

Reflections from WT- Dr. Marty Kuhlman

- Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number 25 of Reflections from WT, the heart and the soul of the Texas panhandle. My name is Randy Ray. I'm the director of Broadcast Engineering here on the campus, and today I am joined by Dr. Walter Wendler, the 11th president of West Texas A&M University. And my good friend, Dr. Marty Kuhlman. Good morning, gentlemen.
- Dr. Kuhlman: Good morning.
- Dr. Wendler: Good morning. Good to be here.
- Randy Ray: I'm really excited, talking to Dr. Kuhlman today because he and I have a bit of a history together. Not only are you a history professor here on campus, but you spend a lot of time over here at the campus radio station. And so, we've hung out a lot together. I have in front of me a copy of your book, Always WT. And I noticed that you graduated first from West Texas State University in '83? '84?
- Dr. Kuhlman: Yeah. And we might even have a history there, because I think that was where-
- Randy Ray: I know it. That's what I was... I graduated in '84. So both you and I were hanging at West Texas State University back in the '80s.
- Dr. Wendler: That's a frightening thought right there.
- Dr. Kuhlman: We might even have done a radio.
- Randy Ray: We may have, we may have. I need to dig in some of the archives and see if I can find that. Dr. Kuhlman, there's a lot going on in our world today. And I know that you have spent a lot of time researching, and I know that your expertise is in women's suffrage, and also integration. Let's talk about that a little bit. Let's talk about the hundredth anniversary of women's suffrage.
- Dr. Kuhlman: When I was doing research here at WT there was a suffrage league in 1911, and that was actually one of the few suffrage leagues in Texas at that time. There was no major state one. There was one at UT, I believe, maybe one at Baylor, and one in Austin. But other than that... So there was a lot, but here... And actually, they had a debate. A debate between women really, pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage in 1912. Actually we wanted to redo that debate. Of course all this happened, so we can't redo it, but it was good. And in the middle of the debate, actually male students came in dressed like old men, and they were carrying baby dolls and they said, "Oh, don't make us do this," and all that, so.
- Randy Ray: Crazy times. Yeah. But don't you think that WT was kind of on the cutting edge of suffrage?

Dr. Kuhlman: Really, somewhat. They were out there. I mean, there was this group, I don't know how many was in this group, but there was that. Of course, WT when they started, was a normal college, which was for training teachers. So actually women made up the majority of the student body. It was about at least 70% female at that time. And up until World War II, actually. And until the end of World War II, when the GIs came back, that women always were in the majority.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, is that the case now?

Dr. Wendler: Yes, it is. More women than men. It's over half. Well, obviously it's going to be more women than men and be over half. And I don't know, I don't have the exact numbers. I should know them, but I don't. But it's over half. And I think part of it is because, what Marty just talked about, this commitment to educating educators. You've heard me say before, that about 72 or 3% of the primary and secondary educators and administrators in the top 26 counties have at least one degree, or certification from West Texas A&M University. We educate the panhandle. That's 2020, but we educated the panhandle the day the door opened.

Randy Ray: Way back.

Dr. Wendler: I mean, that's what we were about, and it doesn't surprise me in some ways. And I guess it would surprise some people because they think, well, we're so very conservative and so on up here, which we are. I mean, there's no question about it, but this is a culture where it's performance that matters. And I think if a hundred years ago, if a woman was a good teacher, apart from the fact that that was traditionally a women's discipline, especially in primary school, that they would succeed, and they'd be treated seriously based on performance.

Because that's, to me, the pragmatism of the panhandle, I think it says, look, we need to get a job done. Who's the most fit person to get the job done? And by golly, I think that aspect of our history, among many others that Marty so carefully charts and records in *Always WT*, which is a great book on the history of what's now West Texas A&M University. It's important that we have always, in a sense, been practically minded, making a difference in society. And I think that's really important. And it comes through in Marty's work, I think. Very nicely.

Randy Ray: We mentioned how WT started as a teacher's college. Marty, I want to ask you, what's your favorite thing about teaching?

Dr. Kuhlman: I would have to say, well, interaction with students obviously. And it's, I guess, that you know something that you can give them, and they seem excited when they find it out. And so, it doesn't get old. You're always putting this to fresh minds or whatever, and you keep learning yourself. Learning about things.

Randy Ray: Now, Dr. Wendler, you've taught in the past. You ever miss that?

Dr. Wendler: Only every day. I really love to teach, and for the same reasons that Marty has just articulated. You have an impact on people, and you do your best to have it be a positive impact. But, and Marty just said this, you're always learning. I used to tell students... I taught design studios for years at LSU and at Texas A&M, and towards the end of my career in Southern Illinois, too. I used to tell students, I feel like a thief when I come into this classroom. I come to give you guys something. And I use guys in the New York... It's a non-gendered term, it's just a "you people." I give you guys a... I come here to do that, to share something with you, but the fact of the matter is I always get more than you. Nobody leaves this room with a greater change in what they could have learned today than I do, which is a strange thing. And I've always had a love for that, and I just love it. I love being around students, and I appreciate them very much. Just-

Randy Ray: I will tell you this, as my boss, I do the teaching for free. It's all the other stuff that I have to do that you're paying me for.

Dr. Wendler: I understand that. That's exactly right. Filling out forms, and assigning grades and all that.

Randy Ray: And going to meetings, and all that stuff.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, all the meetings. Yeah. Yeah.

Randy Ray: As I mentioned at the top of the podcast, our world is in a strange place right now. Marty, and I know your background and your expertise, and if I'm not mistaken, your dissertation was on civil rights. What's going on right now with civil rights? Are we in a good place? We in a bad place? How do we make sense of all of this?

Dr. Kuhlman: To make sense of it would... I mean, it's difficult to understand. I think that we are having to come to grips with our past. With how minorities have been treated in our country, and it's coming to a head right now, and we have to make a decision. We have to say, "Okay, we're going to change Robert E. Lee High School, or change Edmund Pettus Bridge." Things like that, and that's... People have to come to grips with their history, and that's what that history shows them. That there's a lot that was done, that is coming to a boil right now.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Like women's suffrage, WT also was a bit on the cutting edge of integration. Tell us about Joe Kerbel, and his role in WT integration.

Dr. Kuhlman: Well, Joe Kerbel was very important. And then of course, Joe Kerbel, he was a coach of the Buffs, the football team. And in 1960, he came here from Tech and then... Of course, Tech, like other schools in the South, really most other white colleges would not play African-Americans on the team. Kerbel said that, "Hey, we're going to win, and that's all we're going to do." And so he said, "Yeah, I'm going to start recruiting." And he did start to recruit players. First of course, Pistol Pete Pedro. Of course, a famous running back for WT, actually came here

from a junior college in Colorado, and just made a big impact because he was such a big player. Actually, it's kind of interesting, when he went to recruit... Pedro was from Massachusetts and he went to recruit, and Pedro's mother said, "Well, I don't know if I want to send my son to Texas. With all that going on, and he'll have to sit in the back of the bus and all that."

And Joe Kerbel said, "Well, if your son can run the way they say, he can sit on my lap in the front of the bus." So he was very important when... And there were people of course, who wouldn't have done that.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Kuhlman: Actually Pedro played a game in '62, I believe, against Tech. One of the last games WT played with Tech. And Tech still had the habit really, of not playing teams with African-Americans. Or at least not in Lubbock. And he was there, and I think he was half Puerto Rican, so that's why he may have got by there. But anyway, he led the Buffs to a victory, 30 to 27, which was a big deal. He led them to a victory in the Sun Bowl, one of the bowl games that WT has played in.

Randy Ray: Interesting history about WT, and I'm proud of the fact that WT not only led the charge for women's suffrage, but also integration. We're going to take a break real quick. And when we come back, I want to talk to both of you about your time in a monastery. And we'll be back in about 60 seconds.

Speaker 4: West Texas A&M University is a student body that learns by doing, and is always seeking opportunity. Talented and accomplished faculty that teach both in and out of the classroom. Programs that provide timeless information and meet the challenges of today's world. Facilities rich in technology, as well as WT history. It's our alumni and donors that make the big difference, and set us apart from other universities. With your support, WT will continue to award scholarships to deserving students, and strengthen our programs. Which means a better campus, more in depth education and a lasting cultural and economic impact on our region. Now is the time to strengthen connections, support students, and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience. Share your heritage. Share your pride.

Randy Ray: All right, welcome back to the podcast. I mentioned before we went to our break, that both of you guys have spent some time in a monastery. And then may be misleading a little bit, but it's because you were both on a study abroad trip. Dr. Wendler, tell us about your experience.

Dr. Wendler: Well, myself and another faculty member from landscape architecture, and a couple of graduate students took 75 Texas Aggies to Fellini Volturno, which is about 45 kilometers south of Florence on the Arno River. And it was what's called a ghetto program. We stayed in a place all together, we didn't... And we had studios there, we had classes there, and we all slept there and ate there,

and so on. And it was 80 of us, basically, there, and 75 students. And there were four priests that still ran the monastery.

Randy Ray: And took care of you. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. They kind of took care of us. But I'll tell you what, they were capitalists. They charged for everything. You wanted to shine your shoes, they'd do it for a buck and a half, or whatever. I mean, that's a silly example, but they did charge for everything, and they were good business people. And the fact of the matter is, we had a, I think from their perspective, especially a good experience. And most of our students had a good experience. It was interesting.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Kuhlman and I taught a class, was probably a couple of years ago, about British cultural influences. And one of the places we stayed in Oxford was at an Anglican monastery. And it was fun. It was completely different from one of the other places we stayed, which was a hostel. The hostel and the monastery, two completely different experiences for our students.

Dr. Wendler: One was all rules and the other was no rules, I'm sure.

Randy Ray: Exactly. Exactly. Dr. Kuhlman, I'm going to ask you, how important is studying abroad to a student?

Dr. Kuhlman: I think that study abroad gives people a chance to see the world, and say, hey, the world is a lot bigger than the panhandle of Texas. And people, that are good people, that have totally different thoughts than I have. So I can't just say that other people are, for example, snowflakes or whatever. That I should say, "Hey, everybody has a voice." And it broadens their minds.

Randy Ray: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I wish that we could require every student to study abroad. And I know it's really expensive for some folks, but I agree with you. Especially what you said, there are good people everywhere, and we just need an opportunity to meet them and get to know them. And I think it does give us a broader view of our world. So Dr. Wendler, where all have you been?

Dr. Wendler: Different countries that I've visited?

Randy Ray: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Well, I've been pretty much all over Western Europe, not every place, but almost. Been to Israel in the middle East. And I've been to Taiwan, to China, to Korea, to Vietnam on different... When I say missions, I don't mean that in the sense of religious missions, but doing different things, they were all intentional visitations. It wasn't as a tourist. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've ever been anywhere as a tourist. I went to Dumas once.

Dr. Kuhlman: Good luck.

Dr. Wendler: But anyway, that's kind of like study abroad. And I love Dumas, I really do. These small towns in Texas, these rural communities, are the glue of the Texas panhandle.

Randy Ray: I will tell you about one student that Marty and I had. When we took him to England, he had not only never left the panhandle, he had never been on an airplane before.

Dr. Wendler: Yup. Had the same thing.

Randy Ray: And so man, it was just an eye-opening experience. And I love that. And I know he did to. Seeing these kids that are from Shamrock, or Wheeler, and then we're taking them to Oxford and Liverpool.

Dr. Wendler: Well, this happened to me. I don't mean to interrupt, Randy, but it's the same thing. And I have to tell you how this happened, because it was remarkable. I'm only going to use the gentleman's first name. I know his whole name, and you'll see why, but his first name was Robert. A dining room had a big fireplace in it in the basement of this monastery. I say it was a basement, it was the first floor, but it was well, anyway. First floor of the monastery had nice windows in it and everything. And that's what we ate every day. And one day I went down there and Robert... We'd been, probably, in country three or four days. So people were still getting settled in, and so on and so forth.

And Robert, I'm won't say his last name, was standing in front of the fireplace with his overcoat on, and looked forlorn. I mean, he just was kind of crestfallen. I didn't know what was going on with him. I said to him, "Robert, what's going on?" He said, "Well, I'm homesick." I said, "Don't feel bad about that. I'm homesick myself. I've lived a lot of different places. I've traveled to different places. But every time I go to a new place, I long for something that's more familiar to me. It's just natural." And so we talked for a while and he told me... I asked him, I said, "Is this your first trip out of the country?" He said, "This is my first trip out of the country. It's my first trip out of Texas. It's my first trip on an airplane." He said, "This is a lot of firsts for me." Anyway, we talked, we laughed a little bit about it. He stayed and did fine. Everything turned out to be fine.

Well, this was 1984. 1994, 10 years later, I'm at an architect's convention in Boston, Massachusetts, and somebody taps me on the shoulder. It's Robert. And Robert, he said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "I do Robert. I don't remember everybody. But I remember you because you had a moving experience over there." He said, "I'll tell you something. Best experience I've ever had in all my life was getting to a place where I was uncomfortable. And I was always comfortable, and this place made me a little uncomfortable."

And I know that's what Marty is talking about. We get to see some other things. And one of the things we find out, there's these vast differences in kind of culture, and human behavior, and so on and so forth, on the one hand. On the

other hand, they're fairly small differences when you get right down to it. I don't care where you are, mother-in-law jokes are funny. I don't care what nationality, what language people speak. They're funny. Fathers and mothers are committed to their children. They want to see their children do well, and prosper, and so on. They want to see the next generation be better than the last generation. Their generation. And those common traits I think are very powerful. And you can only know them when you get outside yourself.

Randy Ray: Well. One of the things I love about where we work, here at West Texas A&M University, is that if a student really, really, really wants to travel abroad, we will make it happen for them. We'll find a way. So, I also... Dr. Wendler and our guests, a curve ball. This one, I don't think it's that tough. Since we are kind of talking about studying abroad, I would like to hear from each one of you. What's the most foreign place you've been, where you felt you were most furthest from home? That make sense?

Dr. Kuhlman: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Probably Egypt.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Why?

Dr. Kuhlman: Egypt. I don't know, it's just different. As well as different, it was so, so hot and dry, humid. And then all the centuries old architecture, the pyramids, all these things. Just, I don't know, the way things were done is different.

Randy Ray: Yeah. It would love to go there. I'd love to go there. When were you there?

Dr. Kuhlman: I was there in about '95, maybe.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Wendler, what about you? What's the most foreign place you've been?

Dr. Wendler: I would probably say North Vietnam, in Hanoi. It's very interesting between the North and the South. South Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City, or what we would call Saigon, it was... I was there when John McCain was running for president, which made it a kind of an interesting time to be there, because the South Vietnamese people love John McCain.

Randy Ray: Really?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, because he was a kind of a cowboy. I mean, he was tough, he had ideas. They consider him to be very brave.

Randy Ray: He was a POW there, in North Korea.

Dr. Wendler: In Hanoi. And I saw what the cell he was in, actually in Hanoi. They so-called Hanoi Hilton. Because I was staying in the real Hanoi Hilton, or maybe that was the real one, but I was staying in the one with the servants and all that sort of

stuff, right around the corner from the prison. It's right in the middle of town, which was a little strange.

It was just a juxtaposition. And all these people on motor scooters, I mean, like swarms of bees. It would all stop, and then it would all go again, and people were going in every different direction. It just seemed like, just wild to me. And very kind of conflicted culture, because they were deeply... There were many, both in the North and the South, deeply freedom-loving kind of people, and all that. And a lot of people there were stateists. They wanted the state to kind of take care of them, and so on and so forth, especially in North Vietnam. But it was just interesting. It was interesting.

Randy Ray: One of the things I have noticed about traveling abroad is, I always come home feeling fortunate, and it reminds me how good we have it here at home. And another thing that I think, students learn when they travel.

Dr. Wendler: They do. Randy, just let me mention one other thing, and I don't want to... I know we're on a timeframe here. One of the values of having international students on the campus, is that they bring their culture with them and share it with people. Marty said it before, to get people outside the Texas panhandle, just to see the larger world. Well, if we bring 200 international students to campus, and we start to rub shoulders with them, we began to get a little international experience right here in the Texas panhandle. And it really is, I think, very important to welcome those students. When we can, and when it's appropriate and all that sort of stuff. Because they do bring their culture with them, to help us see in a sense, again, outside of ourselves.

Randy Ray: All right. Well, I sure appreciate both of you, and I have enjoyed our conversation today. We also appreciate you listening to what we have to say today, and we're asking you to join us again next time, here on Reflections from WT, the heart and the soul of the Texas panhandle. We'll see you then.