

Interview with Dr. Peters

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LP: Hello I'm Lew Peters, that's P-e-t-e-r-s. I'm a professor of Biology at Northern Michigan University. I live at 600 ? in Marquette and my telephone number is 906-225-0487.

Int: Ok, now can you just tell us a little about Dr.

LP: Ok, I came to Northern in 1961. The first time I came to Marquette I was 17,18 it was to go skiing at what then was called Cliff's Ridge, now it's called Marquette Mountain. It was a day in March there was a tremendous amount of snow probably 18 inches of snow and I thought what a great place to live and I then inquired at the University the next morning to see what kind of at that time it was called Northern Michigan College and I meant a person who commented that they were looking for a zoologist and if I was interested I could apply, so I sent in my application materials, transcripts, a few letters of recommendation, a letter that I had written, very simple I meant about two weeks later or three weeks later and I meant Dr. West for the very first time and Luther West defiantly was a person from the old school as far as my impressions for professors are concerned. It was Saturday morning but he had a white shirt, a tie, his suit coat on, gray hair, a nice very well little manicured mustache, spoke very proper English, I'm sure he always said whom when someone should use the objective case, and that sort of thing, at any rate we had a good interview, and ultimately I got the job and here still I am 40 or 30 some years later. What would you like to know about Dr. West?

Int: Anything what was your relationship

LP: Well, I think a lot of people tended to hold him at great respect and awe and perhaps being something of an outsider coming from Wisconsin and having already being a teacher at a college for three years I didn't feel quite the / sort of attitude toward him that perhaps some of the other people in the department may have felt. There were other people who had been undergraduate students at Northern and when ?? had returned to Northern to be teachers and sometimes I think that the feeling that they had toward him when they were undergraduate students still continued never the less Dr. West certainly commanded everybody's normal respect and politeness and so on. He was really a very scholarly person I would say without being critical of any of the other faculty members that Northern had at that time I would say Dr. West probably was the most scholarly of any of them that I knew he had written a number of books, text books and research type books, summarizing the research of other people. One book with the house fly, the next one probably got him more fame and reputation than the other ones however, he also had written the mosquito portions of the very well known book on malaria and there was three or four authors one of the most important malaria references. Also with one of our graduate students at Northern perhaps the first masters graduate students at Northern Dr. West wrote a book on the portazoa, the

free living protozoa in the U.P., and this gives just a little idea a little representation of the variety of subjects within biology that he had done however prior coming to Northern he had done work on a different group of insects I think, I can't remember beetles or something of this type he also did done a lot of work in the field of U-genetics an area that probably doesn't have a very good reputation at the present time but at one time it was considered the way of improving quality of people and the quality of life. When he was at Battle Creek Community College, prior to coming to Northern he had written a lot of articles on genetics and new genetics as a part of his assignment at the junior college. So I guess number one Luther was primarily a scholar. But you should keep asking me things along that topic.

Int: Maybe like you talked about the new year kind of personal relationship with him maybe stuff like.

LP: Sure I can remember a couple of instances. The first, toward the end of my first year here Dr. West invited me and my wife and she was bearing she was probably five or six months pregnant with are first child at that time, to his home which he called his camp a few miles out of town and it was on Memorial Day it was really a very hot day and I wore short pants in those days they were short pants meant that they came all the way down to ones knees and so I had these on and it was perfectly appropriate for the occasion however it was also the first day the black flies were out and as we were out hiking around tremendous number of black flies were biting me all over and I surely wished that I had jeans or some kind of long pants on. So I asked him, I said, Hey Dr. West, are these flies here summer? and he said, oh no there only here for about two weeks then there followed in succession by about half of dozen other species of flies so he was being that specific when I said these flies I just meant biting insects and he took it to mean that particular species of black flies and so that you know kind of one example. I can remember probably in the fall of my first year at Northern he invited the Biology staff as he referred to us to his home for a social evening and that included all six faculty members and their wives because all of us were men and also some graduate students and I think we had about 4 or 5 graduate students at that time and I remember I was directing one graduate student who did not come to this social evening and the next day Dr. West advised me he said it would be in the interest of that young man to participate in social events because that's necessary as a part of one's up bringing and participation for the intellectual ?? so I told him the next day or two I said well it's too bad you didn't go Dr. West would have liked to see you there but it gives you a little idea of how the formality to which he used to do things. The things that I say about Dr. West I'm not in anyway intended make fun of him just to show he was a person of a different from what I am and I hope that I'm not so different from the people a generation or two younger than I. I hope that I'm not that different from them but who knows.

Int: You said that with the fly story the black fly story that he

was precise, would say he was, I interviewed his grandson, John, and I've also interviewed Mrs. Phillips, G. Phillips, would say that he was very orderly he followed a certain schedule

LP: Absolutely his lectures notes were very well organized he every lecture he gave was geared so that it would end at just about the time the bell would ring to let people out he was always there one time he had a list of rules by which he one being the students should always be prepared and so should the teacher that sort of thing he organized his life to be very efficient an example of that as department head he could decide what his own schedule would be and he sought to it that he didn't have any classes at 11:00 in the morning or 1:00 in the afternoon and that allowed him to leave campus about quarter to twelve so as to avoid the rush hour around noon go home and eat and Mrs. West would have meal lunch for him then he would recline he told me for about twenty minutes maybe a half hour if he had a strenuous morning then he'd get up and he'd feel all perked up and ready to go all afternoon but he wouldn't have to come back till maybe ten after one so that he could avoid the noon traffic. That kind of sucked in my mind. Another thing about his driving I ran into him one time, and I said gee Dr. West there was somebody that I was following on the way to school today, this was probably about my fourth year at Northern and this person didn't even have snow tires on and it was February or March, boy this guy was slipping all over the road and could barely make it up some little hill I sure can't figure out why he would have that why didn't he put snow tires on? Dr. West didn't give me any response he didn't say anything about that, well I found out from my colleagues that he didn't use snow tires either so here I was kind of criticizing or kind of poking fun at somebody else for not using snow tires while he doesn't either so that's just another little thing. I also remember when I first came in the fall in 1961, the person I was ready to get married to also came and was a graduate student at Northern my wife Beth and we had are wedding date set up and I hadn't said anything to anybody much about it except Martin Kopski, who Martin Kopski was one of the young staff members and he and I have been friends ever since and Martin was the best man at my wedding and my wife, my fiancee at that time had made friends with one of the girls in the dorm and we were set to get married on a particular Saturday morning and about Thursday of that week I went into Dr. West in the afternoon and I said well Dr. West, I'll have to tell you something that some of the students seem to know about my personal life I guess it would only be the fair and best thing for you to hear it directly from me instead and I don't know whether I was kind of teasing him a little bit or I was just being really polite but I think the look in his eyes and the response of his twitching mustache made him wonder do I have some pretty bad concessions to make of some type and then when I told him I said well you know that Friday night I'm going to be married in a few days on Saturday morning he seemed real relieved to hear that's what those were just a few instances that come to mind.

Int: Could you tell me about the ? driving after ten o'clock

story. This is one for your wife and this for O'Well

LP: Oh yeah, Dr. West well he went to bed regularly at a certain time and it was typically ten o'clock maybe he would listen to the news I'm not sure but ten o'clock was bed time and he also was a very strong supporter of the Michigan Academy of Science Arts and Letters and would present papers when he could and he always attended the meetings he was an officer of one type over the years and encouraged a lot of us faculty to be active in the Michigan Academy, so coming back this happened before my time a year or two before my time but somebody said on the way back from Ann Arbor or perhaps it was East Lansing or Detroit but on the way back from lower Michigan it was getting kind of late at night and it got to be about ten minutes to ten and they were in Munising and Dr. West decided well it's bedtime then so all the folks in his car pulled into one of the motels in Munising this probably was in the late 1950's or 1960 I know it was about that time and so they didn't drive on the extra forty five minutes to Marquette because that would be past bedtime I'm not sure the folks that were riding with him really appreciated having on Sunday morning instead of Saturday night, but that's that story.

Int: Could you tell me a little about his works that you did with your wife and Jane.

LP: Oh and Jane Phillips? After he retired well let me just Dr. West had collected copies of the reports on research concerning the house fly everything available that he could possibly get his hands on and he had what certainly is the was at that time the world's most extensive collection of research on the house fly. More than what would be possible to make a revision on his previous book called The House Fly. So what he decided to do is put these together in a form of a published bibliography and just enter the bibliography reference of each of the words and many of these were in obscure languages obscure journals perhaps journals written in India, China, Bulgaria, countries that we don't normally look or at least at that time except scientific research to be coming from and especially if these are written in a non-English or non western language they'd pretty much over looked. Dr. West got a hold of these things and if there wasn't a translation to English then he would look for a summary or he would at least translate the title and then he had he was to publish all of these into one book with some comments about each of these works and this was a pretty big undertaking for one person even though he was retired and had a lot of time so he hired my wife, Beth and Jane Phillips who had been a graduate student to be his assistants so the book came out as published by Luther West and Beth Peters with technical assistants by Jane Phillips and so that's how he worked with them. He came out with a book of poems also, do you have that?

Int: yes I do.

LP: One of the poems was dedicated to each of them and the third one also to the secretary who did the typing.

Int: This is one for your wife and this for O'Neil

LP: Yes one for my wife, O'Neil Beth Peters, and which he commented on her partial background, ancestry as an Oneida Indian one to Jane Phillips in which he talked about her strange tonic to blame it was some herbs or something she would add to tea regular tea and also Janice Brezette and Janice Brezette had done the secretarial work and typing totally apart from Dr. West long after words Janice Brezette had signed up and was a student in one of my courses that I teach so I got to know her probably fifteen years later after this book had been done. In addition to his scientific writing and the poetry he also composed Northern alma mater song not song very frequently but heard at graduation time and he composed the words and the music to it and he was quite a handy man around the house and I'm not sure if Dr. he also sang in his church choir he was an active member of the First Methodist Church in Marquette and he was a member of the hospital ? as far as I know probably the only faculty member at least the only faculty member at that time who has been a member of the hospital ? normally Northern has been represented by the President of the University but at that time it was Luther West. One bit of advice that he gave me now Lew your going to have to do some kind of public service in the community in addition to your committee and research try to make those things committees or service that relates to your teaching and research don't get involved in things that are of your field because then ??? so perhaps being on this school of nurse advisory committee that is close enough to biology that would be ok now if I was an advisor to a social fraternity or such well I think that he might of considered that kind of frivolous not bad but just not really worth helping me commit myself. He was in many ways a grandfather figure for me he or an uncle that kind of a person and I think he gave me a lot of helpful hints to keep me out of trouble sometimes and that sort of thing if I did something he would raise an eyebrow and he would have a response defending what I did and that it was all ok not that I did anything terribly bad. What next?

Int: Would you say could you give me I got the impression he was a very diplomatic person who never really caused any stress.

LP: Oh Luther West was a diplomatic he was also I would say rather ? I can remember a couple memorandum that he sent out and one of them was participated by me. During final exam week I , when the schedules were different from the normal semester I decided I was going use a particular lab room for a lab test and I just set up things well he had planed on using that room at that time and so we all received in mail boxes a little notice that if words to the effect if a classroom or laboratory is going to be scheduled is going to be used outside of the regularly scheduled period the faculty member will first consult with the department head the second paragraph the department head will consult with himself that was the memorandum and trying to think there was a similar memorandum that he gave another memorandum people were often teaching night classes and Saturday morning classes and the question had come up to President Harden if a person teaches for

example four hours on Saturday morning would it be ok if a faculty member took four hours off at some other time during the normal work week of Monday through Friday from 8 to 5 and the answer was yes that would be ok two hours at night or four hours on Saturday you could take those hours off during some point during the week. We were never bonded to that strict forty hour a week schedule but Luther West kind of made it seem as though that was absolutely what needed to be done. I can remember one other situation I think I had been at Northern for three years I think that's about the time when Luther West was promoted to become the first dean of arts and science and he had a number of materials that were packed in boxes and he wanted these boxes brought from his old office from the biology department to his new office in the arts and science or vice versa I do not remember but these were about three or four pretty heavy cardboard boxes with books and other stuff in them that had to be moved to somewhere else. So being one of the young probably stronger faculty members in his department he asked me to see about that and I'm sure what he had in his mind was that I say yes Dr. West I'll take care of them and move them right away for you and instead I said sure in a day or two I'll get one of the grad students you know one of the other assistants and either he or we depending on who's available will come down and move them to where you need them and my impression is that prior to that time very few people would have spoken up to him in that sort of way I wasn't trying to be disrespectful or anything it's just that it just wasn't possible or easy at that moment to just drop what I was doing and do that errand for him, I think one of the grad students did it for him later on not that I'm not willing to do that sort of stuff.

Int: Would you say he was a gentleman?

LP: Oh I think Dr. West always maintained his dignity and sense of propriety he was polite to people if things bothered him he would have a very diplomatic way of letting the other person know. I recall one time when I was with him when we were in Ann Arbor his granddaughter was a student at University of Michigan at that time and we arrived on Friday afternoon probably about maybe it was Thursday afternoon about four thirty or such checked into the Bell Tower Inn that was the place we always stayed in Ann Arbor having made his arrangements to do so in about six weeks in advance to be sure that we would get running water, the price that he wanted and those things. And then he said Lew I have a phone call to make, and so he dialed int he number and then he said, Lesley that was his granddaughter, then he said "this is grandfather perhaps we will have an opportunity to meet while I am in Ann Arbor" that sort of thing. Well if my grandfather if he was calling me he is that kind of person, even though he is of that age and generation, even older, my grandfather would of probably said, "oh hi Lew this is grants" how about seeing if we can get together sometime. Little less formal.

INT: Can you tell me what his values were?

LP: Yes I would say Dr. West had a couple of things that were really important to him, one was his church, one was his family and certainly and top value was his scholarship at Northern. Certainly he was a very loyal person to Northern and wanted to see the University develop it's programs, develop a more scholarly, more research, more academic approach to things. And he tended to tolerate athletics than to strongly support them. But his values on a world wide sort of way, perhaps were before I really new him, I know that he had been in Rome on one occasion. Maybe on several occasions, as an expert on the world health organizations. Probably the Miliaria, but other tropical diseases also. During World War II he was an instructor of physician of tropical diseases.

INT: Can you tell me anything about his hobbies?

LP: Hobbies, well lets see, one time he, I know he like to go bird hunting, grouse hunting, and on one occasion he invited me and I am sure I could of gone other times too but, he wanted to only to go on Saturday mornings and that was my time usually the only time for me to catch up on my sleep. So I went with him one time and we went grouse hunting on his farm, his camp, and that is one thing. He also enjoyed, he had an instrument he played, I can't remember if it was an accordion or something else about that size, maybe it was a small guitar or mendelian, some hand held instrument of that size. At a social event at his house I referred to earlier he played a couple of songs for us on it, kind of old type songs. But for the most part, he didn't do things that would be considered frivolous, just for fun. I think the things that were done had a purpose. So pure hobbies, I am not sure, I never heard him talk about going fishing for example. He did have a farm in his earlier years, and then his kids were small, told me about the things that went on the farm, mostly about raising cattle and ah.

INT: Could you tell me about anything after he retired and

LP: well ya, after he retired, he still kept coming to the office regularly, except that his noon hours got to be more like, instead of hour and 15 min, or hour and half, his noon hours would get to be two hours or two and half hours something of this sort. This is when he wrote the last book with my wife and Jane Phillips. After several years of retirement his wife had gone into a nursing home, and he was very attended to her there, but he also suffered a serious stroke several years after retirement, and that handicapped him quite a bit, but he regained a lot of uses his other arm, he was right handed so it was his left hand that he learned to sign a check, tie a neck tie and take care of himself. But at that time, with Mrs. West in a nursing home and he pretty much limited by having had this stroke. There was a student, who lived in his house with him to be there, a young strong fellow who could take care of him. Eventually he found himself coming to his office for shorter and shorter periods of time. And ? was publishing a second companion to go along with the other one. That ? was started diminishing trough the cost and other factors. It was more

likely to be put on computer than using the printed book mechanism. Then he suffered a more serious stroke or a series of small strokes and he was severely handicapped from that point on. And he no longer ?. There were times I can remember after my wife had died I can I was going through really serious emotional adjustments problems and he was hopeful to me at time he would come in and spend time with me, not trying to give me advise or council me, just being a friend. And that meant, I hadn't thought of that recently as such, but his conversation ? ? .

INT: Just one word you could describe him by, what would that word be?

LP: Probably used the word two or three times already, half a dozen times already, I guess Academic would be the thing. When he was dean of Arts and Science, at the opening meetings one fall he made the comment to the Art and Science faculty, this is the kind of advise, this is what I would like to see you do, profess your profession. That was his advise. Profess your profession. If you are professors that is what you should do profess. And I didn't know exactly what he meant by that. But, not too much reflection, but it kind of stimulated me to want to promote Paristology, that is my specialty, to promote Paristology in what ever ways I could, in my teaching to directing students on projects, just being knowledgeable about it, as reasonably could. I am more of a generalists by nature, compared to Dr. West. But he also had wide knowledge of history and literature and religion all these other topics that we think of as liberal arts type topics. He was quite proficient in those as well.

LP: before you turn it off, let me say, I really enjoyed doing this. And it brings back memory's, there are probably a lot of things I didn't say that just didn't come to mind. But maybe you picked up some things that are different. Thank you.