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## Jean Seman and Piano Lessons in East Hall

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WMU Alum Jean DeHollander Seman

Thursday, Feb. 9, 2023 at 4:30 PM

Virtual Meeting via FaceTime

**Cassie:** Alright, okay, so I'm recording now, so go ahead whenever you're ready.

**Jean:** Alright, my name is Jean DeHollander Seman. I was under Jean DeHollander while I attended Western Michigan University back in 1965 to 1969. And then I got my Master's in 1975. So figure out all those different years.

But I was always at Western and I was an elementary teacher. I took elementary classes at East Campus. I remember having music with a classroom teacher there. I had a couple of different health classes, some gym classes, a piano class, those kind of things that were offered at the East Campus.

Then I don't remember when it was, but it was when Western, well, I got married in 1973, and we had our reception at the ballroom in the student center. And then they had this big thing not too long ago of saying how many marriages, to renew to figure out how many people or something, renewing your vows.

And so my husband and I did that and it was on East Campus, so it was kind of fun to go back there again. So that's pretty much what I can tell you right now.

**Cassie:** Okay, great. And sorry, just one second, hold on... Sorry about that. So I wanted to ask too, I looked over the email that you sent me originally.

You also talked about playing piano and that connection to WMU to East Campus. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

**Jean:** Sure, I remember it was, when I took the music for the classroom teacher, it was at the East Campus, and we just had learned different songs and stuff.

And I was going into elementary, and I've always wanted to play piano, and I knew it was offered there in the little cubicles that they had in the building. And so I just decided, hey, I need a credit, I'll sign up for it. And so I did, but you had to practice.

And so I was always going over to East Campus and walking up the steps, those many steps. And the funny thing I do remember, I probably counted them, but I don't remember. But I do remember that the steps kind of slushed because so many people had walked up and down. They no longer were a flat step, they were just grooved and all the way up and down. So that was funny.

But took piano there. And I remember learning, I could remember things with my right hand and never with my left. And I know they tried and it was just like, okay, forget it, who cares? And so I went through life not knowing. And then probably when I was teaching, I think I had already gone to just being an elementary reading consultant that I saw in the newspaper, our buyer's guide, that they offered piano lessons somewhere in the Grand Rapids area. So I decided I'd take a look at it.

And it was fun because I could use my right hand again and my left hand, and they taught me chords and whatever, so it was just fun. But it was all that basis that I had learned way back when I was taking the piano for classroom teacher and all of that.

That's what I remember.

**Cassie:** Yeah, and you said also that you had, I believe, a few more classes on East Campus?

**Jean:** I did, I had a health science, safety, I don't know, food. There were all kinds of things in this degree. And there was a health science class that was over there.

I think I had a couple of gym classes that were over there. I remember playing field hockey, folk dancing, I mean, crazy things, but they were all on the East Campus. And then walking back and forth from Center Campus over to East Campus. And a lot of times you could get a bus, but not always.

**Cassie:** And so where did you stay when you were in your undergrad? Did you live in the dorms?

**Jean:** I did finally, but I started out as a commuter. I lived out and graduated from Parchment High School, which is just north-south of Kalamazoo, and took the bus every day.

And then I decided this was for the birds, so I thought, I'm going to take a semester off, because I kept hearing all my friends who would say they lived in the dorm and this kind of thing, so I saved enough money so I could live in the dorm. And I lived at Zimmerman Hall. I don't think it's there anymore, is it?

**Cassie:** It was actually just torn down, I think it was like two years ago now.

**Jean:** Okay, alright. But I lived at Zimmerman from, I guess, my last year and a half, and then I student taught, so it was like the last two years I lived in Zimmerman.

**Cassie:** Okay, and then you did student teaching, you said?

**Jean:** I did out to Portage, a school in Portage: Pershing Elementary, come to think of it. I do remember. And it was a spring and summer session, and then it was also, we did the summertime Woodcliffe elementary sticks into my head, but we were all of us teachers or interns or such people, we all took the classes for the summer and we ran the summer school.

And so I think I had taught a first and a third grade, and so I had a third-grade experience doing the summer school business. And so we ran the whole class and these kids were just getting ready to go into third grade, and I had had a first-grade experience. And then when I taught, I taught 36 years, but I taught first and second grade and then finally ended as being a reading consultant.

**Cassie:** Okay, and so you also said that you went back to WMU for your master's.

**Jean:** I did.

**Cassie:** What made you decide to do that?

**Jean:** Well, I just knew you had to do that within a certain amount of time or if you were taking any classes. And so I did, and I got that in 1975, so I'm sure things are different now, but that's how it was then. And I just went to Western.

I think I thought about going to Michigan State. And then there's some class didn't want to, maybe they didn't even accept me, come to think of it, because I had already gone to Western, and they said, your better bet is to just go back to where you've gotten your undergrad.

And at that time it was all strange, I remember, but I remember taking one class and it was like they didn't care, not necessarily didn't care, but there weren't that many available, I guess, in the Grand Rapids area. And so then I just said, hey, Western is available.

So I just did, and then I didn't have any trouble at all, and I just stayed at Western and got it in 1975.

**Cassie:** Okay, were you glad that you went back to Western?

**Jean:** Sure, it was fine. I mean, it was just, most of those I could get in Grand Rapids.

I had to go on campus one summer, I remember, maybe my last six hours or something, and those were in the summertime, but it didn't matter because my folks lived out in Parchment, so I could just drive, so that worked out fine. And I did take night classes at both Grand Rapids- I taught in Lowell, so that was not far from Grand Rapids, and so I just did that and it was fine. And that's a nice variety of classes and stuff, so it worked.

**Cassie:** I'm wondering, do you remember any of the professors or any faculty during your time at WMU?

**Jean:** Do I remember any... I probably would have to go to the yearbook to see if there were any, I can't remember any. There was a woman, and I took was undergrad, I think her name was. She was in the elementary department, someone named Strickland, I think. I'm not sure, but I think she was the one, and I think she also had some...

When I took that class, I remember I was commuting and there were an awful lot of people who were on campus, and whatever she had said made me think, maybe it's time to do something different here.

So I did take a semester off and earned enough money so I could live in the dorm. And I remember because she kept talking about things to be involved with, and I kept thinking, well, there's really no way, I had to go off to work and to be able to pay to go to college and stuff. But she just gave me, I can remember her thinking, yeah, she was the one who said this might be a great idea. So anyway, I did it, and then I'm trying to remember any others.

There was another lady I remember that taught the science class. She was an older woman, I remember, but that was on the East Campus. It was in the Phys Ed building, kind of a thing that they used to have right there where this gym was. And up above, I mean, one of those classes. I can't remember who it was that taught me the piano or any of that, but that was, again, up all the way to the top of the hill to get to the classes.

**Cassie:** Was it in that main building then that was at the top of the stairs, East Hall?

**Jean:** Yes.

**Cassie:** Okay, what do you remember about—

**Jean:** That's where I had the piano class. And it just took that's also where I had music for the classroom teacher. I don't remember who taught it, but that's where— both of those were, over there.

**Cassie:** Do you remember anything about the building while you were taking classes there?

**Jean:** Just that it was large, but there was a whole wing that they had for pianos, and there were little cubicles for all different kinds of music rooms. It was like a little small room you could go and practice, so there would be lots of people playing a flute or clarinet, whatever.

But there were lots of rooms with pianos in them. So you would just go in and you'd close the door and you'd practice right there. And that's what I remember. But I think the class was actually in another whole classroom, and I don't know how we must have had— we had real pianos, I think, but they were using the classes.

But these were like just keyboards, and they were stand-up kind, but they were keyboards in each one of these rooms.

**Cassie:** Okay, were they used often, do you remember?

**Jean:** Yeah, it was usually busy, so you had to kind of figure out, I don't know if you had to sign up a time or what, but you normally didn't have to wait too long. Maybe you reserved it or something. I can't quite remember.

**Cassie:** Could you often hear the music being played from the rooms?

**Jean:** No, they were pretty soundproof.

**Cassie:** Wow.

**Jean:** You could hear them when you walked in the hallway, but once you were in doing it, you couldn't, so their room evidently was soundproof, but they had big windows, and so I think you could see which room was open.

**Cassie:** Okay, wow. And I just had a few more questions for you. This one is a bit more difficult, so answer it any way that you can. What do you think impacted you the most during your time as an undergrad at WMU? Whether it be a person, a place or something that happened?

**Jean:** Well, I don't really know. I just remember well, I can remember things probably more when I actually went to, well, let me go back. I guess I remember two things. I guess when I was commuting, it was always, we see the people that also were commuters who would have lunch down in the student center so that I can remember going downstairs and getting and finding people that you knew and that I can remember.

The rest of them was like, if I missed the bus coming in, I'd have to walk from downtown Kalamazoo all the way up to campus. And sometimes there were trains and stuff that made you miss, but that was just that. And then I can remember when I finally did move into the dorm, I remember the whole idea was everybody was real excited about doing the exams.

They'd have a big break or something. And we all went downstairs and they had an ice cream party or something, but it was playing music and it was stuff. But I can remember the whole deal was, we can't wait to get out of here because it's like we've been doing this forever and ever and ever, and we want to go out and do our job.

That's two things that I can remember specifically on campus that and those two things.

**Cassie:** Yeah, so we're coming to the end of our time. So I just wanted to ask one more question. If you had any other memories or stories that you wanted to share or were there any topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to conclude with?

**Jean:** I don't know. I guess I can remember. And I don't know if it was part of my degree, but I remember taking a lot of Phys Ed. Is that still part of the deal? So many hours that you have to take a physical education class... that I had a dance class, a folk dance, and then I also had a field hockey class.

And I don't remember if there were more or not, but it was like outside in the summer or fall. And then one was inside at that big gym, but still you're on East Campus, and the bus was always full to get over there, to get back. It was always full.

**Cassie:** Was it at the gym on East Campus?

**Jean:** Yes.

**Cassie:** Okay, was that the Oakland gym?

**Jean:** I believe it would have been the old gym because it was right there on Oakland Drive. It would be across the street from where you went up the hill to go to East Hall.

**Cassie:** Okay yes.

**Jean:** Whatever that building is, and I don't know how long that was... it's been a long time since I've been on campus to know where buildings really are. And they have so many new ones, and they've tore things down, but the field house was right behind it or down off the side, and the football field was just below us, I think.

**Cassie:** Yes, it was Oakland Gym, and now they kept part of it, and they also redid it, and Oakland Gym is connected now to the Seeley Center, which is connected to the stadium.

**Jean:** Okay, alright, so that's all new, but that's where I remember having a few classes.

Either a couple of Phys Ed ones, that science thing one, science and health, I think it was. And then again crossing the street and having the music ones up on top of the hill.

**Cassie:** Okay, do you remember what Oakland Gym looked like at the time that you had classes in there?

**Jean:** It had a wood floor. I can remember that. And then I think there was like a stairway that went down. And then there had to have been another whole section, another whole wing, because my class for the health science class was in a regular classroom, and it wasn't with the gym part. That was on another section of that building.

And I just remember there was a kid I went to high school with that actually was in the class with me, and it was kind of like I don't know why he was there, and he didn't know why I was there. But anyway, we both needed this class, so it was always kind of fun. But that's all I remember.

**Cassie:** Well, thank you so much for sharing some of these memories and stories with me today. I really appreciate it.

**Jean:** You're welcome, if you need anything, let me know.

**Cassie:** Okay, great. And I will send that form over to your email then and send it back whenever you get a chance.

**Jean:** All right, sounds great. Thank you. It was nice to meet you.

**Cassie:** Thank you, nice to meet you as well. Have a great evening.

**Jean:** You too. Bye bye.

**Cassie:** Bye.