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George Kohrman and the Family Legacy at WMU

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Campus School & WMU Alum George Kohrman

Thursday, March 2, 2023 at 1:00 PM

In-Person at Heritage Hall

**George**: I started here in the fall of 1951 in the second grade. And I was probably in about the eighth grade in… probably in the seventh grade in ‘57, and in the eighth grade in ‘58 when it turned to be University High. And that was a result of Western Michigan University becoming a university versus a college.

**Cassie**: So you started in the second grade, though.

**George**: Correct.

**Cassie**: Interesting, where did you go before that?

**George**: I was in first grade, was in Missouri, so I think I should put some background to how I ended up here. The Director of Industrial and Vocational Education had a heart attack, his name was Fox and passed away in the spring or summer of ‘51. On the campus there’s a dormitory. I believe, out in the north campus or in the valley that’s called Fox Hall named after him, but he passed away and Dr. Sangren needed a replacement, so he went nationally looking for someone he felt that was qualified to take that position.

My dad worked in that area, in State Department of Education in Missouri, and had been involved in a lot of national conferences. And so my dad was actually on his way up to University Michigan for an inner job interview there and Sangren learned that he was coming up here and asked his secretary if he could stop in Kalamazoo for a job interview. Well, the next day my dad got off the train and stopped here for an interview and both the University of Michigan and Dr. Sangren offered him a job on the spot.

And he turned them both down, said he thought the best place for him currently was in staying in Missouri. Well, after two weeks in Missouri, thinking about both jobs some more, he called Sangren up and said if the job was still available at Western, he’d be interested. And so Sangren said it was, and then he could have the job.

So he moved his family here in the fall of roughly September, early October of ‘51, and I was in the second grade. I had an older brother that also joined the school here, and I had an older sister that joined the school here. So being, I guess, a professor at Western and getting the job here, Sangren helped get him in all three of his kids into the school here. It was difficult to get into the school because the enrollment was only in… Campus School was only approximately 24 students were in a class. And so the people that got the kids that got in the school early on either had previous parents or brothers or sisters that were in previous classes.
So the students were made up of previous graduates, A, and B, faculty member kids, and C, well-connected people in the community that put their kids on a waiting list very early on before they were ready to go to school. So it was difficult to get into the school because everyone wanted their kid to come here.

I was fortunate enough to come here in the second grade and went through not only my campus school grade school years, but the high school, which was also held in the same building. All the high school classes spilled over into West Hall also and extensively. So our science classes were over there and our shop classes were in West Hall. We did have access to the library. The library… Western’s Library was in North Hall up until 1957 when they moved over to the West Campus and that building was ready, and they moved into it, but we were able to use that, but none of us really used it much.

I think when I was in junior high, I believe I took a typing class that was in the basement of north in the old library building that’s where typing, all the typewriters were at.

Cassie: Let’s talk a little bit more about your grade school years and high school years and specific memories you have. What are some of your earliest memories of starting school here?

George: Well, as I say, it was in second grade. The highlights of the second grade that everybody in my classroom, I remember in my classroom, remembers is what they call the Egyptian tea. That was where the teacher, being a child, you don’t remember all the details and what goes on behind the scenes.

But we had a little make believe, because someone constructed a ticket booth to sell tickets to the event, probably cost a nickel for the event. And the teacher and her people that helped her collected pumpkin seeds and with pumpkin seeds, they roasted them among other things, and salted them and roasted them to make it kind of a meal.

I don’t remember what other items we had that might have been snacks and so forth, but we had a party and I can show you a photograph of us all together and some of them are decorating costumes for that event. I remember also that around lunchtime, I don’t know if it’s 11:00, 11:30, or 12:00, because kids don’t have sense of time, but I remember I was responsible for a week or so.

We all shared the responsibilities. The milk small bottles were delivered in a wire cage container that had maybe 24 milk bottles in it and was delivered to the room, and then I was responsible for seeing that was handed out. And again, we might if I had to collect a nickel per bottle for our drink for our lunchtime.
We also had a play. There was a stage outside in the rotunda outside our room that plays were performed, and every several classes performed plays over the course of the semester. So that was the second grade. One other thing, I guess in the second grade when we had a big snow day, a lot of us got in trouble by going outside and sliding down the hill and came back thoroughly wet and soaked and freezing.

So the girls were separated from the boys into the back rooms, and we had to strip some of our clothes to put them over the registers to get them dry. That stands out as an interesting behavior issue that we had (both chuckle).

But as far as the building location on the southeast corner of the school outside, overlooking the hill. To the far corner of the… I guess it’d be down this corner here down. There was a large flagpole. And one of the probably the fifth or sixth grade class was responsible for raising the flag on that pole every day. But that was where we would slide down the hill. And that’s where the activity it wasn’t over here in the steepest part. But it was kind of… it still has inclined to it.

But yes, that was the second grade. Third grade, I remember activities dealing with having things on the bulletin board. For us to keep track of books we were reading. How many books we were trying to get read. Every time we had in several years. Second, third, fourth grade, Valentine’s Day, Christmas holidays. We would make little pouches on the back of our chairs for kids to come and put cards to the other classmates in the class as an activity.

The fourth grade, a unique activity that I did or we had one of the rooms was a music room on the second floor of the overlooking their rotunda. And in that music room class, we learned to sing certain songs. You practice, practice, practice. Well, it was all leading up to what they call the May Festival.

And the May Festival was always held in the gymnasium. Which was the end of the hall down here. And that was an activity. The May Festival was something that was. The records I’ve read went back to 1915. So it was done every year in May.

**Cassie:** What did the festival consist of?

**George:** Mostly singing. I can’t say what the olden days were like. But I’ll show you in a while. Yeah, but I have a picture of the activity.
In the gymnasium, there was a riser with the upper class up to 6th grade in it. I believe this is the second or third grade down here. (Pointing to photo) And I think our class was down here. And there's an audience that the parents came to listen to it. But we had put together all these.

**Cassie:** Were those the decorations on the track above?

**George:** Yes, there was drapes off the tracks and then they had decorations off of and they had a different theme every year for this festival. We did not have an outdoor activity that I can recall. But I know I looked at some of the old year books and so forth. There was May poles and so forth outside.

But I don't recall us in my years here doing that particular activity. I think that was an older time when they weren't as many students involved. All these kids in all the classes were practicing their songs. For this festival in the music classes that they had on a weekly basis. Well, I was in fourth grade, and after we perfected our songs the best we could, the teacher, my fourth grade teacher, rolled in out of a closet on rollers. It was about two feet high, 18 inches square devices. Basically looked like a record player. And it had a microphone that was able to patch into it. Kind of a tabletop microphone. It was a huge thing. She rolled it into the music, into our music room and set it up. And she put a record on it and proceeded to record singing seven songs.

**Cassie:** Wow.

**George:** Okay, basically she was creating the master. Because it didn't have really grooves with music on it. It was a grooves without music or without anything. And the needle was carving the sound onto it. So only one of those records were produced. Because she was also my next door neighbor on the street I lived on.

I lived on the other side of Kalamzoo College where my house was. And my fourth grade teacher lived close by. And she knew my dad's profession here. When he was hired here. He thought the best way to preserve that record was to give it to me.

**Cassie:** Wow.

**George:** So I was the custodian of this record of our seven songs from the fourth grade on. It was in my house, in my collection. And I kept it up to from 1954 I kept up to about 1995. And gave it to the archives.
I've since asked the archives if I could see it again or whatever and hold it for item for a display. And they couldn't find it.

**Cassie:** Oh no!

**George:** So they've lost it. But I have been able to save. I did make a copy on a cassette tape and a CD before I gave it up.

**Cassie:** That's good. I was going to ask, do you have a copy?

**George:** I have a copy of the audio. I just can't show the physical item that this was saved on. That was somehow another lost. When the archives was over here when they were moving. Maybe it'll turn up one of these days in a lost box. They won't know what it is and maybe pitch it at that point.

But because it's not one that you buy in a store, but it is substantial in size. It's about twelve inches, 18 inches in diameter. But that's an event that took place in the fourth grade. Fifth grade, I can't recall. I mean, they're all every year has highlights. But I can't recall right now what the fifth grade would be.

Sixth grade. I know that one of the fourth or fifth grade. We had to go up in front of the sixth grade class and make a presentation. As a grow, you had to go up to the big guys. But the sixth graders also were given the responsibility of running, being the safety patrol for the campus. So there was a group of kids that were each given a safety belt. Safety patrol belt that they wore. And they stood out in front of the building. As people came to drop their kids off in the morning. We were also stationed down in two or three places along Oakland Drive to make sure the kids got out of their cars. And safety just giving that sense of responsibility. That was a role of the sixth graders. I have a feeling that was also a role of the sixth graders to put the flag up on the flagpole.

I did not have it. Don't recall me having the responsibility of putting the flag up. But I did put in some time with the safety patrol being assigned. One of about six places that kids were stationed. Kids coming to the school did not come by buses, we didn't have bus services. So it was up to the parents to drive their kids here and drop them off or they could walk. Some of the kids lived down in the vine neighborhood and walked up the hill to school.

My dad, I lived on the other side of Kalamzoo College and my dad drove me when he came to the office here on the campus. He drove me every morning and then I walked home.

**Cassie:** Did he work on this campus or in the west campus?

**George:** Both.

**Cassie:** Both, okay.

**George:** His first year, maybe two years he worked here. His office was in the Aircraft Automotive Building, which was located partially on the footprint of where Seeley Hall is.
Cassie: Right.

George: Yes, Seeley Hall occupied most of it. Seeley Hall occupies the old Oakland Drive gymnasium, but it extends out towards Stadium Drive, which had another building there. That was the aircraft automotive building.

And my dad’s first year or two here on campus, his office was there. Then he moved up to the Health building on this campus and he had a complex over there on one corner and next to him was the director of College of Education. His office was next to him. And in 1957, when they became a university, the Dean of Education was there and my dad was a dean, first dean for his area was there side by side.

The second year, from ’58 on, my dad’s deanship office moved to the Seibert Hall over on West Campus. It was in that building. Although the Dean of Education stayed here until Sangren Hall was built.

But back to 6th grade, one of the highlights of 6th grade is a writing activity where every student was asked to write someone famous. And so we wrote everyone wrote a letter to a famous person and everyone got responses back. Most of us got responses back.

Cassie: Really?

George: I wrote guy by name of Dave Caraway, which was the head newscaster on channel CBS News. Every morning you woke up to Dave Caraway.

I wrote him, other people wrote the president, Eisenhower, football players, comedians and so forth actors, which as you see a few here on here, that’s just a sampling. This is my class in our room. And our professor was teacher was Hoffman. I don’t know recall his first name, but Mr. Hoffman was our professor.

So that made the Kalamazoo Gazette as a big article of activity we had done. And so every class and every year had lots of activities.

Cassie: Also lots of responsibility too, sounds like each year you had different roles to fulfill and duties.

George: Mm-hmm. But besides those things, there was plays, there were several plays. I don’t say that we had plays every year, but see if I can find like in the second grade we had a father’s luncheon.
(Showing photos) This is the Egyptian tea of what the Egyptian tea looked like but with the costume, costumes, and I don't know, there are probably some dialogue that went to it. But this is a play that we had on the stage there in the rotunda.

**Cassie:** Wow.

**George:** There was a girl by name of Patsy Johnson, part of my class. Her mother was a photographer that took pictures of cats, dogs, children. I don't know if she was considered herself as a professional photographer.

But she was darn close to being considered that because she did do a lot of photography of things and tried to sell them. But any event, because her daughter was in our class, she made a point every year of photographing our class at least once and sometimes twice a year.

So I have a good collection of photographs for each year from her mother. And so, like, that's an example, the picture that went in the paper.

**Cassie:** Yeah.

**George:** Okay. But this is a picture of our 6th grade graduating class in front of the fireplace that was in the Rotunda in the campus school as we were going on to Junior High.

In the very early years of the building, the 7th grade and maybe the 8th grade were actually squeezed into this campus school building. But eventually the Junior High classrooms were incorporated into the top four here of the administration building. So the rooms right across the street, across the hall here where the 7th grade, there were two rooms for 7th grade.

And then down the hall, the other direction, that side, were two rooms for the 8th grade. Basically 24 students up through grade six. But they doubled our size. So we had two class, two classrooms in a lot more students in some junior high.

**Cassie:** They let more students in?

**George:** They let more students in.

**Cassie:** Okay, and some of that was athletic scholarships, too, is that right?
George: I'm not an athletic person, so I can't tell you that. But yes, it was my opinion that the high school athletic director had some input into giving favoritism to a student coming from the public school system that wanted to come here. He had some input into, yeah, this person is a good basketball player or a good tennis player. Let's have them come in, they're also a good student.

Cassie: Right.

George: So several things went into it, expanding it. I'm just saying that in the campus school, I'm going to say we had approximately 24 students of class. Junior High we had approximately 50 students to the class.

And the list of names I added up last night, our directory was called Camp Cub Sense, which was a directory of the address of everybody for all four years of high school. And I added up the number of names in my list here when I was a senior, and it was 87 names.

Cassie: Okay.

George: So that meant that even when we went to 9th grade, they left a few more students because we were no longer assigned to a specific one teacher. For that group of people, or homeroom, what we call homeroom. We were assigned to math rooms, english rooms, shop class, and so forth.

So there were so many more subject matters that we were studying, and so there was more places that they could absorb several more students. So we went from 50 students to 85 or 87 students.

Cassie: Okay. But the graduating class when you graduated high school, was still just under 100?

George: Significantly under, It was in the 80s, around 80-85.

Cassie: Okay, yeah still small classes. Just larger than what you started out with.

George: Our school getting back to your athletic scholarships, which I don't scholarships to go school here was not very costly. It was like $20 a year.

So, it wasn't as if you were getting a significant dollar figure. It was a matter of, Is there a chair? Can I get in? Is there a slot for me to even attend here? For the teachers that are here? And that was the criteria of how do you get in here. And so, if you had a skill set like you're a A-plus student, or if you were a seven foot tall and could make a basket type thing, then that helped get you in, from my perspective. But was never in an official role to know what the criteria was.

Other than to say that's what it appeared to be. Now, we were a school that was, high schools are either in a Class A, Class B, Class C, or Class D student size. We were a Class C school for
athletics, but we could almost have had 20 less students and been a Class D, I mean, we were on the lower end of a Class C school, athletic, weight wise.

We never competed, our school never competed in Class C. We always competed in Class B. So the schools we competed against, were significantly larger than our school. And we won a lot of championships in different sports. Baseball, basketball, football, golf over the years that way. When I was a sophomore here, now I’m getting to high school.

But when I was a sophomore here and a junior, the tennis coach, who was also our science teacher, physics and chemistry teacher, he was our tennis coach. He thought we had a good enough team to compete against, a team called Hamtramck, a suburb of Detroit that had won the Class A championship 10 years in a row.

He thought we were good enough to give him a task. So when I was a sophomore, we competed for that championship and we won it.

**Cassie:** Really?!

**George:** We dethroned them for that 1 year. Now, whenever you went up a grade, like up to another tougher level. Yeah. You had to stay there for 2 years, which meant that when I was a junior, we also had to be there. And I don’t recall, I think we might have won that year also, but if we didn’t, we came in second. But that’s an example of how we were very competitive in athletics.

**Cassie:** Yeah, right.

**George:** Okay. Now, when I was in junior high and going into 9th grade, we had one of the top basketball teams in the town, in Kalamazoo. When I graduated, I think we were near the bottom of our conference. So.

**Cassie:** That changed.

**George:** It changed.

**Cassie:** Yeah.

**George:** We lost a couple of players, they got dissatisfied and went back to the public school systems. That hurt us, but we just did not have the talent that I’ve seen in other years. It’s like any sport.

**Cassie:** The school was fairly competitive in academics as well, wasn’t it?

**George:** Correct? Let me, can I get it (pointing to flipping page in photo album)?

**Cassie:** Yes, go ahead.

**George:** I digressed from the elementary school. Now we’re talking a little bit about high school. A couple of major things in the high school level, that’s to lead to academic areas is
that I know that when I was about a junior, might have been a sophomore, one of the science
teachers and the math teachers would go off and study during the summer, extend their
knowledge base and bring their knowledge base back to us with new textbooks and so forth.
So we always had the latest from the teachers we had, we’re not just regurgitating what they
did the year before. They were always looking what challenges to take to their students here.

Cassie: And this was also because it was a teacher’s college at the time.

George: Right. Correct

Cassie: So they had to keep up on the latest to also teach the college, the student teachers.
Right?

George: Correct. So, our science teacher went to John Hopkins for the summer, for a 6-week
course, and he came back with new physics textbooks due to, see how it’s discussed. And so,
we were on the leading edge, you might say, with what was being produced and trying to
extend to try to challenge us in our studies.

When I was again about a sophomore, Purdue University had a new endeavor where they
wanted to try to teach by television. Okay. But the Internet didn’t exist.

Cassie: Right.

George: The ability to transmit signals long ways, quality was not very good. You just
couldn’t go out and build a network to deliver things. So they would fly, I don’t know who
gave them the grant, but I’m gonna guess it was the federal government paid Purdue
University a grant to fly an airplane over the Midwest in a circular fashion with antennas
hanging off of it to broadcast TV services. Because if you put up a TV tower, you only have a
radius of about 50 miles.

Cassie: Right.

George: But if you could go up 2 miles in the air and have your antenna, you can do it not 50
miles, maybe 200 or 300 miles.

Cassie: Right.

George: So they were broadcasting material that had been produced in a studio from high
level teachers of subject matter you might get off YouTube today, for instance.

They were broadcasting it off of an antenna hanging from an airplane. And so, two or three
of our rooms in this building in East Hall here, the Heritage Hall, we had television sets put
on, rolling stands and TVs were put there. And certain times of the day, some channels, some
lessons would be presented.

That was coming from an airplane that Purdue University was promoting as an experiment.
Is this in value to producing material to the students here. That’s an example, besides the
teachers going off and staying current. It also some of these teachers. It's interesting to see
the Latin teacher and Spanish teachers that are here.

I can go back in the university's yearbook and find them as students here in 1928. In other
words, when they graduated from Western, they came here and dedicated their life for 30 or
40 years of teaching here.

Cassie: Wow.

George: And they were interacting with the college teachers as their mentors, in effect. So
the teachers that were here were well seasoned and were challenging the students that
were also top notch to start with. Yes, academically wise, it was a good place to go. I didn't
personally do it because I wasn't one of the stronger students, but a lot of my classmates
took at least one or two or three college classes our senior year on the campus here.

Instead of going to West Hall for physics class, they'd go to West Hall for a history class or go
over to West Campus for a sociology class and come back, and they were getting college
credit. Now, it's not unusual to see that in a lot of schools, but back in this 1960s, we were
one of the few schools that were doing it.

Cassie: Right.

George: And so I can't tell you how many National Scholarship, classic Scholarship awards
that were given to our classes, but the numbers were high. The numbers people graduating
that earned that status was above average. I saw, I think, Sharon put together at the reunion
table of the number of kids that were left this school versus the public schools and so forth
that went on to college was phenomenal.

90-some percent for the school, 98% for this school at a particular time where in public
schools it was only 55%.

Cassie: Yes.

George: So that's an also an example of what I had to compete against as a student.

Cassie: Yeah, within the school with each other.

George: So I found it hard for me. Although my brother went here and graduated here,
ended up getting a doctorate at MIT. My sister got a nursing degree at Michigan when she
graduated here in the 50s. But I was not quite as capable as those two were.

But there are a lot of doctors, lawyers, and very talented people have come out of the school
because of the challenges in mentorship they were getting from the teachers.
And a lot of had to do also the student teachers that came out of the college. And that was the purpose of our school, was for the student teachers that placed for the Western students to see a classroom in action and actually try some of their skills out.

Teaching a section, student teacher for a math class, for instance, would come sit in the back room for the first three weeks, maybe the fourth week, the teacher says, “Okay. The next three days is gonna be taught by a student teacher that’s been watching you. And this is a subject he or she’s gonna teach you on particular component.”

And that student teacher had to develop the lesson plan and get up in front and lead the class and take us through it.

**Cassie:** How did you guys feel about the student teacher?

**George:** No negative feelings. We actually loved them. I can’t say that I recall their names cuz they’re only with you for a few weeks.

And I regret somehow we haven’t really collected those names as a class student. But yes, a lot of students were student teachers here and used us as their guinea pigs of learning their skill set. And they were also watching our teachers and how they taught. And they would have discussions behind the scenes in terms of why they were doing things certain ways.

And so our teachers were also teaching them from their perspective without what they were doing and how to handle the classes. But no, we had lots of teachers. It was accepted as the norm.

**Cassie:** Right, it was so normal to you guys to have them in there.

**George:** But the cafeteria for us hasn’t been discussed in others is in the basement of the campus school building. That’s where the lunchroom was.

**Cassie:** Was that just for grade school or was that for junior high school as well?

**George:** Yes, I would say when I was in high school, we were more free to do things. We weren’t locked down. We had a timeline. I don’t remember how many minutes we had for lunch break, but we would go… quite a few of us would go down to a place called Parkwood Grill which is down on the bottom of the hill, about two block, about where the Stadium Drive and South Street intersection is. There was a little place that would sell hamburgers called Parkwood Grill at the time. Little Michigan, which is also down there by the railroad tracks, by the Dairy Queen, there’s a building. It’s called Little Michigan. It was a nice little restaurant that you could go to. Some of us would run over to Walwood Union and it had a cafeteria there. And there was a little snack bar in Vandercook across the street. Some of us occasionally would run down there and get a hot dog and drinks.

I would say the number of people that went down to the lunchroom down here in high school was limited. You bring your own lunch bag and eat. Although they had hot food every day, they’d post a menu on the wall. Whatever was the schedule of the meal for the week.
And you could choose whether you wanted to pay some money for a meal or whether you wanna bring your own sandwich for those days. I typically would bring the lunch probably four out of the five days and there would be always be one day. I’d say, this is great, I can’t miss this.

**Cassie**: Yeah.

**George**: Back to grade school, when Western had a very good baseball team in the 50s, 1955 was probably their highest pinnacle of a baseball team. They went to the nationals, they were one of the last four teams in the nation to compete at college level in 1955.

And so it was a big thing, I would say 1960 in the age of the television, everything went downhill for our baseball sport because all the good athletes want to go to schools in the south. Where they can have 300 games they can play a year versus 30 or 40 games a year.

**Cassie**: Because of the weather.

**George**: Because of the weather.

**Cassie**: Okay.

**George**: So if you wanna make it to the majors, you went off to a place where you can play year round.

**Cassie**: Right.

**George**: Whereas back in the 50s, Chicago Cubs and Detroit Tigers had farm systems, and they’d have scouts that actually come to every Western game, and they’d recommend to good players in high school saying, go to Western, it’s a good place to get your training, become a professional baseball player. So we got a lot of referrals of good players in the 50s when it wasn’t becoming a big money sport, it was just an entertainment sport. And so we made it to the Omaha Nebraska World Series Championship in ‘55.

In any event, back to grade school here, whenever the bell rang at 3:00 or there about five to 3 for the classes to dismiss, most of the boys in my class would run as fast as we could down to Haymes field to be selected as a ball boy or the person that took care of the bat for the visiting college team that we were playing against that day.

And so it was always an honor to be selected to chase foul balls or to go up to the plate and retrieve a bat to bring back to the dugout for the visitors. So that was an activity that the guys would do. It wasn’t something the girls did.

So that was an activity dealing with that, because we had a little teeny tiny gymnasium off the lunchroom down there it’s called the Cracker Box. It’s a small little room, and I don’t think it was ever used for anything else other than that over the years.

**Cassie**: So then after you graduated high school, right, you went on to your undergrad here at Western, correct?
George: That’s correct.

Cassie: Okay. Was it just your undergrad or did you go for degrees after that, like a graduate?

George: Yes, because I was not the strongest student, and I actually found, to U High’s credit, and the struggles I had here competing against superior students, I found college easier.

Cassie: Oh, wow!

George: Because the college was a makeup of a better cross section of the population and so I won’t say I excelled at the top level I did in my majors and my interest. But there were classes that I had difficulty with. There were classes I had difficulty with.

And so I took five years to get my bachelor’s rather than the typical four, because I didn’t want to take 16 hours of credit a year to get my degree. I basically only took twelve credits a semester, which required me to spill over to a fifth year. After I’ve completed that, I said, well, the last couple of years I was at college at Western, I did extremely well in what I chose to do for my major.

I decided, well, I’m not certain where I want to go, what my job will be. All I got to do is hang around for one more year and I can have a Master’s.

Cassie: Right.

George: So I put a 6th year in and graduated with a Master’s.

Cassie: Wow. And what was that in?

George: My major was electrical engineering on the campus. I discovered when I was a sophomore Western got a computer and I was interested in taking the class as an elective because it was not in my required classes to get my diploma.

Well, when I lived in the dorm, I discovered that the first semester that they offered computer classes on the campus, that they’d have everybody in a raised classroom, tiered classroom, about 70 students and after two weeks, 20 of them had dropped out of the class. It was too hard for them.

And so I said, I’m not certain I want to take this class anyway because it might affect my grade point average. When I got to be a senior, I was at the top of the line to enroll in classes. That’s something you wouldn’t or you were not exposed to but back in the 60s and 70s, the seniors got to enroll first, and the freshmen got to enroll last. So then you took over what classes were left?

Cassie: Right.

George: And the seniors always had the first you got the leftovers. Well, when you’re a senior, I was known now at the top of the league, I could take more. And I knew where I was
standing to be able to graduate and my grade point average and all that and I could have electives I could take. So I elected to take some computer classes. Well, I found that was easier for me than my electrical engineering.

And so I got A's in them all. I even wanted to take some classes. They didn't offer, so I took them as independent studies, like one or and so the the prof I had that was grading us maybe had four students. Not enough to hold a class, but he could perform assignments and give us a textbook.

Say this is what you need to do and requirements and get credit for it. And I got A's in all those. So when I did actually graduate, my first job was for the summer was I got a job over at General Motors while I was finishing up my Master’s.

I worked at General Motors Proving Grounds as a computer programmer. And they hired me because I had the engineering background to interact with their engineers on the proving grounds. But I had the knowledge and could program the computers that they had in their building.

Cassie: So it was a perfect mix of what you had been doing in your college career.

George: Correct. Now, when that fall came around, they had an opening in their department on the campus here. They had three programmers, and one of them quit to go off in the industry for a higher paying job. And they had an opening, and they actually had two of the people left out of the three and so I was offered a job to come back here at a slight salary cut, but I saw that I was a better fit here than I was at my General Motors job. So I came back here and started around the first week of October in ‘68.

Cassie: Was your dad retired at that point,

George: No.

Cassie: So you were both working here at one point?

George: We were both working here. There is a comment I’ve met to look it up and I haven’t really found it or whatever. If I recall right, there was a comment in the Gazette. It was a small article around the time I got hired where I was, the board of trustees approved my position as being an employee. And there was someone at the Gazette who wrote an article, it’s probably about an inch long, saying that there’s now going to be a problem with the mail department at Western because they won’t know… they have two George Kohrman’s… where to deliver the mail to or something to that affect and yeah (Both laugh). And so but our middle names are different, so it means I’m not a junior. As a result of having a different middle name.

And I won’t spend much time, this is not the appropriate time to get into my dad’s career here, but not only was he the first dean of his area, which is now called the Dean of Engineering. The name has changed because of alignments of the departments have all changed a lot. But he led a lot of neat, good departments like the Department of
Occupational Therapy is nationally recognized. Now it’s in the Health and Human Services Department. The College of Aviation was underneath him when he was the dean. Paper Science was underneath him, which is also nationally ranked. It's on the top four schools in the nation. So he had a lot of departments that he reported him that have national ranking.

It's not just him. It’s he had good staff, he had good programs that he was nurturing along. A number of areas he had is now no longer on the books. Some of them are actually in the College of Business, and there’s at least one that’s in the College of Education.

So as the university is realigned, their deanships and their colleges, some of his has been moved over. So now the College of Engineering is specific engineering type of activities.

Cassie: And how did he feel about you starting to work at Western? Was he-

George: He was very, very supportive.

Cassie: That’s good.

George: He actually gave me the heads up that this job was in the computer center at Western was open and actually put a good word in for me, I guess, to get me the job. Besides, it's not as if the person that hired me, my first boss, didn’t know me because he was my mentor in terms of the coursework I was taking.

Cassie: Yeah, so he already knew you as a person as well.

George: He already knew me, but I was not aware that the position was opening up, was available.

Cassie: Until your dad told you.

George: Yeah, but that started a 46 year career for me here as an employee.

Cassie: Wow, so you both finished your careers out at WMU then?

George: Correct, my dad was forced into retirement because in his years, you could no longer be in a position of leadership at the university past the age of 65.

Cassie: Really?

George: You could work up until you’re age 70. Now they don't have any age limit. If you want to work until you’re 90, I guess now you can do that. But in my dad’s years, the limitation was 65 for administrator and 70 for a teacher, instructor or professor.

And so when he reached 65, he had to step down from his deanship. He had been here, I think, about 23 years at that point. And then he stayed around for another year to teach some shop math classes for people in his area. And he did that as an instructor for this last year before he officially retired. I’m going to guess it’s around 1974. So there was about a six year period when we were both employed here.
**Cassie**: Wow, yeah.

**George**: They named the building after him in, I think, 1979, so several years later. That was a result of a lot of his staff and coworkers lobbied the board of trustees and administration to recognize him in naming the building after him.

Because my dad did a number of things in his position when he was a dean. And the current Kohrman Hall was one of the projects he lobbied for and worked on getting all his departments that he had, most of his departments, into one building when that was built with his leadership and got done.

And another major thing that got him, I think, major recognition was that he started a project in 1960 called the Nigerian Project where he helped establish a college in Nigeria, Africa. And he was involved with that for eight or nine years where he sent professors over there and he made a trip every year for he made ten trips in a ten year period over there to foster that along.

And so that was a big feather at his time in Western's cap as far as our international activities we were involved in.

**Cassie**: So were you there for, was there an opening or unveiling of Kohrman Hall?

**George**: Yes.

**Cassie**: And were you both there?

**George**: Yes, I don't have many pictures, but his portrait was created and a plaque was created. They were put on the wall outside in the hallway outside of his office. Those were all removed when the College of Engineering moved out to BTR Park in around 2002 or 2003.

**Cassie**: Right.

**George**: So those were removed. So his portrait is out there now. I have asked what happened to his plaque that was kind of a photocopy of, photocopy is the wrong word. It's an etching of the official paperwork from, I think, the state legislature or whatever that was. It might be the board of trustees paperwork that dedicating this as a structure in his name, honoring him, recognized the building was built good 15 years before his name was put onto it. So it had a different name from '65 up to '79.

**Cassie**: Okay, and then they changed it.

**George**: They removed it, the wording off the building to put his name on it now. And then they put a plaque inside to commemorate that this was happening by the board of trustees had given to bestow this honor. And all that's been removed. But yes, I was there. It wasn't a big deal, but it was-

**Cassie**: Pretty cool?
George: When I retired, I asked instead of having my retirement party over in the Oaklands, which is a lot of them happen in that location. Some have happened in the Bernard Center and so forth. But I thought it was fitting that the space my dad’s office was in had been opened up into being kind of display room for the home economics. I guess it’s now called the Consumer Family and can’t think of the right proper name there. It used to be the home economics department.

They do a lot of dress making, pattern making, creating clothing, and they use that as a studio to display their wares, activities the students done. So I had my retirement party in his old office.

Cassie: Wow, that’s cool.

George: So it wasn’t just his office. Some of the walls had been removed, but where his office was and where his secretary was and some of his assistant.

Cassie: In which building?

George: In Kohrman Hall.

Cassie: In Kohrman, okay.

George: Yeah, it’s a quarter of Kohrman Hall. That’s on the ground floor. That’s where the dean’s office was. So that was fitting to honor him anyways, I looked at it.

Cassie: Right, yeah. And so you spent practically all of your career then here at Western, right?

George: Yes.

Cassie: How did that position change and grow?

George: People would ask me, when am I going to retire? And I didn't retire until I was 70, so I enjoyed working at the university. And I’d say, I've been here since second grade.

I put in over 63 years here, and when I did retire, I'd been here 63 years from the second grade on. And I said, it's my family. You get up and you go to your family. What do you leave your family for?

Cassie: Right, we’re your home.

George: Retirement, yeah, you're home.

Cassie: Right, and how much time you spent on this campus and the other one.

George: The whole campus.

Cassie: Yes.
George: Not just this building, but the whole campus, I consider as part of my family, it's like your child. You don't just walk away from them.

Cassie: Right.

George: And so I want to say it was hard, but yet I was looking at.

Cassie: A bittersweet moment.

George: Yeah. I was trying to make it to 50 years, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. I got 46 years in, and four years later, I told my wife, I said, I don't think I could have made it to 50. The last four years would have been very tough, but I don't regret it. I made it to 70, and I had a great staff. And for other interviews here, there's a whole line of things I can talk about from '68 to when I retired.

Cassie: Right.

George: Dealing with the computer field and what my contributions have been to that. And while I was doing that, I had the privilege of being in every one of these buildings. I've been in this attic, I've been in the tunnels underneath this building.

Cassie: The tunnel that ran to West Hall?

George: To West Hall, and I've been on the tunnel that went from West Hall to the Oakland gym.

Cassie: Really? I didn't know about that one.

George: It's still there.

Cassie: So that goes under Oakland Drive?

George: Oakland Drive, yeah.

Cassie: Wow, interesting.

George: It's made out of brick, so it's not in the best of shape.

Cassie: Yeah, and you've been in the attic here?

George: I've been in the attic here. I've been up in the cuppola a while.

Cassie: Is your signature up there as well?

George: Legitimately (Both chuckle). In the process of remodeling this building, they left a couple of the steel beams that cover some of the support of this open area we have up here. They needed to add a number of steel beams across, and they had them out in the parking lot and invited people. There was a couple of weeks that they invited people, allowed them to write their signatures on the beams before they got put up.
Cassie: So you put it, okay.

George: So, yes, I didn't put my signature in the attic at the time of the attic, but I put them in outside when they were in the parking lot. And they were invited as kind of an alumni activity that was available to them if they will so choose.

Cassie: Okay.

George: And so I so chose to make sure my signature was up there. There are a number of signatures up there of my classmates, and I’ve taken pictures of them and shared them with them, saying, “You did something you weren’t supposed to do,” (Both chuckle) but…

One of my roles at the university was building the campus communication network. And so it required us to run wires, both copper wires and fiber optic wires every place. We were also trying to extend our network from an educational standpoint down to the Math and Science Center, which is below the hill here at the old Central High School.

And so, yes, I actually scoped out the cuppola below as a possible place to put a radio signal transmitter to beam it down to the school below us here. We ended up doing it, but not from that location. I think we ended up using a spot off from the top of West Hall to send down there.

And the first year or two, we added them to our campus network so that students down there could have some computer exposure.

Cassie: And was that what your position always entailed was dealing with the electronics and computers on campus? Or did it ever evolve into other things?

George: The first three years, my office was in Wood Hall and my title was Assistant Programmer. So I wrote code and I basically aided both graduate students and undergrad students and faculty on anything that they wanted to do with using the university’s computer. And so I was the interface between them and getting computer work done.

In 1970, we moved to Rood Hall, our facility, and it exploded in size and such that I became not the one main contact to connect to, but we divided our department up in four activities. Someone in charge of the operating systems or the computer system, someone in charge of user services they interacted with the community to get work done, there’s a person that had to deal with running the computer and the staff that kept it running all the time and so forth, that was my title. I was director of operations. That took care of keeping the facility running and the machines running. And all the students we hired to act as consultants and the terminals that were used for the labs, in effect, all fell under my area of responsibility. I did that from roughly 1970 to about 1990, 1990 my title changed, it included the campus network.

Up to about 2003, I took on the title that included also the video systems and the phone systems. So when I retired in 2015, my title was the Director of Voice, Data and Video Systems on the campus networks, on the campus infrastructure.
**Cassie**: Sounds like that expanded a lot in the 90s and 2000s, must have just changed quite a bit from your earlier years in your career.

**George**: It changed a lot, and I shouldn't get into it now, that’s another talk.

**Cassie**: All right, yeah.

**George**: But in 1988, Western was part of a state of Michigan organization called Merit. Merit was formed by Michigan, Michigan State, and Wayne in 1965 or ’66, Western joined it in 1979.

So I had only been here 10 or 11 years when we actually officially joined them, although we were working with them from the day I started here. But 1988, our organization applied for a national grant for $2 or 3 million a year for five years to build not only statewide network, which we already was building.

But a national network, we could talk to other colleges. And we were given that grant in ’88, five years, which was going to expire, say, ’93 or ’94, I can say ’94. The grant was going to be over with. Well, when ’94 came, the government said, we can't fund you anymore, you're on your own. Well, we couldn't operate it, we’d be in the red if we did. We didn't have the money for it.

**Cassie**: Yeah.

**George**: So we said we asked for a sixth year and we would try to make it functional, continue. They gave us a sixth year on this grant so we could pay our staff that built this for us.

**Cassie**: Right.

**George**: At the end of the sixth year, they were no longer funding it, so we changed the name and we stepped out of the project totally. In other words, we no longer had any responsibility for it, we de-invested ourselves from this national network and turned it over to others to run what we had built. We had created this structure and the name got-

**Cassie**: But it wasn't fully operational or it was-

**George**: Oh it was operating. Over that five years, we were talking to Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, all over the country, okay?

**Cassie**: You guys just couldn't afford to keep it going-

**George**: Keep it running. Right.

**Cassie**: Okay.

**George**: The grant was paying for salaries for people that helped build it.

**Cassie**: Right, okay.
George: And we still needed people to continue running it.

Cassie: Right.

George: Which we didn't have the money for. So, we de-invested ourselves from it and turned it over and created an organization that would make it run. Now, that network in 1995 is called the Internet.

Cassie: Wow.

George: I was not a voting member on the board of directors, but Western has a member that is of that organization that is the voting member of the board of directors. It's only state colleges for Michigan are the only ones that member of this organization. And I was at every board meeting from roughly 1985 on as the technical advisor to the voting member for Western.

So, yes, I've been on the ground floor, I've seeing a lot of things happen.

Cassie: Right, yeah, in the age of the Internet, which we are now deeply in, some would say.

George: So I would say 99% of the students here do not know that Western's participation in development–

Cassie: Creating the Internet, right.

George: Creating the Internet.

Cassie: Because if I remember correctly, it started a bit with the government, but then it was really the universities and colleges that brought about the Internet, is that correct?

George: The government itself only supplied money. Our organization called MERIT, which is an acronym for Michigan Education Initiative Triad or something, it's an acronym for a Michigan agency. That agency was formed back in the 60s to try to save money. Michigan students used Michigan State's computer, Western could use Michigan's computers.

And so back in 1968, when I was still a student, I was punching up programs here on Western's campus, but taking them over and running them at night at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor to get my programs run because Western didn't have the computers to run it on. So they were letting me use their resources to take my college classes. It was the purpose behind this group.

Cassie: Wow.

George: And by the end of the 80s, there was a lot of theories and a lot of techniques to create a better network nationwide, but no one had built it yet.

So our state took the leadership to pull together a group of people, which was MCI, which was a company that had already put fiber optic wire in the ground from state to state. IBM,
which had built some computers. We got IBM to give us computers, and we got MCI to give us some of their fiber, and we got the government to give us some money to hire programmers to program IBM computers to act as routers.

And then these computers that have been programmed as routers could be distributed in different states, in different schools to connect to the fiber to create a national network. I'm oversimplifying what took place.

**Cassie:** For the general public who does not know as much about computers technology, yes.

**George:** Exactly. So, I'm not gonna say that Michigan or Western or the state of Michigan schools invented all the techniques or invented the protocols or invented the things to build it, but I will say that we should be given the credit for building it.

We actually built it with a collaborative basis of knowledge that was known about across the country on small scales. And we made a nationally implementation of it, and then we created the organizations that kept it going after we stepped out of it.

**Cassie:** Right, and I believe we have about like 15 minutes left or so.

**George:** Sure.

**Cassie:** But there was a question I wanted to ask because I noticed this theme throughout. Starting in second grade until the end of your career, it seems as if a lot of your student career and then your career later on working at Western was heavily impacted by this sense of community and collaboration at WMU within the community here.

But then also collaboration between, as you were saying, working on, starting the invention of the Internet and everything. These are very collaborative things, it sounds like. And how do you think that sense of community shaped you in your career?

**George:** It's a good question, I don't know. I would say that the more I was involved in each one of these projects and there's lots of them, and I've tried not to pull out of all the projects I've handled since I started here in 1968.

**Cassie:** Right, it'd be too many.

**George:** It'd be too many and that's another hour or two discussion, that is for another interview. And there's lots of them I'm proud of, but it built my confidence. I have a lot of things that I'm not proud of in terms of my academic capabilities, but I've learned to live with them and have lived to deal with them. And actually, the things I am capable of doing very strongly, I've been able to enhance.

In other words, I'm not a public speaker; I don't go out and promote, I don't write papers, I don't do a lot of extension of that case because of weaknesses in the reading and writing areas. And I'm not a good person to get up and make presentations at conferences and so forth, but I have a mechanical aptitude, I feel very high and strong, I have above average
ability in math, but I’m not a math wizard. But yes, when it came to math courses that use math in my engineering programs, I got A’s in most of them because I’m in the detail.

So, as I took on my responsibilities here at Western, yes, I’m very proud of a lot of things that I did accomplish to seeing it get done. Everything the last things, great things I did before I retired was, I kinda would say I’m the father behind the wireless system at the university.

We were the first school at our size in the nation who had wireless campus campus.

**Cassie:** Which has been in great use, especially today with COVID-19. We relied heavily on this wireless network to have a virtual world.

**George:** The wireless system here, I basically brought it to university out of the budget I had been operating under and created. And then I had Dr. Floyd call me in the office, his office, with about two days notice and saying. My boss told me, he says, Floyd’s gonna wanna see and you’re all in his office tomorrow. I said, okay. He wanted to have an explanation from me, what I was doing with this wireless system I was playing with.

Not personally myself, but I was the brains behind it, and I was the one having my staff build it and use it and create it. And with that, he offered to fund me a million dollars to get it done for the whole campus within a year.

**Cassie:** Wow, were you successful in getting it done within a year?

**George:** Short answer, it was probably eight months, six to eight months later, we had it done.

**Cassie:** Wow.

**George:** But he had a big party twelve months after he gave me that challenge and publicized and called the media and made a big deal about it. But no, I’m not a person to be up in the spotlight, my dad was not a person to be in the spotlight.

If you try to go back in the archives and get my dad’s picture, you won’t see him a lot. He was always the guy behind the camera taking pictures of others and submitting those pictures that he took to the news and publication services to be serviced.

So, there’s not a lot of photographs of me or him and others in all these things. We might be occasionally in these things, but that was not our forte. We basically are interested in building things for education, for the betterment of students, for teaching. And that’s been our drive.

**Cassie:** And it's now your legacy, it sounds like. Not just Kohrman Hall, which we can physically see, but the wireless network that students are operating them today.

**George:** As you’ve seen, if you go back and think about where computing was in 1960 and where it is today, you can imagine I’ve been through a lot of different changes. I mean, 1980, we didn’t have personal computers.
Cassie: Right.

George: Okay. Yeah. There's a big difference between 1960 and 1980. Well, we didn't have personal computers, so what was going on in those years? What was going on from 1980 to 1990? Is about, I was stringing fiber optic wire on this campus in 1984. No one else was doing it in town. I mean, it was unheard of.

Cassie: Right.

George: But with a challenge and with my engineering, electrical engineering knowledge, I could bring that skill set to my office at Western in the computer world and promote it. Where if I had an English background that just was good with computers, that would not have happened. That would not have happened in '84, it might not even happen in '94.

So I like to think I was bringing leading edge technologies to the campus, and it was not for me, it was for you and other students. And they thought, well, that's what all colleges have. As we were preparing to build the computer center in '89/'90 time frame, my boss took a number of us to Boston College, Boston University. What took us out to those acres we wanted to go to, actually go to MIT to see what they were doing.

On the way back, we stopped at Penn State to see what they were doing. And one of the department chairs that was with us taking this tour of these other schools. Sat down with me and next to me in the airplane and said, “George, I did not realize how much advanced you guys are on our campus. Western, is so much more superior than all these other schools we just visited.” And so that was a nice compliment to hear from his perspective. Now, I'm not gonna say we were better off than MIT. Part of the reason we were going out there is we knew that they were a leader in this field and so forth.

But what you were seeing is that the big hype you would see with computing at all these schools, was really only available to the graduate students, not the undergraduates. And if you looked under the carpet of what were they giving to their freshmen and sophomore at these schools, was nowhere close to what we were already giving our freshmen and sophomores.

Cassie: Wow.

George: As an example.

Cassie: That's where the difference was, right.

George: And so, that's advantage of being a large school, but not too large.

Cassie: Right, yes, a medium pond.

George: But no, I have a lot of memories here. They're all good. The space we're having this discussion in was the library for the elementary school. So we'd come up here for every other day, or probably at least twice a week for library time, and librarian would read we
were in the early grades. They'd read us a story and a couple of chapters of a book, and then next week they'd get the next couple of chapters.

**Cassie:** Wow, I imagine it looks a lot different now as the Hall Archer Pickard room than it did as the library.

**George:** But a book called The Borrowers, which is a couple of little people or mice or whatever lived in the walls of the house. Always borrowed things from the things of the house they were living in and they were called the Borrowers. It's a small children's book, that's another activity.

Two other activities in the elementary school, every year there was a small bookstore in the Marlboro Apartments downtown on Level Street in the basement of it called Athena Bookshop, their bookstore. They always would come up here and set up ten tables in the rotunda and lay out books. And there were books for each grade, for first grade and now this table would be second grade, third grade and fourth grade and to try to promote books for the kids to buy, it was a sales opportunity.

But again, the books were being brought into the rotunda for us to see. Also, the college education would use probably 40 tables in the gymnasium down the other end of the building here, in the summer for summer school. For their teachers, future teachers, all the different publishers would come in and set up displays of textbooks and math books and reading books and so forth.

And that was interesting to go down there and see all the books that were being promoted and activities from vendors. That was not during the school year, that was done during the summer school. That was a side activity I got exposed to from being up here in the buildings.

During Christmas, we had a family member that was family that had her children went to the school here. They ran a tree farm, so they had always donated a Christmas tree that was probably 40ft tall, 30ft tall that was in the rotunda and they, we would do plays around that tree.

Other words, when I was in the second or third grade, we were we'd put little jingle bells on our shoelaces. And if you have put three jingle bells in your shoelaces and you have ten kids doing that and you kind of skip in. So, it had a very good activity in terms of being festive around the tree. I thought I had a picture of the tree or part of the tree, but I do, but I don’t know where it’s at.

**Cassie:** That’s all right.

**George:** So, we had all kinds of events that took place in the rotunda. And what other things do we do in the basically when you had several classes involved here, all that activity took place in the rotunda, that became our assembly hall.

In high school, when we had to have 200-300 people in a room, it was not unusual for us to all meet up in the Little Theater and use that as our location for it. We had high school plays
were done in the little theater in the early years, I guess they could have been in the gymnasium down here on its stage.

But once the Little Theater was available, that’s where it became a focal point. And on occasion, once a year, a play was done at the Civic Theater downtown, next across from the park.

**Cassie:** And did you use the gym then? That was on that side, like for pep rallies or anything?

**George:** Yes, that’s where we had our parties, you might say.

**Cassie:** Sock hops.

**George:** Yeah, that was done there. Our basketball games were done either in Oakland gym or the University Reed Field House, as far as our basketball games.

**Cassie:** That was fairly nice, having the resources of a university as a high school or junior high being able to use those.

**George:** Our football games typically took place at St Augustine's Field, which is across the street from the Red Arrow golf course. That’s where the local amateur baseball team is, can’t think of the proper name of it now, but that’s where the football games are played.

Once when my brother was on the team, once a year they actually rented and used Angel Field Kalamazoo College's football field for one game, and another year they actually used Waldo stadium. We did not play all our football games at Waldo Stadium, it was a special deal when we did. And one year we went to Angel Field. But yes, that’s the advantage, we could try to take advantage of the university facilities when we could.

**Cassie:** And I think we have about five minutes left. Did you wanna show any more photos?

**George:** Just for your own story, since you’re familiar with the campus? It has nothing to do with the interview here, but this is a picture made out of Legos.

**Cassie:** Oh, that’s cool.

**George:** The whole thing is made out of Legos, that’s what my son did.

**Cassie:** Really?

**George:** I asked him to make this part of it out of Legos for me. He said, “Dad, if I'm gonna make this out, I want to include the gymnasium and also the campus school.” What he had to do was this is where he’s in the process of building it.

**Cassie:** Where did he build this at, to, is this home or was this…?

**George:** Yes, this is part of one of his rooms, he started building this thing. My printer screwed up, so I didn’t come out very well. Here’s a better picture of it, it shows you how it’s
forming. He doesn’t have any floors inside of it, it’s all external because once you get done, you can’t tell whether what’s inside it anyway, so why put the effort into it on the inside?

And so, this is from looking from the perspective or the campus school end of it.

Cassie: Yeah, so he made this all out of Legos, how long did it take him?

George: I can’t answer that because you don’t build these things day and night, and you have to…

Cassie: I imagine it took quite a while.

George: You have to get the parts, and so you’re acquiring parts from all over the place and takes you time to get them, but it took a while. And he had it up in the Kalamazoo Valley museum as an exhibit for about four or five months when they had a Lego exhibit down there.

Cassie: Wow, yeah this was in the exhibit hall?

George: This was in the exhibit hall along with other stuff. But it’s so big I’ve tried to talk to people here saying, “Is there a place that could be set up in this building as an example?” But real estate is so hard to come by, no one wants to give up real estate to show it for something that big.

So, right now, it’s in pieces, in boxes, in storage for the last eight years. And if someone could come up with an idea how it could be put on display for several more months, protected, he’s more than welcome to almost give it away if someone wanted to show it.

(Flips page) This was a father’s lunch in the second grade, this is my dad here, and this is me in front of him. All the fathers of the kids, there was actually four pictures. That’s just one of four pictures showing different things going on around the room. There were tables for a luncheon, everyone expected to have their father brought.

This is way out of the play, I don’t know if it was a second grade. This is a different year, player of a different no, this is the same year: I don’t know what grade this is, This might be the fourth grade, I think this might be the fourth grade and there’s a student teacher. There’s a teacher and there’s a student teacher.
Right off the bat, I don’t see myself here. I must have been playing hooky. (Both laugh) I might have been playing hooky, but there is that. But, something else we did in 1956, I would have been around the 6th grade I’m guessing, the class went to Clear Lake Camp, which is Clear Lake is a lake north of Battle Creek.

And we spent a weekend or 2 or 3 days there. And this is, basically a schedule of everything we were gonna do, activities we were gonna get into, things we looked forward to doing in the visit. Basically, there’s a schedule of what activities we’re gonna do.

So, it was a gathering of, we got onto a bus down here at the bottom of the hill in front of Oakland Gym. And they took us to, drove us by bus over to, this particular camp for activity.

When we were in, I think about, 7th grade, we went to Chicago, went to the Museum of Science and Industry. Again, an activity, and there was yet another trip, I don't have it here, I do have it in my files at home. Yeah, we had another trip we made. So, to involve us in activities outside the campus here, it was not unusual, that’s one of the things in this training here is trying to extend our knowledge and us being more inquisitive to things going elsewhere.

Cassie: Which I guess carried over into your career?

George: Correct. As far as… I don't know how well this is documented, in any place, but this particular publication in ‘53 May Festival lists all the way back to 1915 in terms of what was the main theme and it looks like the main themes got rotated about every 5 years.

Cassie: Right, there are repeats, some so often.

George: So there’s about five names in here that are repeated.

Cassie: Right.

George: They pull from as far as the songs that are sung. But, as the kids we made… Pat Anderson, which is not a classmate of mine, but designed this which was used as the program.

Cassie: Well, we’re coming at the end of our time now. Do you have any last notes that you wanted to finish on or any last thought that you wanted to share?

George: Short answer is no, other than I could talk for several more hours in general. But, I'm very proud of the opportunity I had to go to school here. I can't say that I was never in trouble. There's probably some times I was in trouble, like every student in every school, but I think it was, I was very fortunate to have this vocation as a place to learn from.

I had great classmates over the years. Sorry to say a number of them have passed away I know this already, but we've all… and I know there's a lot of great people in the community have come out of this, out of the school. But, I'm sorry to see that, for the benefit of the other
people that they didn't get a chance to see the saving of the Oakland gymnasium portion of this building, or the training school, they were both great facilities.

They served their purpose, I guess, for their time being and for their time. And even now, it's hard for me to believe that even though the building was built, the campus school was built roughly 1910. I started here in 1951, which meant that building was only 41 years old when I started using it.

And then you think about the buildings on Western's West Campus. They're 50 and 60 years old, they're a lot older now than what I was experiencing there and I think it's been here and gone. It's hard, but it was a very nice design.

You had three grades on one floor and three grades on the floor; and a room on the second floor, that was for music, and another large room on the second floor there's our art room, and kindergarten, I think, was on the first floor. And the nursery was established about the time I was in junior high.

A nursery school was established down there off the kitchen, one of the rooms off of the kitchen. It was not part of the initial set up, but the philosophy they use for this group, the teaching philosophy of this organization, which I’m not an expert on, so I don't wanna go there in terms of trying to explain.

John Dewey, was a nationally known professor from the University of Chicago promoting a particular style of teaching for learning. It was the basis of what was being implemented here in this school system. But yes, there was constantly an effort to be innovative and learning how to teach and improve the teaching and learning for the next generation what’s going on here for years.

And it eventually disbanded because of, not that the quality was here deteriorating, it was originally built for a laboratory, for student teachers at Western, and by 1965, 80-90% of the student teachers at Western that were getting their practice teaching was happening out in the public school system.

So, it was no longer felt that there was a need to support financially this operation on Western campus when they could put the students out in the community where they were gonna end up getting a job.

So, it’s… I get it, although it's still hard at the time to accept that it was happening.

**Cassie:** Yeah, right.

**George:** But, while I was here, I enjoyed it, and a lot of other students appreciate enjoyed it.

**Cassie:** Yes. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today, sharing some of your stories and the many photos that you have.
George: All this I have is eventually gonna end up in the archives and their belongings of anyone that wants to, in the future, delve into my material. But, no, I know Tom Coyne which was a senior, interviewed me probably 25 years ago, at one point on some aspects. But, when I’ve asked the archives if they have a copy of it, they can't find it, so. No, it was done over in one of the studios in Dunbar Hall.

Cassie: Interesting.

George: And so he didn't actually film it himself, it was done by the studio technicians over there at the time. And so, whether it was put on a tape that the archives wouldn't have understood, and the archives at that time would have been over here in the gymnasium.

And so, whether it got lost in the transfer or whether the technology changed and it's no longer anywhere around, that people will read it and they pitch it. (Both laugh)

I guess, one other thing here. In 2003, we had our centennial. Okay, have you seen the book that was published during that time?

Cassie: Yeah!

George: There's a picture of the trolley car on the front of that book. Okay.

Cassie: I have the book.

George: You have the book?

Cassie: Yeah, I do have a copy.

George: The girls, I think it's all girls on that trolley car. They are students of the high school here. I think it's one of those little trivia facts that no one really knows, I don't think the archives even know it, other than I've mentioned it to them in the past in verbal, but these are high school girls that went to State High back in the 40s when that picture was taken.

Cassie: Towards the end of the trolley's life then?

George: Correct. I came here in '51, the trolley life stopped in '49. So, I never got to see it operate.

Cassie: So close.

George: But the building still existed. The doors were not on it, so I was able to get into it, and I could see the mechanics of it and look down through the open floor down the hill.

The cars were no longer on the hill, but I had been in there.

Cassie: But the tracks were on there.
**George:** The tracks were there, and I was in the building in my younger years. And, a girl that I employed in my office in the computer room, it was her grandmother that was one of these girls.

**Cassie:** Wow, really?

**George:** And so, she was able to give me names.

**Cassie:** She saw the picture?

**George:** She was able to give me names to about half of these girls.

**Cassie:** Wow, that's very cool.

**George:** Which I don't think anyone else has that list.

**Cassie:** No.

**George:** But, I thought that was an interesting fact, that these were not college girls at Western, these were the high school girls.

**Cassie:** Right, yeah.

**George:** That were hanging out and getting their picture taken.

**Cassie:** Yes. Well, I'll stop the recording for us.