Ben Terpsma April 28 2015

Kalamazoo Armory

C: It’s April 28 and I’m down in Kalamazoo and I’m with Ben Terpsma. The last time Ben and I talked was in a coffeehouse in Holland, MI after Ben returned from Charleston, SC. So Ben, let’s go right into this: How do you define success in your current job and did GVSU help prepare you for success in your career?

B: It did. After we last met in Holland my career has taken two different paths from where it is. When I returned from South Carolina I ended up in job as corrections officer. My father-in-law was a county sheriff for Ottawa County so while I was looking for a teaching job he said the county is looking for part-time help over there…military background from my time in the Marine Corps before, was something I could handle. Well, if I could handle a classroom of 30 kids then I should be able to handle 30 inmates in a cellblock. That transition actually was very appealing. I worked part-time with Ottawa County for a year and then I got hired on with Kent County.

C: I remember that.

B: For 3 years. So working in a correctional officer facility type thing, my teaching background came in huge knowing how to, like classroom management skills, learning how to talk to inmates like you would a student, learning how to deescalate a situation. I felt more prepared than talking with people who had been through a corrections program. Better prepared to handle working in a jail as a teacher than I would had I gone through a criminal justice program so…

C: Wow!

B: So that was a kind of cool transition just simply because some of those philosophies that you learn through teaching, your “Love and Logic” or your “Choices” and stuff like that so I implemented a lot of that in my cellblock and I always had one of the quietest, easy run, just kind of laidback, no problems type of thing. So I credit Grand Valley a lot for that because that was a huge type thing for me there.

C: Did you mention that to other people?

B: I did a lot with my all other co-workers, our staff there. Some of them started incorporating, the lieutenants, the captains started incorporating those different types of teaching methods and stuff, like, you know, classroom construction. How do you arrange your desks? Kind of the same thing when you start taking into that effect too when they started looking a doing a new addition up there (at the Kent County Jail) of how you manage where groups are and how to separate certain groups like that and I would look at that within my cellblock and I would say, “I would like some of these inmates to be bunked over here. Kind of separate these and keep these over here.” I handled my cellblock like I did a classroom for the most part.

C: That’s really interesting, Ben.

B: It made my life a lot easier so I mean falling back on that part (of my college education) was huge. The degree, itself, helped in getting hired. A lot of employers will simply look at, “Ok, you have a 4 year degree so you get put in this pile. Ok, you have got military background so you get bumped up one more pile.” So I had part-time experience so I got bumped to the top. They didn’t really care so much that it was not a criminal justice degree. It was just kind of a 4 year degree.

C: Right.

B: And that follows over with my time in the military now too. You know you have a 4 year degree and it’s really big for promotion points. The military is really big on education. So just me having a 4 year degree bumps me up quite a bit for promotion ahead of some of my peers that don’t have a degree or just have a little bit of college so that aspect has helped and my time in the military too. I do a lot of office work and stuff now too and when you’re in the military you have to kind of take care, I won’t say take care of yourself but you have to look out for yourself as far as making sure you keep good documents on everything you do, keep track of all your records, keep track of your awards. Paperwork can get lost and stuff so I loved the folders I created while at Grand Valley for yourself when you go into an interview I kind of carried over here so that’s a big thing and I helped a lot my co-workers with theirs too. Just kind of like, “You got to have this folder that you kind of take in and just have right with you if you are even ‘boarding’ or something for a new position here. They might ask you for something that and you just look down and, “Here’s all my stuff right there” and so that’s a big thing and then just the writing aspect. You have to write a lot of memos and do a lot of stuff that way. And then the third thing with the military is that I got to go through the Army Basic Instructor Course. One of my careers paths is hopefully to be, it’s called a “Military Occupational Specialist”, you’re an instructor over at Fort Custer. So I would actually get back into teaching then, new soldiers coming in, a different job basically. That’s kind of on my horizon so hopefully so that’s a first step so it would be kind of nice to do the best of both worlds, stay in the military fulltime and then be able to teach while I’m in there. It’s called a “Regional Training Institute” over at Ft. Custer. So it’s a regional ‘schoolhouse’…

C: Is it an induction center then or…?

B: No, it’s on, it’s at Ft. Custer. It’s called the Pentagon Building or the Ft. Custer Education Center.

C: Ok.

B: And they National Guard members from all over, all over the nation, Puerto Rico, California, Alaska and they offer the different classes and so they have a fulltime instructor staff that goes through and teaches all the different classes and stuff. Kind of my hopefully next stop to get over there.

C: Well, if you need a letter of recommendation, even though we haven’t been in much contact lately I would be more than willing to do that.

B: Yep. That would be a big help. That was kind of, some of the people over there have set me up for that and that’s why I got to go to that “Basic Instructor Course” before going over there. They wanted me to come back over there, knowing that I have that teaching background.

C: Yeah. So it sounds like your education at Grand Valley has been really applicable in a lot of different ways.

B: It has and it has been in areas where you would not thought it would have been. (6:03) “Oh, you’re not teaching and then how is a teaching degree going to help?” Well, it’s, you learn to take what you have and adapt it and adapt it to your new life and you take what you can learn what you can from the past and mold it into your new future. To say that you will completely forget my education and still try and take what I learned and use it to adapt to new jobs.

C: Yeah. So after the corrections thing then what?

B: After the corrections thing they were talking about lay-offs at the jail, (Kent County) and I was kind of like towards the bottom of the seniority list. It was economy, stuff like that, budget cuts so at the time I wanted to keep insurance for the family so it was kind like a big thing. So I looked back into going into the military, you know Reserves, National Guard, type thing. So I wound up talking to a recruiter, “So you have a college degree” so the career path then was become an officer, you have a four year degree, officer path, and go that way. So it was November 2010 that I signed back up in the Reserves, I was still working for the jail. The unit I got attached to out of Grand Rapids was an infantry unit, and they were getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan and they said, “Would you like to stay and be our rear deck commander and take care of the soldiers that aren’t deploying because there is still some that will be attached for this year.” I said, “I’ve been at the jail for 3 years and I can get off work from the jail for a year, you know, take a leave of absence, so this full time and yeah, sure it sounds like a good idea.” So I wound up doing that and putting the uniform back on, like I had back in day when I was in the Marine Corps and doing that full time and getting back into it and I was, like, “Wow, I really, really enjoy this!” So there was some full time offerings that they had posted out there and I put my packet and application altogether and interviewed for them and wound up getting my first job down, doing supply, it’s a supply sergeant role, so it’s kind of like doing logistics for everything for the unit.

C: Right.

B: Out of Ft. Custer so I’ve been doing this full time now it will be four years this August. Part of it was an economy type thing too. The pay was good. I had all my previous time from out of high school when I was in the Marine Corps so it was kind of like, if I stayed in the jail, I would have to work 23 more years before I could get my retirement or I could do another 14 years, at the time and hit my 20 years and go on and do a second career type thing.

C: Right.

B: So now I’m down to 9 years this August so…

C: Wow!

B: and be able to hit my retirement and people say that and I say, “Well, if I had stayed active duty right when I got out of high school, I have friends who have put their retirement packets in now because they graduated in ’95, did their 20 years and so, wow, they are retiring out already so part of me feels a little behind so I guess I’m ahead of some people.

C: Yeah, one of my really good friends lives in Omaha and he was attached to the 89th out of Wichita and he called up to active a month before his retirement date in his mid-50s to 7th Army Headquarters and he got deployed into the former Yugoslavia.

B: Um, ok.

C: But it was after a lot of the combat violence was going down but there was still snipers and he’s walking the streets and we’re doing what we can to help his wife out. They had already inscribed his, the cup he got, you know for his retirement, with the retirement date and everything so they had to replace that with a new one when he finally came back. So he was deployed for 9 months and came back and retired.

B: One of my good friends got out of the Marine Corps and he’s in the National Guard, he went to Yugoslavia that would have been 2001, 2002, somewhere in there, and his wife at the time, he met in the National Guard. Her unit was getting ready to head to Iraq. They were going to swap. He was coming back from a year in Yugoslavia and she was going to Iraq so he transferred paperwork and transferred to her unit basically went straight from Yugoslavia and went to Iraq for a year. So he spent two years over there and a little longer than he wanted to.

C: So, wow! So we basically covered the first two questions, so how has your degree helped in your career, in other words, what skills and knowledge…yeah, you covered that really good. And I think also you got into (question #) 3. What factors led to you leaving your original teaching position? I sort of know that background to that and…you came back here in February, right?

B: Yes, wife was pregnant with our first child. She was having some complications, whether it was homesickness or being away from home, stuff like that so we just decided that it was better for us to get back home so we left down there a lot earlier than we both anticipated (10:59). Like I said, when I came back it was looking for those teaching jobs. It was a hard time and I got a job working in the, also when I was working part time at Ottawa County (jail), working full time at West Ottawa as a security guard there. So I kind of thought that was going to be the doorstep into that. There was a couple of people out of the History Department that were either getting ready to be promoted out, either up to the Assistant Principal spot, there was some openings coming up so I was trying to set myself that way but then fell in love with doing the corrections stuff.

C: Yeah.

B: Wound up getting into that and the other thing, too, was that Kent County pays very well for its Corrections Officers so I was kind of looking at how much I was going to make there versus a starting teacher pay so…

C: Is my memory serve correctly though, after you left down in Charleston, did you still have contact with them? I have some memory that they came up to recruit and…

B: Yep. They sent a team up from the Charleston County School District to recruit at the Grand Valley event (job fair in March of 2008) and I went over there while I was back home and kind of helped them out a little bit and kind of help pitching the school district down there because the school district was really great down there. I kind of got stuck in a, I wouldn’t say it was a bad school, but it was a school where they put brand new teachers or where they put teachers they couldn’t get rid of.

C: I didn’t hear that part of the story.

B: So it was kind of a…that might not be the exact terms they would have used, but when myself and Miss Culley were a couple of the new teachers, you know doing everything we could to get books for these kids and taking them on field trips and then our third partner in the History Department down there would just come in and hand out worksheets and kick her feet up with the newspaper and that’s the kind of help that we got. They transitioned through 3 principals in the few months that I was down there and…

C: And I know the one guy (principal) you really liked. The one principal.

B: Yeah, the one that hired me was one that they kind of brought out of retirement to kind of turn the school around and if it was a politics thing that the school district didn’t like the direction that he was going to change it, that kind of forced him out a little bit and they brought in somebody else that was a young, hotshot assistant principal from some other school and I kind of felt like he played more a kind of puppet role from the higher district down there. And it’s different down there too where, this kind of gets into #4 a little bit here, was one thing I wasn’t ready for was the difference in states where Michigan has, you don’t have those county school districts, like some of those other states do so your school district is really formed around the community that it’s around so you kind of have that community involvement with that school district (in Michigan). There, it’s a large conglomerate of schools under that district. You have that one superintendent and four or five assistant superintendents and 12 different high schools that all fall under this one school district down there and the brighter, better schools that have these ‘blue ribbon’ and higher scores and everything else, they kind of seem to get the money and the technology. They kind of hold them up (for public view) and then the school I was in, “Let’s tuck this one to the side”. It was one copy machine for the whole school that with the humidity down there, if you didn’t have your copies done by 8 o’clock in the morning you might as well just wait because it will start overheating and…and you walk in and it’s, “Here’s your teaching supplies. You get 3 reams of paper. That’s all you get for the year.” It’s like, “Wow”. That part was a little bit more difficult because I wasn’t ready for that broadness of that (power structure and organization) and like I said, I was falling back on the one principal that hired me and he ended up leaving and I really felt on my own down there. It really made it more difficult so that was one thing that I put for #4 as far as how the school (GVSU) could improve a little more was maybe broadening out a little bit more (how education exists in other states). (Interruption so he could process a new soldier)

C: Back on. So you were talking about the differences in the structures of the school systems and how the county-wide systems are a whole different bag than what we see in Michigan.

B: Yes. So when you go out and do your student assisting and student teaching, kind of get a feel for how the school districts work and run and community involvement and it’s different and kind of hard for a university, maybe, to show that. I mean you can’t get into a school district like that and that was just a little bit difficult and the other thing from the History Department too was different views on history or how different sects view history (laughter because we both knew that the South Carolina view on things, like the Civil War or the War Between the States or the War of Northern Aggression was somewhat different between Michigan and the South). When I got down there it was, “Hey, you’re going to start teaching about the Civil War and I’m the white guy from the North and it’s the War of Northern Aggression.” It’s not called the Civil War down there. So that was kind of a big, kind of cultural change down there too and I learned about that with my time in the serving in the military about how the United States is a huge country and all my friends that I have met over the time from different places…I went down to Mississippi earlier this year or last year in August for a 3 week course and you just get to know people from across the nation but it’s almost like you, I wouldn’t say you visit a foreign land but it’s…you have all these different pockets and history can viewed, especially American history, can be viewed a whole lot different from spot to another so that’s one thing (16:40) that kind of took me back a little bit too. I want to teach it from my point of view from how I learned about the Civil War but now they have their cultural influence that they brought up down about how it was different but, hey, we’re from the South. The Northerners attacked us, not…

C: Yeah, States’ Rights and not slavery and, yeah. A whole different take.

B: So, it was just a little bit different. A little more challenging than I was ready for right at the beginning and so.

C: How to present the different perspectives, even within the country. Because we talk about, I video stream one of my former students, an former exchange student who lived with us, and she was raised in Hamburg, Germany and now she lives in Alsace in France and so she talks about how an international viewpoint can change but we really don’t address the differences within the United States so that’s a good thing to be able to talk to our students about. And that’s part of the strategic planning we’re doing is what we can do to help counsel within the Department. So that’s something I’ll bring back to everybody else.

B: The last challenge I had was, I mean I graduated in December (2007), mid-year, but I took that job actually right after Thanksgiving. I met all my requirements and the university kind of let me go early to get down there and that was really hard because you jump right into the classroom then. You don’t have that, “hey, let me get my classroom set up”. I got down there and I had to find my computer because some other person was using it and, you know, I had like a weekend, basically two days to try to figure out how to run a classroom. Smartboards were a brand new thing down there. The district had got a few Smartboards and I had never used a Smartboard back up here before so I’m trying to flip through the manual as best I can and Google was not really heard of much and it wasn’t like you could just get on YouTube or Google and figure out how to use a Smartboard. You know my 6 year old uses a Smartboard in school all the time now and he could tell me more about it. But that to me was the hard part (starting school in mid-year). I think I was not ready for that transition mid-year into that (situation) where somebody who graduates in Spring, has the time, like gets a job in the Summer and then now, “Here’s your classroom”. You have time to get it set up and go over stuff and get your lesson planning set up where it was kind of (in his mid-year situation) like, “Hey, here’s where they (the students) are, here’s the books and here’s the stuff you’re using” and (he makes a gesture like it is all just thrown at him) and “Have at it”.

C: Well, I mean, your case is just really, really exceptional in terms of, you hadn’t even graduated and you jumped into that, but is that a cautionary tale for anybody…but the students know that, and I get this feedback all the time, when they go out to teacher-assist, the first time they are in a classroom, because I had ED 331 this semester, they feel like they’re trying to do catch up all the time because, you know, the classroom environment has been set by the classroom teacher and here they are plunked in in January. So are you saying maybe we advise students, “Here’s all the things you may need to think about if you jump in during the school year?”

B: Yes.

C: Ok

B: That would be the big thing. Those mid-year graduates that do their student teaching in the Fall and then graduate in December. “You know, it’s kind of going to be a different animal if you’re getting right in, if you’re finding those teaching jobs.” A lot of those teaching jobs that I think are open mid-year are the ones that are going to be in those more challenging schools or challenging school districts.

C: Right.

B: Where it might be better to say, “You know finish out this whole year. Get as much subbing in as you can. Get different experience working in different schools but maybe look for that full time job when the school year ends. But that can be hard when the job opens up because you want to get your foot in the door so kind of a double edge sword so what do you do? But maybe the university could prep them (the students) a little bit better of, “Hey, knowing that you’re going in mid-year things are going to be established and stuff, like when you’re talking about with student assisting when you’re doing that, you’re going to start that (mid-year job) with that group of kids in that January because you will do your student teaching the following Fall, like I did and then graduate in following year. But have them know that this is what it would be like in the mid-year type thing.

C: Right. (21:01)

B: Where you don’t have that time to get set up. I remember when I started doing my student teaching too we started earlier and I went to all the pre-conferences and little seminars that the school district did. “Hey, here’s all the new teachers for the year” and…

C: Right because you teacher-assisted in the Winter and student taught in the Fall, right?

B: Fall, right and so before the students even got to school, they were doing stuff. I student-taught at West Ottawa, or, I’m sorry, Hudsonville, and so when I met with my teacher I did stuff in August. I helped coach football while I was down there but a lot of that stuff started before the actual school year started but I got involved with a lot of that stuff before so by the time Day 1 of school started I’d been in the classroom for a good week already. I’d met all the teachers and staff from all the little pre-summer, “Hey, welcome back to school” functions that they did. So that was a nice, easy transition because then I felt, ok, I was ready for the kids to come in because I was ready. I had everything prepped and ready. I went over everything with the teacher before and you didn’t have that pressure of all the kids staring back at you and, “What’s going on?” versus you get down mid-way through something and all of the sudden it’s like (he did a deer in the headlights look). I had to do my first week down in South Carolina doing my ‘icebreakers’ and trying to get stuff set up and, “Hey, let’s just take a break from all the five temporary teachers you had before and regroup.”

C: Yeah, because it was just a matter of a couple weeks and you were off on Christmas break too?

B: Yes. Right after Thanksgiving break, so literally I think I drove down there the day after Thanksgiving, that Friday and started that Monday so I got down there, got into an apartment. Basically slept on the floor that first week until I got a futon and other stuff and jumped right into it and I had Winter Break and…

C: Catch your breath…

B: Yeah. The original plan was the wife was going to stay home for the whole school year and then we were going to figure it out from there and then but she wound up getting pregnant before I went down and we found that out, I think, after two weeks that I was down there so flew home for Christmas and then she drove back down with me to get back down there and so that was a big transition time there so. It was working out really good. She found a good doctor down there. She got a job at a bank down there.

C: Yeah, I remember.

B: And, yeah, just some complications with that pregnancy, and stuff, the first one. So we just decided it was better to…

C: How is your family?

B: Um, good. A little different now since then. Divorced and so, my ex-wife and I, we had two kids together so they are 6 and 3 now.

C: Ok.

B: Then I’m remarried to another service member and she’s got two kids so I went from 2 to 4. But other than that, everybody’s really good. We all get along.

C: How old are the kids from the second marriage?

B: Her two are older. 9 and 12, so 3, 6, 9 and 12 right now.

C: (Laughter. He must have his hands full.) You have the whole spectrum, huh?

B: We do. The 12 year old is a big soccer player so we had the big soccer tournament this weekend. He had another game last night. The 9 year old did a pageant over the weekend. The 6 year old is over all the place and the little one is our little angel. She’s just…she’s the sweet one yet. She’s little though. Give her time. (Looks like he’s invested in his double family).

C: Wow! What good information. Question 5: What types of evaluations, both formal and informal, and you can bring in your military background if you want to, are used to access your classroom teaching and how are these evaluations used to better your teaching?

B: One of the things I’ll pull from the military are AARs, After Action Review. It kind of breaks down into four categories like: What was supposed to happen today? And you kind of have one person who is the leader that brings back home…it’s kind of a peer evaluation type thing. Where you can say, and you can even do this with your classroom, to say, “Ok, class, what were we supposed to do today?” And have someone in the classroom say, “We were supposed to learn about the French Revolution. Ok, what did we do today? And someone else could say, “Well, we started to talk about the French Revolution and then we got sidetracked and started talking about Baltimore with the riots going on right now.” To use a modern day thing. “Ok, well, what’s three good things that we learned today? Well, we learned about this, this, and this. Ok, what’s three things that we can improve upon the next time? Someone could say, “Well, I really didn’t like the handout” or “I didn’t like the PowerPoint presentation” or “This was a little confusing”. And then what we do in the military is that we take that and that AAR, that After Action Review gets put in with a whole big training packet for whoever taught it so if we’re doing a class in the military on “How to drive a military vehicle”, same thing. So next year you might have a different instructor who’s teaching that class. Well, they can take that whole packet, read through it, and say, “The last person who taught this class, here’s what went right and here’s what went wrong, so now I can make sure I can improve upon that.” And then that (AAR) always stays with the unit so no matter who comes they can keep building on that so that now you’re not making the same mistakes. So if you have a senior teacher you can kind of go through and build that, but the big thing with that is that it’s a lot of peer evaluations. And that’s one thing, I kind of wish, looking back, that would have been good, if during the student assisting, student teaching, if you’re to have another student say, “Hey, I’m going to go do my peer evaluation on somebody else” and they come in instead of, you know, the professors coming to watch you. You have another peer that’s in that (situation) come do that because they might…peer to peer, it can be a little easier to talk to versus a professor to student type thing. You might say, “Hey, I’m doing this in my classroom, you should try that.” Especially if you’re both History majors or something like that so that might be something to bring that, so that would be my big thing to better that would be to bring more peer to peer type stuff…

C: Because the only way that we do that right now is in Teacher Assisting Seminar they do “Best Lesson Presentations” and then they do peer evaluations there and there’s a checklist of things you are supposed to do but then I have them write comments and then I send those comments anonymously so they get at least a reaction. I do that in the Methods class too but the template that you mention, though, of those steps, that’s right part of the AAR then?

B: Um, hmm.

C: I like that a lot. I’m not sure, like you said, I’m not sure how much that is replicated (in other school districts as part of their evaluation process), that’s part of this second round of my sabbatical research, to find out what kind of feedback that everybody is getting to help improve.

B: And like I said, that’s a permanent record that doesn’t stay with that individual instructor. It kind of stays with the unit so if you had a soldier that taught that class last year and all of a sudden you had someone else who was going to teach it this year, while it’s like, “I’ve never taught this before”. “Well, hey, here’s this training packet. Here’s the handouts. Here’s the PowerPoint presentation they might have put together. And here’s their notes about what went good and what went wrong”,

and you can go, “Hey, I’ve got a good start and I can tweak it a little bit and make corrections” and away you go. But for the students though too as an instructor you can, even when I teach classes here for the soldiers, it’s almost like that summary at the end of the lesson. “Hey, what were we supposed to learn today? We were supposed to learn how to shoot M-16s. Ok, what did we do? We learned how to shoot M-16s. Ok, did we accomplish our mission? Yep, we learned how to shoot. Ok, what went right? Ok, we all qualified today. No one got shot and we got everything cleaned up on time. Ok, what went wrong that we can improve on?” It’s almost a good way because then you’re getting feedback from your actual students right then at that time also. “Ok, did you grasp what we went over? Was it effective? What was effective and what wasn’t effective for you? So that’s part of the teaching…back to one of the first questions, you know, how the university helped you in your military career, that’s kind of After Action Review that we do with a lot of stuff here of having that review and them repeating stuff back to you to understand if they grasped the concept.

C: Right. And even we get some of that, and that’s some of the discussion within the History Department that, is, let’s say we’re teaching a History of the Civil War course and we know there’s variations between professors and part of that is, the phrase is “Academic Freedom”, but at the same time we have to send our students out with the skills and the knowledge to be able to teach about that, and if people are varying too much then they (the students) aren’t getting that (the skills and knowledge) so the typical thing is that nobody makes it to World War II if they are teaching Recent American (History) and now you’re stuck in the classroom and you have to teach about World War II and you’re teaching yourself the knowledge and the skills about how to approach the Holocaust or any of the military things, all the social and economic and so now going back to the History Department how do we make sure that’s done? (Teaching what our students need to know and be able to do to be successful in their careers) And part of it is, what I think you’re saying is if we created in a more, I think, more programmatic way, more of a way with a better template then it would help to inform other professors teaching the same course.

B: Right. I mean you want to have standards. You know in the military you have regulations for everything, everything! I think there’s a regulation on how to brush your teeth properly, with step by step instructions, but that’s what we always refer to, “What does the regs (regulations) say? What does the regulation say? Well, ok, it says you do your steps. So, ok, that’s what you stick to and where you want to have that with History somewhat but you still want to be flexible. So it’s kind of like the balancing (act). Say, ok, “Here’s our standard that we want to make sure that we’re getting across the board but it still allows the professors to have that bit of flexibility across about how they want to present or teach or approach that subject.

C: Right.

B: So I think that can be always a challenging thing for any type of teacher. I can see that down even down at the high school, middle school, elementary level, how…maybe not so much the elementary because you get a lot of the standardized testing stuff too now of, math is a big one. Our kids come home with right now and it’s, “What are you doing? This is the way we’re learning it.” You know us parents, “That’s not how you do it! This is what my teacher taught me. This is what we’re learning.” I mean I know. Then we have to get back online and go to the school’s website and there’s the math center and click on that and watch these videos or these little things and then, “Oh, that’s how they’re teaching now!” and you have to try to relearn yourself how to do it and it’s confusing but it’s all those new kind of standards that they’re trying to get across.

C: I remember doing that with Algebra with my son with a couple decades removed and he’s coming home and saying, “I need help with this” and I’m going, “Same subject title, not sure how to teach this” and so.

B: I had fractions the other day and the 9 year old came home and needed help with fractions and, “Hold on, let me finish doing this real quick, you know and I’ll come over and help you”, and I’ll get on my phone and Google and like, “How do you divide fractions?” Quick refresher. “Oh, yeah, ok, that’s what you got to do. All right, I’m good now. Let’s go. Dad, you’re so smart! How do you remember all this stuff?”

C: Thanks for the phone. Is there anything else you want to add about evaluations, formal or informal?

B: I’ve got my notes up here so I’m (I sent the interview questions to all the subjects ahead of time so they had a chance to think about what they were going to say.) (32:41) Talked about some of that stuff. Talked about that. A little bit too, as I can of go back on this, with your teaching certificate, I guess, kind of after I left the university, I felt, I don’t want to say, “left alone” or whatever but most of the emails and traffic I would get would be from the Alumni Association and, “Hey, donate money and come do this” and stuff and not a lot of follow up on the Continuing Education credits to go from that, what’s the right word? Temporary teaching certificate to a more permanent one, type thing. That’s always something that’s been in the back of my mind that, “Hey, I’ve got 9 years left in the military, of getting back into teaching once I hit my 20 years active duty and retire. I say “retire” but I’m on to a second job but I got enrolled in Detroit University in the Master’s program. They have an online Master’s program down there and it’s a very military friendly school and between the tuition assistance and everything else so I’m trying to get into that. My wife right now is trying to finish up her Bachelor’s so we’re kind of focusing on that a little bit but that’s one thing that wasn’t added onto the questions was, “Hey, great, you graduated and moved on…(break for an office interruption) and I didn’t get more information from the university (Grand Valley) because and I didn’t actually seek it because I was doing other things with my career too but maybe a little more proactive on the follow-up, like, “Hey, what are you doing to get your continuing education credits to go from that temporary to the permanent certificate and “Here’s what the university is offering to do that continuing education credits”, and kind of go that way so. And that was the question I had for you, too, is what would I have to do to get back into a teaching career type thing with my certificate past the time?

C: The easiest thing to do would be to contact the College of Liberal Arts and Science CLAS Advising Center and there’s a contact person, I’ll give you her name, Juanita Davis. I can write it out on one of my cards for you. And they try…theoretically the university, and I can’t speak because I’m not ex-military, is ‘military friendly’, so they try to work with people as much as possible. So it’s been cited as being ‘military friendly’ university so I guess if you tried to contact them and I’ll give you the contact information and then find out if they really are or not and report back (to me). The good thing is, from what you just said, that’s one of the things from our strategic study to reach out to our grads and make more of a contact to help them, whether you call it a transitional period or whatever, to say, “Ok, even though you’ve left us, we’ve got a big chunk of your money, we still really want to maintain contact.” And that’s why the university supported me going out to make contact with 28 former students because they really think, they’re changing their focus and they really want to say, “We’re not just here to kick you out the door, take your tuition money and you drop off the end of the universe.” So when the History Department made a commitment to that and the university backed my idea of going back to out to contact people again, I see that as heading in the right direction.

B: Changing in the right direction. So I said, reading over the directions, it’s kind of like the one thing I got contact from you and stuff like that and I talked to Professor Edwin Joseph, I don’t know if you know him.

C: Yep. Sure do.

B: I know him a little bit. We were actually take our ‘honeymoon’, the second wife, down to Trinidad. So we had that all planned and I guess a good friend of his was the Minister of Tourism down there and so we were back and forth (communicating) and some other training missions came up so we never made it down there so he was one I kind of kept in contact with too but they got me thinking they (the university) never really sent me anything formally from the university of a kind of follow-up, kind of like, “Hey, how are you doing?” That transition away from the university was just kind of a…you look at with the military and we have a lot of programs with soldiers, whether you’re in for two years, three years, twenty years, there’s tons of transition programs. How do you transition from military life back to civilian life or coming back from deployment to OWA? (Howell)? (Home?) That’s like, what you said too, the university doesn’t want to have, “Look, we took your money, here’s your degree and out the door you go.” The military is kind of like the same way. It’s not say, “Look, you want on deployment and here’s your awards and here’s your KD? 214 (at video 37:27) and see you later.” I think it would be a good thing for a lot of the students to, “Where are you with your career? What are you doing to…” If goes back to what I was saying you have to look out for yourself and you have to learn to look out for yourself to make you’re doing stuff but some people just need that extra little, “Hey, ok, how many continuing education credits do you have right now? Well, I have four. Well, ok, you have to have so many by this time to get this certificate going so”, maybe come up with a game plan or something to kind of help them along. I think that keeps those people in those teaching professions maybe a little bit longer and helps the university out too because you have good teachers that, especially out of state, to say, “hey, we look, we got so and so from Grand Valley, great teacher, you know has been great for us. We want to recruit from that university to get more students that come down here so.

C: We have a pipeline right now to the west side of Houston. It’s still exploding and the South is growing.

B: I have a commander from the 33rd when I was over at Ft. Custer. He lives down in Texas and flies back and forth and he’s an engineer and it’s a big thing, all the jobs down there and…

C: We have 6 Secondary Social Studies majors in a single high school at the Cypress-Fairbanks School District in the northwest side of Houston and someone from the College of Education told me just two weeks ago a quarter of all the elementary teachers in one of the elementary schools in Ogden, Utah are Grand Valley grads.

B: Oh, wow.

C: So both Ogden, Utah and Cypress-Fairbanks School District in Houston send recruiting teams…

B: ‘Michigan has a lot of fresh teachers coming out and not a lot of teaching jobs so let’s start pulling more than one or two. Let’s get a group of them of them that probably know each other and that makes the transition a lot easier.

C: We have another half dozen or more outside of Phoenix, in Glendale, Arizona too.

B: A lot of the Southwest.

C: But I appreciate the comment about trying to follow up with our grads because I think that’s something that the Department is definitely interested in. Well, I know it’s something they are definitely interested in doing. Pearls of Wisdom question: I think you’ve hit upon this a lot of different ways but is there anything you would like to say now about now, here’s people in the classroom…I video stream into my Capstone (class), in fact I’m probably, I’d be interested in doing that with you or if you could actually show up in person that would be great too but “You shouldn’t leave the university, you leave this, until you should really know about this or think about this”.

B: Yeah, just like I kind of hit on before, just be prepared for a completely different world than what you have had when you were student assisting, student teaching. West Michigan in itself is different than the east side of the state. I know the university tries to have the different types of diversity when you do your student assisting and student teaching but just know it’s a whole different animal once you get out in the ‘real world’ of teaching out there and my biggest thing was I was not ready for the lack of support and technology, and I guess, in better terms, just support of, you know, you have these great, grand ideas of “I have this great teaching lesson I’m going to do. I’m going to do this, this and this” and all of a sudden you get to a school where it’s your job and all you have is an overhead projector and that’s it. Now how do you take that great lesson that you did and what do you do with it. Or, like in my case, I couldn’t make copies of anything. Ok, now what do you have students do? So, I didn’t have a projector so PowerPoint kind of went out. We had Smartboards but I wasn’t spun up on Smartboards whatsoever so that was my biggest challenge there was to make sure everybody was able to adapt to, “Hey, this is a great lesson plan but what if you don’t have the technology or the resources that you want to do this, now how do you teach this?”

C: So, maybe like, we have Smartboards now in Mackinac Hall but because so many students go through that (room and the program), they just get bits and pieces (of how to use the tech). We don’t have a Smartboard training class.

B: Right.

C: So they pick up bits and pieces but back to the lack of technology, maybe say, “Here’s how to use the tech, but here’s the least common denominator and you better be able to do, how to replace the bulb on the overhead projector because that may be it.

B: I guess the other thing to is just slow down and take your time when you’re looking for jobs and make sure it’s a good fit. Don’t just jump on the first thing that’s out there, especially if you’re looking out of state. I was offered two different spots when I was looking down in South Carolina there and one was at St. John’s where I taught and I can’t remember, the other one was the west side of Charleston a little bit more. That school district had a lot better established full time staff teachers there but it was in a rougher part of town. A little more of a rundown school than where I went to…

C: It looked nice.

B: It was newer built school. It looked nice, but the staff wasn’t as established and looking back I think things would have been a whole lot different had I been at the other school versus that so don’t get ‘bright-eyed’ with all the shiny things they might throw in your face. Really look at it and have a real good staff you can look at when you’re looking at those jobs.

C: Be prepared to ask questions.

B: Yes.

C: And then maybe there’s an informal interview that you can talk to people besides the principal who’s trying to sell you.

B: Yes, exactly. Lot of that is just it. Especially those school districts that are in desperate need of teachers they’re going to show you the best and the brightest and make it look like it’s “Wonder World” and everything is great. But after the interview is done, walk out to your car and wait for him to walk back inside and then walk back inside and start talking to people. Find the janitor, find someone else around there and just, “Hey, what’s going on?” “Oh, there’s fights every day here and there’s this and that or it looks like a rough district but they’re good kids” and kind of find that out. I loved to come talk to them (my Capstone).

C: Ok.

B: Today’s ‘youth’.

C: You’re not that old, Ben.

B: What’s really funny is when you get into the military though, like I said, my age, I’m going to be 38 this year, but a lot of my friends that stayed in active duty, they’re out and getting ready to retire as First Sergeants so they’re looked at as that ‘old guy’. It’s a funny career where you hit your late 30s, like, man, you’re 40, that’s it. You’re the old man that’s floating around so.

C: My friend, Len Kruse, he was, I think he finally got out when he was 59 ½ or something, but he was on the civilian side of the 89th in Wichita too but then he went active whether he wanted to or not, but he was in great shape, I’ll tell you that, better than I am. Anything else that you want to add with the Pearls of Wisdom question?

B: No. We covered about everything. I’m looking at my notes that I jotted down and looks like I went over everything…

C: Anything that we didn’t touch upon with the questions with the last seven? I mean what a fount of information. Holy Cow! You did good.

B: Nothing that I can think about off the top of my head. We kind of got off on a couple of sidebars and talked about some different things. We covered everything that I could think of when I was going over the notes that you sent me the questions so.

C: Ok.