

Reflections from WT- Madison Thetford and Katy Zimmerman

- Randy Ray: Welcome to Reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. I'm Randy Ray and I'm joined today with my boss, Dr. Walter Wendler, the 11th president of West Texas A&M. Good morning, sir.
- Dr. Wendler: Good morning, Randy. How are you?
- Randy Ray: Well, I'm okay. I need a haircut.
- Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I do too, actually. There was a thing in the paper about how to give yourself a haircut in the Amarillo Globe-News. There was a whole page-
- Randy Ray: Oh man, don't do it. Don't do it.
- Dr. Wendler: A preacher held that thing up and said, "Anybody foolish enough to follow these instructions to get a haircut, it's a mistake. It's a mistake.
- Randy Ray: I think I'm just going to let it go as long as I can, so-
- Dr. Wendler: Yeah, let it go. It'd be like the '60s again or the '70s, '70s.
- Randy Ray: These are weird times-
- Dr. Wendler: Yes sir.
- Randy Ray: ... Unusual times, an unusual semester. I wanted to just ask you, what are you doing to stay sane?
- Dr. Wendler: Well, actually, I think I'm working more because I'm primarily working out of the house and what happens is I don't get a chance to separate myself by getting in the car and leaving the office and going into the house. Even though for me, that's a short ride right now. The bottom line is, it was still like a physical separation. Now, it's just on the clock. When the clock ticks, the day's over. But it's not over when you're home and you've been working in the house all day long. So I'm working hard. There's a lot to do and we're making plans for the fall and we're thinking about recruitment, even continue to think about recruitment right now. So we're staying busy. Everybody is staying busy.
- Randy Ray: Are you getting out much?
- Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I try to walk. I walk about three miles every day and then a pretty good clip. I'm always less than 16 minutes a mile for walkers. I'm hustling, I'm hustling. Some days I'm below 15. If I've got a lot on my mind, I'm really trucking along.

Randy Ray: The other day I was driving close to your house and I saw you working as you were walking.

Dr. Wendler: Was I on the cell phone?

Randy Ray: You were on your phone working even while you were walking, so ...

Randy Ray: I think I tell my students, and I think it's really important that it's good to sit the digital devices down and just get out and get into nature and get off the grid sometimes.

Dr. Wendler: I should leave the phone home, but I listen to music when I'm walking and then it rings. I get texts and so on and I just ...

Randy Ray: Let's talk about safe gathering online a little bit. How many Zoom meetings have you been in on over the last couple of months?

Dr. Wendler: At least two a day and some days, three or four. I go from one to the next. It's like watching, a lot of your listeners wouldn't know, but it's like watching Hollywood Squares or The Brady Bunch, everybody's gridded off and ...

Randy Ray: My immediate boss, Dr. Trudy Hanson, sent us all an article about being Zoom-fatigued and I'm starting to feel that.

Dr. Wendler: I am too.

Randy Ray: It's just not the same as meeting in person.

Dr. Wendler: No, it's not.

Randy Ray: I think that some of our students and maybe even some of our faculty through all of this, have gotten kind of in a weird place and one of the things that WT is offering is online counseling.

Dr. Wendler: I probably should take advantage of some of that myself, but I haven't, because it is weird. It's weird to relate to the world through a handheld device or a computer screen. It's just different and we need the interaction.

Randy Ray: I think that's a good thing that WT is offering. Another thing that WT is offering is our spring virtual graduation that's going to happen on May 9th. That's kind of a neat thing. I'm excited about that.

Dr. Wendler: I think it's going to be a very neat thing. As a matter of fact, in some ways, I think there may be some things that we are doing for this virtual graduation that we may do forever. For example, we asked students that want to partake in this to do a one to three minute video recounting some reflections from West Texas A&M and I've watched a few of these things and they are amazing.

Randy Ray: They are good.

Dr. Wendler: They tug at your heart. Some of them are really good. Some of them are a little less mature, I'll say, there's just people being giddy about it and so on. But that's fine too. There's a lot of different reactions, but the point is some of these things, it was one I watched that almost made me cry. This young lady thanking her parents and her boyfriend and-

Randy Ray: The one with the pictures? I saw that one. Yeah, pretty impressive.

Dr. Wendler: Very impressive. Nicely done and the technical capability's pretty high, good production values and everything. So I think that's going to be good. John Sharp is going to address the group, the Chair of the Texas A&M University System, Board of Regents, Elaine Mendoza is going to address the group. Four Price is going to address the group. This is one of the things you can't normally do. You can't get them all in one place, well, it's virtual, so ... Ken King, I've already seen the videos. Ken King, from out in the field by a barn addressed the group. John Smithee, who is ... it was kind of funny, he told me, I said, "You know, you can be in casual clothes. This is special."

Dr. Wendler: He said, "Well, my wife wants me to put on a suit and tie." So he did. If he ever hears this, he might be embarrassed, but I told him, I said, "You're the best looking state rep we've got and the nicest dressed." I think for a kind of a second fiddle deal, it's going to be good. The faculty are going to record things. There'll be a whole bunch of channels on this site. So you can go to the College of Engineering and hear from the Dean and various faculty and then all of the videos from students who graduated in engineering will be clustered up on that site. Then we'll have a site that's local leaders. Gary Hinders did a-

Randy Ray: The Mayor?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, the Mayor of Canyon did a thing. The Mayor of Amarillo did a thing. We would never get all those people at graduation. So it's a cloud, but it's got a silver lining in my mind. I think it's going to be nice that people have a remembrance.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, through all of this, one of the things that's come my mind is sometimes through the negative things like this pandemic, a lot of students are very nervous to be far away from home. I had a student email me two days ago from France that's finishing up my class. I think when something like this happens, people want to be at home or closer to home and I think that's one of the great things about WT. Don't you agree with me?

Dr. Wendler: I do agree, especially in this region, we are close to home. You can commute here from Plainview if you really want to, halfway between here and Lubbock. But we've got a lot of Lubbock students that come here because it's still relatively close to home, but it's away from home. You know, you get a chance

to kind of test your own metal and so on and so forth. This summer, we are talking to a lot of students and I would say this to your listeners, that next fall or this summer, if someone wants to come to WT and get started here, maybe they got accepted at Alabama or LSU or somewhere and they think to themselves, "Well, until all this settles down, I want to stay close." We can help them stay close because we're here and we can also help them by guiding them in what courses they should take when they get to one of these other institutions. So we can kind of really tune up our advising to fit with them. Now, some may get here and decide they want to stay.

Randy Ray: That's what I think.

Dr. Wendler: That's a possibility. I don't want to push anybody to do something they don't want to do, on the one hand. But on the other hand, I want to be able to serve students and I want the university to serve students because they're here and because they're local. I think that's a message that a lot of people will appreciate, that they can stay close for a year or more if they want to.

Randy Ray: That kind of happened to me. I grew up in Pampa and when I finally, finally decided I wanted to go to college, I didn't know where I wanted to go. I didn't think I wanted to go to WT because it was too close. But when I got over here, that 70 miles is longer than you think between here in Pampa, I never felt like I was close to home. But when I wanted to go home, it was nice to be kind of close.

Dr. Wendler: You could run home if your mom made spaghetti on Wednesday nights and you really liked it. You could drive home for the spaghetti, bring a load or two to wash, get the wash done-

Randy Ray: And I probably did that.

Dr. Wendler: I'm sure you did. I know you did. There is this idea though, you remember that show, Everybody Loves Raymond?

Randy Ray: I love that show. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I do too and it's funny. But the in-law, his mom and dad living across the street and everything, too connected, too interwoven in my mind. It's funny, but you can live across the street from your parents or your in-laws and be your own and some people could live across the country and not be on their own. It's a state of mind. You know, as an independent thinker, individually and wonderfully made, we are, the fact of the matter is you can be right across the street and be away from home. As a matter of fact, Amberly who we talked with last time, Amberly Hildebrandt, who's a graduate of this program. She's from Amarillo, went to Randall High and she came here and got on campus and had a tremendous experience, a campus experience 10 miles from home. So I think

that's a misnomer. I did the same thing, by the way, but I did it after community college. I played a little hockey when I was in community college.

Randy Ray: Oh, I didn't know that.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I was playing JUCO hockey. I wanted to be in the NHL, but myself and my mother were the only two people that thought I could do it. Anyway, so after that, I thought, "I'm going to get away, do something different." I went to Texas A&M and I had never been west of-

Randy Ray: That's a long way from where you were raised.

Dr. Wendler: I'd never been west of New Jersey. If you remember your geography, that's pretty far east. I was in New Jersey one time and then I went to Texas A&M. I got off the bus in College Station. I said, "Lord, what have I done?" I was surrounded by guys in the military and this was a long time ago too. This was the height of the Vietnam War and all that. It was a great experience. I-

Randy Ray: Don't you think though...When I took my daughter around looking for places to go, don't you think that 10, 15 minutes after being on a campus, you can tell.

Dr. Wendler: Yes, you can. I'll tell you another story, a quick one. This was about two years ago, freshmen orientation. I bumped into a young man, a student and his family, mom and dad and they were from Tampa Bay, Florida. They had six colleges they were going to look at and the furthest one away from Tampa Bay was WT. So they flew up to Amarillo, came down to WT for the thing and rented a car and they were going to drive back to Tampa Bay. I bumped into them on the campus and the father told me this story and he said, I said, "Well, how did you enjoy it?" He says, "Well, we're canceling the trip. He's coming here, one day."

Randy Ray: One day.

Dr. Wendler: One day. Yeah, you're right.

Randy Ray: I think there's a lot of people that feel that way.

Dr. Wendler: You can sense it.

Randy Ray: Just give us a chance. Just give us a chance.

Dr. Wendler: And put everything out of your head that you think you know about the place and I don't care if you live across town. I had a group from Amarillo High on the campus one time visiting the campus, 40 kids. You're going to say, "Oh, he's making this up." I'm not, 40 kids. I said, "How many of you have been on this campus before and looked around the way you are on this tour?" Four of them raised their hand. They may have driven through one time. I thought to myself, "Man, get a life. Get in the car on Sunday afternoon and take a ride."

Randy Ray: All right, well we're going to take a break and when we come back, we're going to talk to a couple of ladies that took a chance on WT and I think it worked out pretty well for them. We'll be back in about 30 seconds.

Speaker 3: 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 facility's rich in technology as well as WT history. Now is the time to strengthen connections and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience, share your heritage, share your pride.

Randy Ray: Part two of reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. I want to welcome you back as I welcome a couple of young ladies as our guests on this episode of the podcast, Madison Thetford, Katy Zimmerman. Welcome. Welcome.

Madison Thetford: Hello.

Katy Zimmerman: Hello.

Randy Ray: All right, so both of you are graduating seniors. Tell me how it feels right now.

Katy Zimmerman: Well, this is Katy. It definitely is sad and especially I am graduating in three years and so I could have extended it and not have been in the midst of all of this. But somehow, I'm graduating early and so it's definitely sad but it's bittersweet and I'm glad that the university and other people are doing as much as they can for us seniors. We really appreciate it.

Randy Ray: Katy, let me ask you, since you, you were one of mine and you were in several of my classes, how many trips did we go on? I know we went to Philadelphia. Did we go-

Katy Zimmerman: Philadelphia, Washington DC, here was one of the broadcasting competitions, so ...

Randy Ray: How important was that to you and your education?

Katy Zimmerman: I actually talked about it in my graduation video. I personally love traveling and getting to see new cultures and especially getting to network and learn professionalism in a different area. It was incredibly important to me and those are the highlights ... of course, I love being on campus, but those were the highlights of my time at WT.

Randy Ray: I think it's so important. I can remember the news package you did in Philadelphia and you did it on the Rocky steps and that was really impressive. That was really good work.

Katy Zimmerman: Thank you.

Randy Ray: That made me really proud knowing that maybe you did learn a little bit while you were here.

Katy Zimmerman: You were trying to rush me off, though. I was trying to film and you're like, "Let's go," and I'm like, "Wait, I got to get this shot."

Randy Ray: That's news. We got to get going. So Madison, you are a business major, right?

Madison Thetford: Yes, I am. I'm a business major, business marketing.

Randy Ray: What's your favorite memory of being at WT?

Madison Thetford: My favorite memory, I'm also on the track team-

Randy Ray: Oh, really?

Madison Thetford: So yes and my favorite memory at WT was getting to know my teammates and my coaches on just a different level. We have a majority of internationals on our team, and so getting to know the different cultures on the track team was so fun and those are memories that I will cherish forever, for sure.

Randy Ray: Is being a student athlete tough?

Madison Thetford: Yes.

Randy Ray: How come?

Madison Thetford: It's a lot tougher than people think. I like to say it's like a part-time job. We put about 20-ish hours in a week. That goes from practice to taking care of our bodies in the training room and eating right and making sure we're staying healthy outside the track and on the track as well.

Dr. Wendler: I'm one that's very committed to this idea of the student athlete as a student first. A lot of people say that, presidents all over America, presidents of universities say that same thing, but I really do think we do a good job of it here and I've been in a lot of universities. I think WT does a great job of allowing student athletes to be students first and also serious competitors. Our track team is very good.

Madison Thetford: Yes. I've loved being a part of the track team. That's all thanks to the coaches, of course, but I do agree. Our coaches always say, "Student athletes are students first," and I can honestly say these past four years at WT, the professors have also worked with our busy and chaotic schedules. I have not had one professor that has not worked with us through that and so that's amazing that our

coaches and professors can work together and make sure that we are set in the classroom and on the track to be able to compete at such a high level.

Dr. Wendler: That's great.

Randy Ray: Sometimes, Dr. Wendler, I think sometimes student athletes get a bad rep in the classroom.

Dr. Wendler: They do.

Randy Ray: I love having them because a lot of times they're more disciplined.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, very disciplined. Well, Madison, how many hours do you run?

Madison Thetford: A week?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah

Madison Thetford: A week, there is a set amount of time that we can go. I would say on a Monday, Wednesdays, Fridays are when we usually have our weight days and so we will be on the track and doing weights for about three hours on those days and then about an hour to two hours on Tuesday, Thursdays.

Dr. Wendler: So you're busy and I agree with Randy. I think that the discipline of taking care of yourself and conditioning and all of that is very powerful. Yet, here you get to meet international students. You didn't even have to leave home. They came to you.

Madison Thetford: They came to me and like I said, I'm so thankful for that because my best friends are in Germany and Italy and Croatia and so many other places that I could ... there's a whole list that I could keep going for minutes on.

Dr. Wendler: And right here in the Panhandle, right here in little old Canyon.

Randy Ray: I want to ask you both. I always say that, to me, one of the best things about going to college is not just your discipline that you learn, but the other things outside of your discipline that you learn. Tell me about something that you learned outside of your discipline?

Katy Zimmerman: I think one of the things, I guess this could go kind of being similar to discipline, but just time management and taking care of yourself because I definitely went through a period where I was having a really hard time and I'd always been a student that was going, going, going. I experienced what I thought was probably burnout because I didn't understand that I needed to take care of myself. You hear people say it, but you don't really understand that. So I think that's one of the most important things for students to understand. It's not just things that

people say. If you want to be a good student, you have to take time for yourself and take some breaks and realize what's most important going into your future.

Randy Ray: I think a lot of students make the mistake of trying to do too much and that's one of the great things about going to college, especially at WT. There's so many different things to do and you got to pick and choose.

Dr. Wendler: And you were part of Rogers LEAD WT, which is a really important ... I know you both were but, you've got the shirt on, Katy.

Katy Zimmerman: Yes, I do.

Dr. Wendler: It looks good too.

Katy Zimmerman: Thank you.

Dr. Wendler: That is really a first rate program. I am so thankful to Dyke and Terry Rogers for supporting that program. It's an excellent program and it's a kind of leadership experience you don't get everywhere. You want to say what about that?

Katy Zimmerman: Yeah, I know me and Madison could both talk for hours about Rogers LEAD. That is my family. That is the only thing that kept me sane through college. It's crazy because I didn't realize how much I don't like change. I realize every semester is so different, but there are two years of my college remained the exact same through Rogers LEAD and I just learned, I know how to be a person out in the world now because of Rogers LEAD and it just brought so many great aspects to my life.

Randy Ray: Madison, what have you learned outside of your discipline? Outside of business, what is the most important thing that you're going to take away from WT?

Madison Thetford: I'm going to have to go with Katy on serving ourselves. I think that I've learned over the years to serve others and I think that is extremely important. But before you can do that, you need to serve yourself and through programs that are available at WT, I have learned to do that through preparing for the job force. The scheme of things, after college we're going to be going out into the job force and I can say that I have served myself through better preparing through the things that WT has offered and that is things like mock interviews. Career services has helped a lot with, not internship ... or they do help with internships of gaining internships and networking and all of that different stuff. So I have learned definitely to serve myself and take time for myself to focus on what I'm going to do to help others outside of college.

Randy Ray: Well, you both are seniors and Dr. Wendler and I talked about it a little earlier. Let's talk a little bit about the virtual graduation. How does that feel to y'all? Are you excited about it or what?

Katy Zimmerman: Well honestly, at first I was like, "What is this? Like, what are we doing here and how is this even going to look like?" But I'm really excited just because we need to, especially us that are graduating that we need to take this time in because even though it's not what we looked like, it's the only time that we get. Of course, we can walk in December and there's other times to celebrate, but we really need to take in the moment and live in the moment. So I'm really excited to be able to watch that with my family and just to kind of take in what WT is doing for us. I know WT wants to do the best for us.

Randy Ray: Did you use your video skills?

Katy Zimmerman: I did. I used my camera and I got a tiny bit creative with my video. So yeah, I-

Randy Ray: I can't wait to see it.

Dr. Wendler: I'm going to look at yours. Have you uploaded it yet?

Katy Zimmerman: Well, my Wi-Fi is really slow so I was uploading it last night, it said 50%. So I'll have to go check if it got there or not.

Randy Ray: Madison, what about you?

Madison Thetford: Well, I do not have the same video skills as Katy. I think I did mine on my iPhone and that's about as good as that's going to get. But in regards to virtual graduation, when I first heard about it, I didn't know what to think. I didn't know how it was going to work, but WT has been sending emails and calling us and letting us know how it's going to work. I think that it's actually a really good thing to bring my family together. I know since this mess has been happening, we've been FaceTiming a lot more and so I know that I can FaceTime my family from all over the place and we can watch it together and we can all click on my video and see it together. It's a way to bring my family together even through this hard time.

Dr. Wendler: I think what's really interesting, you'll be able to construct your own video. So the Provost, Neil Terry, who used to be the Dean of Business of course, and now he's the Provost. He'll do an introductory speech. Chancellor Sharp is going to be there. The Board Chair, Elaine Mendoza, is going to be there. I'll give a short, and it's the shortest graduation speech I've ever given. It's five minutes long, usually they're about 8 or 10 but we're trying to be mindful of the time. So in a half hour, you can see everything you want to see. We're going to have The National Anthem and the Alma Mater, so I hope, and I'll admit, I'm very soft on patriotism. I hope people stand at home.

Randy Ray: I agree with it.

Dr. Wendler: I hope they stand when we sing The National Anthem. I almost was going to say we need to put that in the tape, please stand wherever you are. Let's honor

America. That's just me. I can't help it. I don't apologize for it. It's just who I am and I'm thankful to be here. As bad as things are right now with COVID-19, I'd rather be no place on the planet, and I've been to a lot of places on the planet. I'd rather ... right here, right here in Canyon, Texas.

Randy Ray: All right. Well ladies, traditionally on the podcast, I always throw a curve ball. You ever heard of that? This one's an easy one. This one's an easy one I think. So over the COVID-19 epidemic that we've all been quarantined, I have done a lot of reading. I think I'm finishing my sixth novel now.

Dr. Wendler: Wow.

Randy Ray: I'm going to ask you guys, and you don't have to tell me what you've read over the break, but I want to talk about your favorite books since you're graduating seniors. Tell me about, and Dr. Wendler, you can chime in too. Tell me about your favorite book. What book has been the most influential on your life?

Katy Zimmerman: Well, I would have to give it up to Rogers LEAD WT for not making me read books, but encouraging me to read books because that's something that goes into discipline and just kind of getting into the world that it's important to learn more. So one of the books that we read was, it's The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. Me and Madison were on the same team planning Buff Branding for that. So we took that book after we planned Buff Branding and went back and dissect how we did.

Katy Zimmerman: Honestly, it was really hard because I know both of us wish it would have gone differently, but it was amazing to see in that book, this lady comes in and she just does all these things with team and talks about false harmony within a team and how it's important to have conflict. So I think that's really important going into the workforce, taking that because I know I'll need to be working in teams. So that book was so great to be able to take that knowledge of working in groups in college and taking it into the workforce when I'll have to work in teams and now knowing that conflict is good and we need to make sure it's there.

Randy Ray: No man is an island. We're all going to have to work in teams. Madison, What's your favorite book?

Madison Thetford: Katy stole my favorite book, so I'm going to have to go with a book, it's called Great By Choice. I just read it recently and my favorite thing about this book is that it is about great companies that have succeeded in really difficult times and it's not your normal leadership book. It is a leadership book that is based on straight facts and that's why I really liked that book because it really hits that a leader does not necessarily have to be more charismatic or all the great qualities that a great leader possesses, but it's how they react to situations in a certain point in time. So I know I'm going to take that away with me and focus on the hard straight facts of leadership and that's something that is close to my

heart that Rogers LEAD has helped me with is leadership and how to be a great leader.

Randy Ray: Well, I know both of you are going to be great leaders someday. Dr Wendler, what's your favorite book? Do you have one?

Dr. Wendler: Oh yeah, I've got a bunch of them. At the top of the list and I'll just say this and then just leave it, but the Bible is the most important book that I read and I read it every day. I've got these Bibles that you walk through them in a year. There's one in particular that's used with navigators that I like a whole lot. That said, one of my books is Titan. It's about John D. Rockefeller, who in many ways was a very tough and demanding person, but he built an enterprise and some would say on the backs of others and so on. But to watch or to be able to read what I think is a fairly accurate account of his life and his work in the oil industry, it's a powerful thing to read to see how somebody does that. I really liked it and another one that I really liked from a completely different perspective is a Bonhoeffer on the Life-

Randy Ray: Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It's an amazing-

Randy Ray: Was it the one that was written by Eric Metaxas?

Dr. Wendler: Yes, Metaxas-

Randy Ray: I read that one too.

Dr. Wendler: It's a great book just because you see what persistence can bring in a time when the world is literally falling down around you and what it costs. It cost him everything. So-

Randy Ray: I will tell you, when I read that book, I read it on my iPad and I kept reading and I kept reading and I kept reading and I go, "How long is this thing?" I finally saw the book in the bookstore and it's five inches thick, so you never know what you're getting into when you read it on your iPad.

Dr. Wendler: I know, it's a big one, but it's really good and his life, it's a remarkable tale of commitment. For him, it was commitment to Christ and for me, that's foundation. But it could be commitment to a lot of different things. It's just a powerful testimony of what it's like to be committed to something besides yourself. You know what I mean? I think taking care of yourself like Madison talked about really is critical and that's not self-serving because you can't, and Madison said this just to reinforce the wisdom in this young lady, Madison said it, you can't take care of somebody else until you take care of yourself. You just can't do it. I think that's a powerful testimony to you.

Randy Ray: Aren't you proud of them?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I am.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I am too. I'm proud of you both and congratulations on your graduation.

Madison Thetford: Thank you.

Katy Zimmerman: Thank you.

Randy Ray: Thank you all for joining us today for Reflections from WT, The Heart Soul of the Texas Panhandle. We appreciate you tuning in and we were looking forward to talking to you again next time.