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Ray Lezotte, Meeting His Wife and a Passion for the Air Force

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State High and WMU Alum Raymond Lezotte

Wednesday, March 3, 2023 at 3:00 PM

Virtual Meeting via Phone Call

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

Ray: My name is Raymond Lezotte. I live in Vicksburg and I'm a graduate of good old Western Michigan University with a Bachelor of Business Administration in 1963.

Cassie: Okay. And are you from the Kalamazoo area, then?

Ray: Yes, I was born up in Levington and moved to Gaylord, and then we moved down to Kalamazoo just before World War II started.

Cassie: Okay. All right. So what brought you to Kalamazoo?

Ray: My dad got a job.

Cassie: Okay, and reflecting back on your time at WMU, then you were here for four years of undergrad, is that correct?

Ray: That is correct.

Cassie: Okay. And how would you summarize your undergrad experience at WMU?

Ray: It was fun most of the time. It was harder when I had to pass a math class (chuckles). I was very poor at math, so that was a struggle.

Cassie: Do you remember what math class it was?

Ray: It was probably a basic algebra.

Cassie: Okay. All right. And so what are some of your earliest memories of the school and specifically of East Campus?

Ray: Well, I started up on the East Campus in 7th grade. I got recruited from the public schools in Kalamazoo, so I went through 6th through 12th grade in the old campus in the East Hall.

Cassie: Yeah. So did you graduate when it was University High then?

Ray: It was State High at that time.

Cassie: It was State High. Okay. And what do you remember about those schools?

Ray: That was great. I really enjoyed my time there. I was really short when I was in 7th grade and Western had a basketball player by the name Ron Jackson.

I remember walking out of the locker room, bumping into his kneecap basically. He was six foot eight, and I was probably, what, three foot eight or so? I don't know what I was, but I was really short compared to him.

Cassie: Wow. And do you remember anything about the buildings then during that time? Did they seem big since you were so short?

Ray: What's that again?

Cassie: I said, do you remember anything about East Hall during your time at campus school and State High?

Ray: Yeah, that's... almost all of my classes were in that building except for science, which is across the little parking area.

Cassie: Right at West Hall?

Ray: Yes.

Cassie: Okay, and do you remember anything about the classrooms or anything quirky about the building that the campus school was in?

Ray: Our lockers and stuff were down in the basement, and we always had to go upstairs to most of our classes, although we did have a few classes down on the basement level.

Cassie: Okay.

Ray: And it was fun.

Cassie: Yeah. Do you remember any of your teachers during elementary school or middle school, I guess? Do you remember any of your teachers at campus school or State High?

Ray: Yeah, well, yes, Ms. Gish was my 7th grade teacher, and my favorite teacher of all up there was Roy Walters. I had him for an aviation class, a history class, and he coached track, and I ran track.

Cassie: So you knew him pretty well?

Ray: He was a great man. Yeah. Stevens was a science teacher. He was a really great guy, too.

Cassie: Okay. I'm sorry. What was the name of the teacher who was aviation and also the track coach?

Ray: Roy Walters.

Cassie: Okay. And what was he like?

Ray: He was a pilot in the Navy during World War II and flew on a PB4Y down from... I don't know where... from down in the Central and South America most of the time.

And he got my interest in aviation, and I took an aviation class in history. And right after high school, I joined the Air Force and spent four years in Air Force. Then I came back to WMU.

Cassie: Wow. And do you think that he partially influenced your decision to go into the Air Force?

Ray: No question about it.

Cassie: Wow. So what was it about him that you liked?

Ray: Well, he had some really interesting stories and just had a bubbly personality. I remember when I was a student at Western it was back in the days when they had the freshman team and then the varsity, and he refereed many, many freshmen basketball games and it was fun watching him do that.

I recall one time, my daughter was a very good volleyball player, and subsequently, after University High School closed down, he went to another school, became a principal, and my daughter was playing volleyball. My daughter was about 5'11", and some girl jumped up and hit one in her, hit her on the top of the head.

And Roy came over and told me it looked like my daughter was about two inches shorter. He had a good sense of humor.

Cassie: That's funny. So, on the note of sporting events, you also said you were in track. Do you remember any sporting events or any track meets that stick out to you?

Ray: Yes, I ran half mile, and my senior year, I never did better than second. Never did worse than third. I had one guy on my team that always won, and the only other person that beat me was a kid from South Haven by the name of Driver, I believe.

And I also ran cross-country my senior year and did pretty... I came in first on our team all the time.

Cassie: So where would practices be held?

Ray: Pardon?

Cassie: Where were practices held?

Ray: At the Western track around the football field.

Cassie: Okay. Was it a nice track back then?

Ray: Yes. It was cinder, it wasn't paved or anything of that sort.

Cassie: Got you. Okay. And do you remember any other events, maybe like dances or pep rallies or anything that were held at the schools, Campus School, State High, or at your time at WMU?

Ray: I remember one vividly, one football program where Lynn Colby, who was a sports director for KZO, I believe, at that time, came and made a little speech that was really kind of neat.

And of course, State High won, as a result of what he said, and he had a son going to school at State High at that time.

Cassie: And what was it like going back to campus for university then? Did you view the campus differently as an undergrad versus when you were in high school and middle school?

Ray: Yeah, I think so. It had expanded a whole lot between the time I went into service and when it came back. Much nicer. And a lot of new buildings over on the new campus, a lot of those are being torn down now.

Cassie: Right. So what did a typical day look like for you during your undergrad? How did you spend your free time? Did you have any pastimes on campus or in the Kalamazoo area?

Ray: I got a job for my junior and senior year at a business in downtown Kalamazoo called Office Supply and Equipment Company and left there and went to work for the government when I graduated.

Cassie: Okay. All right. Did you live on campus during your undergrad?

Ray: No, I was fortunate enough to save some money and lived at home. I had a lot of friends that lived up on campus, and that's who I socialized with. In particular, a fellow that lives in Jackson by the name Jim Zelesky.

Cassie: Okay, so they lived in the dorms, and you would visit them?

Ray: Yes.

Cassie: Okay. What dorms did they live in, do you remember?

Ray: Yeah, it's just been torn down recently. I don't think it was Henry Hall. I forget what it was called.

Cassie: Okay. Yeah, I think I know where you're talking about. So it's on the main campus, the West Campus, then.

Ray: Yes. It sort of overlooked what Western tennis courts are located.

Cassie: Okay. Yeah, right. And so what would you guys do for fun?

Ray: Well, went to just about every sporting event available and had a few parties and so on.

Cassie: Okay. Yeah, typical college stuff.

Ray: Yes.

Cassie: Makes sense. And so I have a few more questions for you, and this one might be a little bit harder, so answer it however you'd like. But I wanted to know, what do you think impacted you the most during your time at WMU or Campus School or U High, whether it be an event, a person, a place, or something else that happened?

Ray: That's a good question. I think I enjoyed one physical education class. I had played volleyball, and I'm not a regular volleyball player, but there was a fellow that transferred in from, I think Xavier from Cincinnati, and he was about 6'8". All I did was bump it up to him, and he pounded the ball. We just kicked heiny the whole time. I enjoyed my physical education classes.

Cassie: Wow. Yeah, right. It sounds like you were pretty involved in athletics then.

Ray: Yes, I still do. I play senior softball.

Cassie: Okay. So what did you think of Western's athletics at the time that you were there?

Ray: It was a lot better, probably, than it is now.

Cassie: Right.

Ray: The baseball program was really outstanding with Charlie Maher. He was a great recruiter, apparently. As a matter of fact, I think a lot of major league teams sort of steered fellows to play baseball at Western.

Cassie: Okay. And on that note a little bit, I had another question. How do you feel about WMU now versus when you were a student at WMU?

Ray: Well, I like Western a lot. I don't attend many games, but I think, I donate a little money every now and then, but not a whole lot.

Cassie: Yeah. So we just have a few minutes left, so I thought I'd ask, were there any other memories or stories you'd like to share or were there any topics that we didn't touch on that you'd like to conclude with?

Ray: Well, I got a bride from Western.

Cassie: Yeah?

Ray: After I worked in Detroit for a while and I got sent back to Kalamazoo, I was an investigator for the government, and my friend Jim Zelesky that I mentioned to you earlier had left and gone to Germany as an officer, came back and was taking a graduate class, some graduate classes at Western.

And my wife was in one of his classes, and he introduced us, and that was fate, I guess. It was a pretty good deal for me, not so good for her.

Cassie: So you got the better end of the deal.

Ray: I certainly did.

Cassie: Wow, that's great. (Both laughing)

Ray: I had two sisters that graduated from Western also.

Cassie: And did they also go to Campus School and State High?

Ray: No, they just went to regular public schools in Kalamazoo.

Cassie: Okay. What did they think of WMU?

Ray: My one sister, after she retired from teaching at Loy Norrix High School, came back and was a tutor for the sports program for several years.

Cassie: Wow. So she came back to WMU then.

Ray: Yes. I think she has a master's from Western too.

Cassie: Okay, nice. Yeah. Well, great. Well, thank you so much for talking to me again today and sharing some of these stories and memories that you have. I really appreciate it.

And I'll make sure to send you an email then, if that works best for you with the website link once that is published.

Ray: Great. I'm glad I could help.

Cassie: Yes, of course. And I'll send you an email then. And I'll send that form that I talked about as well.

Ray: Okay.

Cassie: And if you have any photos or anything else that you'd like to accompany your story, feel free to send those over too.

Some people have been sending photos of more current photos of themselves or their spouses, or some people have sent photos from their time at Western. So if you would like any photos included, you don't have to, but if you would, you can send those over on text or over to my email as well.

Ray: Okay.

Cassie: All right, great. Well, thank you so much. Have a great rest of your day and enjoy the sunshine.

Ray: Thank you very much. Nice talking to you.

Cassie: Nice talking to you, too. Bye.

Ray: Bye.