

Oral History Project Director at the JP Metras Sports Museum
London, Ontario

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During the 2012 summer I had the opportunity to complete an internship with the JP Metras Sports Museum in London, Ontario. The museum, named after Western's legendary football coach John Metras, is set up to *research, document, and exhibit* the artifacts, photographs, and other archival materials associated with the athletic teams of Western University since 1878. Ted Hessel, the Director of the museum as well as the president of the alumni organization known as The "W" Club, set up this internship with a vision of supplementing the museum's collection with an oral history repository. Such a repository would contain recorded interviews with former athletes, coaches and administrators to be listened to by future scholars.

Creating this oral history collection from the ground-up involved a number of duties and responsibilities. My first task was to create a list of interviewees and compose a *Letter of Information and Consent* for the Review Ethics Board of Western to approve that outlined our project details, ensuring that our participants knew how their stories would be handled by the museum. Next I began researching and purchasing oral history recording equipment including digital archiving and transcription software. This part of the project was a lot of fun, particularly because we were

approved for a Mitacs-Accelerate grant of \$5,000, allowing me to get multiple high-end digital recorders as well as an iMac to archive and edit the audio files.

Before beginning our interviews I drafted an interview questionnaire, as well as project guidelines, transcription standards, and an ethics guide for oral history interns in the future. This required detailed research on Canadian sport history in general and Western sport history in particular. Since we decided to complete 10 interviews with *former male and female athletes, administrators and/or coaches* of Western University, I was responsible for initiating a pre-interview to meet with the participant without a recorder. These were typically enjoyable sessions, sharing with our interviewees the objective of the project and setting up a date for the recorded interview.

Certainly the most memorable aspect of the entire internship was the interview. Each individual we interviewed was unique and provided us with an incredible story about the role of athletics in his or her life. I was honoured to interview a former Western wrestler and Olympic wrestling coach, two outstanding volleyball players and national coaches through the 1960s and '70s, a number of football players for the Mustangs during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, as well as a former female equestrian, who at 90 continues to ride her horse, golf and exercise. In fact, she even took me out on a ride after our interview!

After each session I was responsible for transcribing each interview using our transcription software and hardware. This was a tedious process, but beneficial in allowing me to listen to the interview again and assess what went well and what questions I could ask in future interviews. Transcriptions, once completed, were mailed out to each of the participants for editing.

Once the interviews were transcribed I developed a searchable index of the audio files. Using *Stories Matter*, free database software developed by Concordia University's Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, I "clipped" the audio files into a variety of thematic segments and "tagged" the segments with keywords that are searchable.

My final responsibility for the internship involved contacting a local or scholarly publication in order to alert scholars as well as the local community to the existence of this new body of research. This stage allowed me to publish a piece in *Western News* to inform the school body of the Metras Museum's oral history collection.

This entire internship provided me with a great platform to practice public history. The small size of the museum, the grant money, and the partnership I developed with Ted Hessel provided me with a great deal of freedom to develop the oral history collection in my own way. In addition to this freedom, I was fortunate to meet and develop relationships with memorable individuals in London whose life stories are now a lasting part of Western's own history.