about three weeks or four weeks in the summer. And we'd play every kind of sport you could imagine. We had teams, we had competition, and we did a lot of it inside in North Hall, in the gymnasium when it was still there, and then we do a lot of it down on the field down when you go down that steep hill down to the bottom.

I forget the name of the street down there now, but there was a big field down there, and that's where we'd play baseball and football and all that kind of stuff. But sports school was like a real big deal for myself and two or three of my brothers.

We all went together every year, and it was really a great experience.

Cassie: And those were the brothers that were also in school with you?

Paul: Yeah, two of them, my oldest brother, he went to UHigh after elementary school, so he went there, I think, for junior high and high school.

Cassie: Okay.

Paul: And he graduated from there, it would have been sometime in the 60s, mid-60s maybe. And then he went on to college from there and then the next brother down from him also went to junior high and high school there. But I think his senior year is when it closed, and I think he ended up doing his senior year at the old Kalamazoo Central High School.

Cassie: Okay.

Paul: Which is down on Westnedge and kind of Vine Street.

Cassie: Right, so what brought you back to Western, then, after you graduated high school?

Paul: Say that again.

Cassie: What brought you back to Western then, after you graduated high school? What drew you towards the university?

Paul: When I graduated high school, I had some chances to go play basketball on scholarship at other places, but at the time, it wasn't a good time to leave my family, my mother needed some help, and so I decided to just stay local. And I went to Kalamazoo Valley Community College for maybe a year and played basketball there. And then I went into Western and kind of spent the rest of the time there.

Cassie: Okay.

Paul: So, I never really left and then I started my career in Kalamazoo after I graduated. Actually, I started while I was in school, which is why I went to night school.

And then when I graduated, I stayed in Kalamazoo for a few years and then my job transferred me to, I think it was Colorado at the time, and never really came back. Ever since then, I ended up moving all over the place and never really came back to live there. But I still might cuz I'm getting close to retiring and I might come back.

Cassie: Okay! So you were there for different times, obviously. You were in and around East Hall when you were in grade school and campus school, and then back again around east campus, it sounds like, for your undergrad, but also your graduate.

What do you remember about some of the buildings in those different time periods?

Paul: Well, I always thought the North Hall, or I guess it was East Hall, really. I always thought East Hall was just such a cool building cuz it was so old, and it was just a very cool building.

Even though it was kind of, back then, in need of repair, it was still very cool, and I just loved the whole design of it. The gymnasium was old, but it had a running track around the top, and it was such a little cozy gymnasium. And I remember going to basketball games there when my older brother was in high school watching U High play.

And so I just have a lot of those memories. And I also remember there used to be a building adjacent to East Hall there that was across this blacktop playground I was telling you about called Walwood Hall, I think, or Walwood. And it used to be a union, it was called the Walwood Union.

And I remember going over there after school to meet my brother sometimes, and we'd get something to eat or a Coke or something, and then he'd give me a ride home from school. And so I remember hanging out in Walwood Union. And one of my best memories of Walwood Union was I was standing in line one day waiting to order something.

This was when I was in college, it was still there. And I looked next to me, and next to me in line was Luther Vandross, the singer. Have you ever heard of Luther Vandross?

Cassie: Uh-uh.

Paul: So he was a famous R&B singer. He's dead now, but he apparently went to Western for a year or two, I guess.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: At the time, I didn't know that because I didn't start following him till a little later, I think. No, I must have started following him before cuz I knew who he was. But it was just weird to me that he was next to me in line at the school, and it's just something I still remember.

Other than that, it was just a really great place to go to school as a kid, because in elementary school, we had so many teachers because they were training student teachers. So you always felt like you had a lot of teaching interaction. I'm not that smart, and I didn't go to any fancy schools or anything.

But my wife still tells me, she said, "You must have gotten a really good education at campus school, because" she said, "you never did any homework, you never went to class half the time." And she goes, "You seem to have learned a lot at some point in your life."

And she goes, "It must have been when you were in elementary school. They must have been really good teachers."

Cassie: Yeah.

Paul: And I think she's right, because, I mean, we were always doing experimental curriculums and stuff, math or science or whatever. It was always something that they were trying out to see if it was worth doing.

I look back and think I was really fortunate to go there and have access to all of that.

Cassie: Yeah, what was it like coming back to campus as a college student? Did campus look different from that height?

Paul: No, it really didn't. And I loved it because all the rooms, all the buildings, everything was very familiar to me, and it wasn't intimidating at all.

And so I actually really liked it, I really did, and I used to just kinda hang out up there. I do all my studying up there, and I really liked it. And then I came back after they did kinda the renovation, I came back to visit and see it, and it was kinda really fun to walk through all those rooms.

There's one room in East Hall they have set up where they have some things on display from the old high school and that.

Cassie: Yes, it's the Union Hall room, yeah.

Paul: Yeah, at least when I went through, there was a display where they've got a mannequin or whatever student looking at a yearbook.

And I looked at it and on the page of the yearbook was a picture of one of my brothers.

Cassie: Oh, really?!

Paul: It was so funny, yeah, it was just really a coincidence, and it caught my attention.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: Anyway, for me, it has really great memories. I loved the whole experience. I wish I could've gone to junior high and high school there as well. I just really liked it.

Cassie: And you mentioned two faculty that ran the sports in the summer. Do you remember any other teachers or faculty during your time as an undergrad or graduate student?

Paul: I do, I wanna try to remember his name. I had a professor in graduate school, and I think it was for economics or finance. It was finance maybe, and I wish I could remember. I'm drawing a blank all of a sudden, but he was just the greatest, really good teacher, great professor.

He kinda helped me, cuz that was at a time when I was really starting to try to get my act together, a little late, but I was trying to get my act together on bearing down and doing better work cuz it was graduate school, and I had him for undergrad too.

And when I came back, about 15 years later, I came back for one of these things where they invite you back as a former student to talk about your career, one of those leadership things. And it was so nice cuz I came back for that day, and they had a dinner for me the night before, and he came to the dinner, and it was really great to see him after all those years.

And then the next day he was, I think, the emcee of the program, so it was really cool.

Cassie: Yeah, that is really cool.

Paul: I just wish I could remember his name. I'd know it if I heard it, but he was really just a great guy. He's one of the few professors I kinda remember.

He had an impact on me, and it's not that others didn't. I had another really good professor of economics, and I remember the classroom I had it in was the one I was talking about that used to be my kindergarten class. I can't remember his name, but he was a really good teacher, and I really enjoyed the class a lot.

It's probably the class I maybe learned more than anything in college.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: I remember it was an economics class, it was good, yeah. I have good memories of Western. I mean, growing up, I always went to all the college football games. I used to go to Reed Fieldhouse for all the basketball games, it was just fantastic.

When I was growing up, I played basketball every day, and my brothers and I would always go down to Reed Fieldhouse and sneak in and play basketball with all the college kids every day, it was terrific.

Cassie: Yeah, and so when you were a graduate and undergrad as well, what did a typical day look like for you? Did you work while you were going to school, and what did you do with your free time around Kalamazoo?

Paul: I didn't have a lot of free time. What I did was I had a full-time job during the day, working, same business I'm in now, which is the medical device field.

Come home and I'd go to class at night and I usually had classes every night for 3 hours. And then usually on the weekends is when I would do most of my homework and studying. And my wife was on really the same program, so the free time we had there wasn't a lot.

And usually when I did have free time, I either had to use it doing homework or doing things like going to the grocery store, just living things.

Cassie: Yeah, right.

Paul: But through all of that, I always kept doing like I'd play basketball every day or I'd get some form of athletics in every day, but that's about it.

Cassie: So you went to a lot of the games growing up, but did you go when you were still doing undergrad and graduate work as well?

Paul: Yeah, I tried I always was a big Western Michigan, fan because I grew up there.

And yeah, I always tried to do that. In fact, I was lucky because when I was going there, I think this was probably early 70s Western had a really good basketball team back- it was like '73, maybe? And that was kind of fun because having them be kind of nationally recognized at that time.

Cassie: Yes, right.

Paul: Yeah.

Cassie: So I just have a few more questions for you and I wanted to ask during your time at Western and also campus school. If you want to do like a two-parter, what do you think impacted you the most during your time there? Whether it be a person, a place, or something that happened?

Paul: That's a good question, definitely the sports school experience impacted me. Because it was a chance to play a lot of different sports and learn how to play different sports. So it was just a good... for a young kid who likes athletics and stuff that was great.

And it was great I met so many people there, kids my own age that liked the sports. So that was one of the things I really liked. I would say, from a college standpoint, I don't have really anything to compare it to, but my undergrad, I wouldn't say I enjoyed that much it was kind of a grind.

I really enjoyed graduate school, though, because I felt like it was a little less mass production and more tailored to what I was trying to learn.

Cassie: Right.

Paul: And I had good professors in all my classes and I really loved going to school up on East campus versus over on the other side.

And all my classes were up there, so I really enjoyed grad school much more than undergrad, I would say that. And I enjoyed my elementary school a lot that was terrific.

Cassie: Yeah, and how do you feel about WMU now versus when you were a student there or a student at campus school?

Paul: I don't know if it has, but it seems like it's gotten a lot bigger, but I don't really know if it has or not. I never really kept track back then how big it was, but it feels bigger, and it feels like it's been upgraded quite a bit.

There's a lot of new buildings and there seems like there's a lot of new everything and a lot of renovation, so I would say now it seems a little different, it seemed a little smaller back

then. And the one thing I've noticed now, though, back when I was going there, it felt like the students were mostly on campus.

And you didn't hardly ever see students like downtown Kalamazoo and it feels like now you do. When I go back, there's a lot going on downtown Kalamazoo and a lot more bars and restaurants and places to see where you see students. When I was going there and when I was younger, it was all stuff out on Stadium Drive and out on near campus.

There wasn't so much downtown for students so I think that's a real positive cuz I think it's good for the city. And then, kind of coincidentally, one of the people I went to high school with ended up becoming the athletic director at Western.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: I think she just retired, Let me think, did she yeah, she just retired a year or two ago.

Cassie: I'm trying to remember her name, isn't it, Kathy or something?

Paul: Yeah, Kathy Beauregard.

Cassie: Kathy Beauregard, yep.

Paul: Yes, I went to high school with her and her husband.

Cassie: Wow.

Paul: So small world kind of thing.

Cassie: Yeah.

Paul: So that's kind of funny and then the other thing I still remember about Western that I always liked is my wife and I used to go to church up on campus at the student parish called St. Tom's. It's up near on the other side of the railroad tracks, it's up there by trying to remember what's up there? Now there's a couple of restaurants up there there used to be a Dairy Queen down there, but it's up near on the K College side.

And it's just a little tiny little student parish, but it was the nicest parish. And I remember my wife and I used to love going to church there.

Cassie: So we're near the end of our time so I wanted to ask, is there any last thoughts or any topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to talk about?

Any last memories you wanted to share?

Paul: No, I don't think so when I saw your note, I just thought it'd be nice to offer some memories. Because I feel like from the time I was little, I had a lot of interaction with Western and UHigh and the whole thing.

Cassie: Yeah, well, thank you so much for sitting with me today, virtually, and talking and sharing your memories with me, I really appreciate it.

Paul: Cassie, it's my pleasure and if I can do anything else to help you, let me know.

Cassie: Okay, yeah will do. I will email you that consent form over then. And then if you can just send that back to me whenever you get a chance, that'd be great.

Paul: You got it.

Cassie: Thank you, so much have a great rest of your day.

Paul: Okay, thank you, see you later.

Cassie: Bye.

Paul: Bye.