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MEMORIES OF GRAND VALLEY STATE COLLEGE 1968-1972

Cindy Hull

When I was first asked to reminisce about my years as a student at GVSC, I felt some trepidation, since the request was made by an English professor from my student days, whose red pen was legendary among students with questionable grammatical and spelling skills. Once I was assured that my essay would not be graded, I relaxed somewhat and settled in for what I thought of as an easy assignment. I immediately began to reconstitute the buildings in my mind: now where were those language labs? But, as I reconstructed the “institution” of Grand Valley, I found that those early buildings, the “commuter” dining hall in Lake Michigan and the Pit in Seidman where I spent too many hours lounging and socializing, were filled with memories of people, events and emotions which have lain dormant for many years. I brought my husband, also a 1972 graduate, into the assignment and found that although we were in different disciplines, we shared many of the same feelings and memories.

Since buildings are more visible than memories, they might be a good place to start. GVSC was then even more a commuter campus than it is now. Although commuters could and did eat in the Commons with the dormies, we seemed to congregate on the Great Lakes side of campus (after 25 years, I still don’t know where north is located on the campus). I remember, vaguely, driving to campus in the dark for my 8:00 a.m. French classes and inhaling pre-class coffee and donuts in the commuter dining room with my husband, then boyfriend. Some commuters rented study carrels, which were located behind the language labs in Lake Superior. These study carrels consisted of a locked desk, book cupboard and narrow coat closet; in the era when backpacks would have been considered bourgeois, they saved us from carrying all of our belongings with us throughout the day.

Seidman House had a comfortable lounge area with a pit surrounding a fireplace. A television set was placed there for awhile, and in 1968 the pit was filled with baseball fans watching the Tigers win one of their rare World Series.

A new university president (Arend Lubbers) arrived and a new library (Zumberge) was constructed during my years at GVSC. Previously, there had been several small libraries located around campus. The humanities library was located in Lake Superior Hall and the sciences library was in Loutit. Without computer accessing, finding research materials was a challenge not appreciated by students today. I remember the smell of the new, nearly empty, library which, for me, permeates the building to this day. Then it was a wonderful, quiet study area away from the noise of the cafeteria and Seidman House.

Yet, GVSC was more than buildings. There was a feeling of being involved in something new and different. I first read William James, although I’m not sure if I grasped the philosophies of education or why a traditional teaching approach was still used. Even then, especially, I didn’t know I was going to receive a B.A. in bas-relief. I now believe that enhanced a traditional assignment should be explored with the students silenced.

My favorite course, Archeology 101, was taught by Professor Jellema. It appeared to me, and hundreds of others, to be part of a teaching. He asked us students to consider the possibility that the chair you sit on was made by a craftsman. He considered the possibility to be that of a teacher in the “real” sense.

My career goals went beyond the archeology, for I was going to be a teacher. I considered anthropology. Doc Fries could have been another of my career goals. He was more radiating in the politics of the Valley, and the civil rights movement had been sweeping across. For example, I remember the rhetorical question, “Is there a time when one is not a liberal?”

Alternative lifestyles were a reality, and students were changing schools.

Liberal ideas (some of which I received in my philosophy classes, and completely different from those obtainable by pressing the button in charge by the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), the faculty was more radical. Students seemed more willing to be heard, and I was. Reminiscing on my past is a way for me to keep on reading for classes, I am an avid reader of newspapers and books. I may even write something down.
something new and exciting. The experimental colleges, Thomas Jefferson and William James, although looked at askance by many, were indicative of new hopeful philosophies of education—education that went beyond the classroom and the traditional teaching and learning techniques. There were jokes about these colleges even then, especially TJC—speculation about whether it was possible for one to receive a B.A. in basket weaving or life studies. But the experiment was exciting and enhanced a tradition at GVSC (and continuing at GVSU) that new ideas can and should be explored and that faculty who are forward thinking are encouraged, not silenced.

My favorite course in undergraduate school was Philosophy 101, taught by Professor Jellema. It was a course that changed my life forever. Jellema introduced me, and hundreds of others, to Plato's _Republic_ and to the Socratic method of teaching. He asked us to think about those things that we take for granted. I remember being asked to define "what is real" and then to defend my answer. "How do you know that the chair you sit in is real?" "Well, because it keeps me off the floor?" He made us consider the possibility of other realities, other forms of government. He was a true teacher in the "real" sense of the word.

My career goals were also shaped at Grand Valley. I entered college, knowing that I was going to be a secondary school teacher. That was a given. Then, I took anthropology. Doc Flanders and Prof Wilkerson introduced me to other cultures, and again forced me to reconsider the "reality" of my life in western Michigan and the possibility of other realities. Through a study abroad program, I was introduced to the Maya of Yucatan, Mexico, and from that time on, I knew that I would not be teaching high school social studies. I was on my way to graduate school. It never occurred to me that I would come back to Grand Valley and teach anthropology, but that is just one of life's pleasant surprises.

Grand Valley, like all colleges and universities across the country, was enmeshed in the politics of the Vietnam war during the 1960s and early 70s. The war and the civil rights movements had a tremendous impact on curriculum and social involvement. For example, I remember writing an essay for Political Science in which I had to answer the rhetorical question, "If Jesus Christ were alive today, would he be in prison?" It was a time when civil disobedience and political protest were contested issues. Alternative lifestyles were explored through the readings of Emerson and Thoreau, and students were challenged to question the status quo.

Liberal ideas (some would call them radical) were also the norm on most college campuses, and complacency was criticized. In 1969, the only free book one could obtain on campus was Chairman Mao's _Red Book_, which was distributed free of charge by the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). I don't know how many GVSC students actually read the book, however, since it was widely suspected that the faculty was more radical than the student body.

Students seemed to take education seriously then. Perhaps this is just old timers' reminiscing on my part, but it seemed that there was much emphasis on reading—not only reading for class, but being informed about current events. All of my friends were avid readers of newspapers and magazines. It seemed important somehow.
on a more realistic plane, it was crucial for students, particularly male students, to succeed in college, for if they did not, the killing fields of Vietnam awaited them.

There have been many changes over the years at Grand Valley. There are more dorms, more apartments, more instructional buildings and facilities. Grand Valley went from a College to Colleges to a University in the blink of an eye. The corn fields have almost disappeared, yet much of Grand Valley is the same. We still have the same president, who provides consistent leadership while maintaining our important mission to students and community. We still have enriching classes and programs. Doc Flanders' summer archeology school continues under the guidance of Doc Brasher. We have increasing numbers of wonderful international study programs which allow students the opportunity to experience diversity and to grow intellectually and in cultural awareness. Although we have lost many of the faculty who enriched our lives, Prof Jellema and Doc Flanders to name only two, some of those faculty who enriched my education remain as a core of dedicated faculty who are now my colleagues instead of my professors. Finally, and most important to me, I still arise before dawn, commute to Allendale and start my day inhaling coffee before classes at Grand Valley.

Among the key persons were Dr. State College, Dr. Zumberge, and Dr. Calvin College, or setting the direction. These persons can make this new college, something.

Certainly GVS and sciences were to be offered, professional school in Michigan indicates, the business administration was a central core of the required to complete the foreign language. And completed the "First" the social studies. Foundation Program of deferring work on the quarter system constituting the social credit was equal and constituted a normal.

But such features simply variations not were found in nearly administration could a way of expressing what would be administration of the first ideas that of roughly 1,500 Michigan Hall, Lake one such college—Michigan Hall—would house.