

# From CMU to EPA and back

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My first memory of CMU was an 8 a.m. chemistry course on the first day of classes. I had graduated from Grayling High in a class of 68 students, and here I was in a lecture hall with about 200 other freshmen. The teaching assistants passed out an eight-page chemistry test and told us to turn it in at the end of the hour. I had thought I was a hot-shot budding scientist but quickly began to wonder if I belonged at this large university. I told my roommates I probably would not make it past my first semester. Fortunately I was wrong.



*Kerrigan Clough, recipient of the 2007 CST Distinguished Alumni Award, visits with retired geography faculty members John Grossa, left, and Roy Kloplic, his academic mentor at CMU.*

My second fond memory of CMU was walking to a fraternity rush event wearing my new and stylish fashions – jeans, heavily starched white button-down shirt, penny loafers, and a black-and-white plaid sports jacket. I was on top of the world. I pledged Pi Kappa Phi because a new friend was doing the same, and I had four great years in the frat house, sometimes studying but mostly enjoying college life.

Four years later, I finished my BS with almost three full majors – biology, geography and chemistry – and I had the great opportunity to pursue a master's in geography/earth science with a teaching assistantship that my advisor, Dr. Roy Kloplic, helped me obtain and then mentored me through.

Thirty-seven years later I am now retired, or as I like to refer to it “graduated” from my career at the United States

Environmental Protection Agency. I was very fortunate to be selected into the first class of management interns at EPA shortly after its creation in 1970. My CMU science education was a key in my being selected and a perfect platform for an environmental management career.

## ‘Graduated’ after EPA career

During my career I had unsurpassed opportunities. I worked directly for EPA administrators in the Nixon/Ford and Carter administrations, traveling frequently, participating in meetings at the White House, writing policy positions, preparing press releases, and learning a great deal about how the U.S. government works, or in many cases, doesn't work. I rose up the ranks in several different locations and positions. I headed up a team disposing of Agent Orange left over from the Vietnam War, led efforts to automate the agency, and dealt with all sorts of both agreeable and very disagreeable people in Congress and industry. And I had a ball every day. I finished my career in Denver, where I was the deputy regional administrator at a regional office serving six states and 27 Indian reservations.

Perhaps my largest challenges and greatest satisfaction came from my work with Native Americans to improve reservation drinking water, treat sewage and handle solid waste. I even gained an Indian nickname from a tribal leader. After asking me my favorite animal and knowing I had a keen sense of humor, he put

his very large hand on my shoulder and pronounced to the assembled gathering that forever more Kerrigan would be known as Buzzard Butt.

I met my wife, Nancy, BA 1970, at Central, and we now spend our time traveling the world from our home in Colorado. We have visited Ireland, Scotland, Spain and favorite U.S. locations like Yellowstone. Our daughter received her master's in cell biology from Central and now is part of a research team at the University of Colorado School of Medicine working on the cause of leukemia.

## Gratifying return to CMU

I visited campus in September and was presented the CST Distinguished Alumni Award by my mentor, Roy Kloplic. I had received four presidential awards during my career, but I told the audience of CMU faculty and students that this award meant the most to me.

A couple of weeks later, I returned to watch the Chips defeat Buffalo. Gail Moore, Director of Development, kindly arranged tickets and a catered lunch for my wife and me and two of my friends and their wives – yep, the same two guys that started CMU with me back in 1965. The only thing missing was a full head of dark hair and that fine black-and-white plaid sport coat. It was a spectacularly crisp, bright fall day, the kind of day that readers will be able to recall as they close their eyes, breathe in the sent of decaying leaves, and remember back to their first days on CMU's campus. •

