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## UA1B2/1 Clearance Jeanette Interview

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"I chose to come to Western because it was a complete change of scenery. Everyone I know that came to America went to University of California Los Angeles. I did not want to live in the big city. I wanted to totally remove myself from home and that means also my friends from home."

Ed Nguyen is a foreign exchange student from South Korea. He goes by "Ed" because his name has no translation into the English language nor can it be pronounced with English phonetics. Ed took the name of his family's attorney when he applied for a student Visa to the United States. A senior graduating in May of 2004, he now lives in PFT on floor eleven and plans to work in the hotel and travel industry. He hopes to work at Walt Disney World.

My encounter with "Ed" came by a chance meeting in the lobby of PFT. I decided to people watch in order to get a fly-on-the-wall perspective of one spot of Western Kentucky University. Sitting in a chair in the lobby, steno pad in hand, I watched as he demonstrated the ability to move objects without touching them. With intrigue I walked up to him and asked what he was doing. In his heavy Asian accent he explained that he was using his "Chi, his life energy that comes from the earth, through his legs and up through his body out of his fingertips."

I watched as he channeled energy out of his middle finger and moved a piece of paper across the table. He then took a cigarette and stood it on its end and, with a wave of his middle finger I watched as it inched backwards still on its end. He then forced it to fall over and then he rolled it down the desk and on to the floor, all with out blowing

from his mouth or touching it with his fingers. I asked him how he learned to do it and all he replied was with, "It is old technique that takes much practice".

I often wonder how much history walks through the doors of the DUC or what everyone's story is that rides the elevator in PFT. What else is in the backpack of whatever student that checks out a book from the Helm Library? Oh, if these walls could speak...

Taking the Honors Colloquia class challenged me to work in a manner outside of my comfort zone. I spend most of my time behind a microscope in a closet buried in the dark corners of the Thompson Complex. I had to force my self to talk to people and do research in a completely new manner. I found out what the university archives were, how to use them, and what they looked like on the inside. The project wasn't as easy as I hoped it would be. I ran into many obstacles and pitfalls; among them:

- Archive Red Tape
- Finding Interviewees
- Poor quality records
- Time constraint on resources
- Slow progress filtering through data

My methodology was simple: collect as much information as I could about individuals and present the findings in an organized manner. I searched through annuals, archival scrap books, and many other paper sources. The most useful information came from personal interviews. In my field of study, science, personal skills are not a forte. I was a long and bumpy road ahead and I hoped for all to go well in the interview I was to conduct.

## The Interview

There are never many sellout crowds at any women's basketball games much less at Western Kentucky University. Seating in Diddle Arena is usually speckled with less than one thousand spectators watching the Lady Hilltoppers run up and down the court chasing after a "W" in a stadium that seats just over eight thousand. Attendance is low and typically held only by diehard Western Women's Basketball fans. Clarence Howard Jeanette is one such fan that is always in his seat in the "red barn" and is even known to travel with the girl's team whenever his budget will allow for it. Clarence, or "Tuffy" as his friends and everyone else knows him, attended Western in 1947 and 1948, before attending the Bowling Green Business College, now the Gordon Ford College of Business of WKU. He is a season ticket holder with a very unique perspective on WKU basketball and the history of the university.

Western, to the contemporary student, is a very diverse campus with numerous buildings and over 18,000 students. During Tuffy's time at Western, the campus was drastically different. In a telephone interview on February 21, 2004, he paints a picture of Western Kentucky University that a current student could never imagine.

"I came to Western Kentucky University in 1947 after graduating from Bowling Green High School where I played football. I attended Western for one year and then went to the Bowling Green Business College; at the time the two colleges were not part of the same university. Back then the Bowling Green Business College was one of the best in the country. If you were applying for a job in New York City and they knew you graduated from the Bowling Green Business College, you were almost guaranteed a job."



“Western back then was not like it is today. The whole campus had only about one thousand students and the classes were much smaller with about twenty students per class. Because Western was a regional college, everyone just about knew everyone, because they went to high school together. And if you didn’t know someone, you got to know them really quickly. The students were different then, too. They dressed differently: the boys would wear pressed slacks and a nice shirt, and the girls would wear a skirt and a nice blouse. At the Business College it was a little different: all the boys would wear white collar shirts and neck ties. No one on campus wore blue jeans.”

“The students were also more responsible. Money was tight so you went to college because you wanted to, not because you had to. I was at Western after the Second World War, and I remember there being a Veteran’s Club: I don’t think they have a veterans club at Western anymore. Many of the students were war veterans and knew all about discipline. Some of them had to kill other people with their own hands. They didn’t have a problem with going to class everyday or turning in papers. Also, with the class size being so small, the professors knew you personally and were very aware if you didn’t come to class. They wouldn’t ask to see a doctor’s note, but they would ask you to come see them in their office at some point. I remember one girl I used to see from time to time. I don’t recall her name, but she was from Owensboro, KY, and her dad lived in Russellville, KY where he owned a Ford dealership. Well, every few days or so she would be waiting for me outside in a flashy new car and she would ask me to skip my next class and whip around town in it. I wanted to really bad, but I would always tell her “no I have to go to class.” I eventually had to stop seeing her.”

“Getting in to a class was different from today, also. Now the students sign up on the Internet while I had to walk around to each teacher whose class I wanted and ask permission to join that class. The teachers were really nice to you and would let you in if there were any empty spots in the class roster. I liked all of my teachers; they were all good people.”

“When the basketball teams would play, we would go and watch the games. Football was played on a different field than it is now. The football team used to play on a field below the colonnades, but they built a building on that field. The basketball team used to play in what is now the library. We used to call it the red barn. But that wasn’t the first red barn. The red barn was just that: a red barn. I remember when I was young and living on Kentucky Street, my friends and I would break in to the red barn in the summer time to play some basketball and old coach Diddle would run us out of there every single time.”

“Western in 1947 had no campus parking because no one had a car. If you did have a car you would park on College Street or State Street and leave it there during the week. There was no parking problem but there was a transportation problem. We were young and wanted to go out on the town on the weekends. On Friday afternoons some of my buddies and I would stand on the corner of State Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Street at a pharmacy store called CDS #4 and wait there until we found someone going out to McFarland’s near the Barren River. McFarland’s was a dance hall owned by some ol’ gal that would let us come out there and dance to a juke box for \$0.05 a song. We would get a ride out there with someone headed out there and dance the jitterbug and we would slow dance with some of the prettiest little girls. We would stay out there until it was late and then



we would be hard pressed to find a ride back home. We were lucky and found rides most of the time but it was a long walk home sometimes. Shortly after I graduated from the Bowling Green Business College that lady started to sell beer out there and that ended the fun for some of the younger kids that went out there. It turned into an older, rougher place to go, so not many of us went out there any more. Funny thing is I can still jitterbug.”

“Sometimes in the summertime when I was younger we (my friends and I) would want to go swimming and the only pool in town was at Western’s campus. Well, you had to have a doctor’s note to swim there and some of us just wanted to go swimming and not have to go to the doctor so we would just go swim. That would take us down to the Barren River. We went down there a lot and had a good old time. Every once in a while there would be a dead cow that would come floating down the river and we would all jump out of the water and watch the bloated cow float on down and then we would jump back in just like nothing had happened. I don’t know why we even got out but we did.”

“There is a picture I have of some girl friends of mine that lived in Potter Hall when it was a dorm room. The four of them one day decided in the middle of winter that they wanted their picture taken... in their bathing suits. Well, I remember how cold it was that day, all of the boys we had on our ROTC winter coats; it was COLD! That didn’t stop the girls though; they posed in the snow and then quickly ran back in side.”

Western makes its impression on everyone that walks the campus. For some the impression is more lasting than others. Western is to some people a small and insignificant stepping stone on their way through life. For Tuffy, Western is home. The

foyer to E.A. Diddle Arena is like the doorway to his very own bedroom: a place where he goes to relax and be comforted.

Everyone who regularly attends a WKU women's basketball game and sits near half court facing DUC knows "Tuffy". He is friendly and jolly and will talk to everyone. Even today, students on the hill know him as Tuffy. He is even listed in the local phone book as Tuffy Jeanette.

"Tuffy is a nick name that I earned before I can remember. My father told me that he gave me that nickname when I was a little boy because he would bring me home a toy every once in a while and before the day was through I had already broken it. He would say, "You probably think you're a toughie, don't you?"

"Ever since then I have been known as "Tuffy". My friends, my professors, my family and even strangers know me as "Tuffy."

In the interview, I found it difficult at first to coax the interviewee into opening up. He could not understand why someone would be interested in his personal time here at Western. His memory was a little slow in the beginning but after a while the memories began to pour out. Before I realized it, we had talked for nearly forty-five minutes. I decided to wrap up the interview so I could process the information.

Leaving the interview I felt very impressed by our conversation. I witnessed a completely different perspective of the university that I now call home. It gave me a different view through the worn eyes of a little old man over the telephone of the world that he and I shared.



I am brought back to my interest of the fly on the wall. What would a fly have seen in 1950 from the same spot in the PFT lobby? If those two flies were to meet and have a cup of coffee, what would they discuss? How would their perspectives differ? I say again, Oh, if these walls could speak.