

LLOYD DOBYNS

September 24, 1996

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**Mame Warren,
interviewer**

Warren: Mame Warren. Today is the twenty-fourth of September, 1996. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, with Lloyd Dobyns, class of 1957.

What brought you to Washington and Lee in the first place?

Dobyns: My brother was here. He was a senior the year I was a freshman. He was also in journalism school, although he didn't work in it very long after he graduated, and it was easier for the family if we were both in one place. He and I both wanted to go to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, but in those days for out-of-state residents, it was too expensive. It may be hard to believe now, but Washington and Lee was less expensive, a situation which no longer prevails, I might add, but that was basically it. We both wanted to be writers or reporters, and in those days if you wanted to be a writer, you had to be a reporter, because newspapers and news magazines were the only people who hired them, that we knew of. It turned out not to be true, but so what.

Warren: So had you come to visit Washington and Lee when your brother was there?

Dobyns: No, there's was not point to it. He said it was a nice place, and that was that.

Warren: So do you remember your first impressions when you first got here?

Dobyns: Yeah. It was a tiny place, but it was bigger than where I'd been, because I'd been Fork Union Military Academy for nine years, and that's out in the middle of

absolutely no place, so it looked to me like quite a pleasant town. You have to remember in those days, the Southern Inn was here, but not much else by way of restaurants. There was no liquor by the drink in the fifties in Virginia. There were two beer joints, neither one of which has survived, Doc's Corner Store and Jabo's. Jabo's was on Main Street, and Doc's Corner Store was on the corner of Jackson [sic] and Nelson, where the Bank of Rockbridge ATM machine now is, and I guess it's a print shop. I haven't been in, so I'm guessing from the sign on the window.

Warren: Did you frequent Jabo's?

Dobyns: No, I preferred Doc's Corner Store, the reason being that my brother worked there as a waiter, so we could overcome certain obstacles, like my age.

Warren: Well, that was awfully convenient.

Dobyns: Wasn't it just, yes. Actually, I never had any trouble with my age, because I always looked older when I was here. I remember that when we were having fraternity parties in my freshman year, I would take my freshman beanie off, put it in my pocket, and in those days it was shirt, coat, and tie, put it in my jacket pocket, walk into the ABC store and order the booze for the weekend party, no one ever asked me my age. I filled out all the little forms to transport more than five gallons, and I was, at the time, seventeen.

Warren: Good Lord. So you were here in the days of freshmen beanies.

Dobyns: Oh, yes, indeed. Yes, freshmen beanies and hazing of fraternities and all that stuff that's now been done away with, mercifully.

Warren: Do I take it these are not fond memories?

Dobyns: Oh, it's an irritant, nothing more. It's something you live through because you went through it. But for the life of me, I cannot figure out what freshmen beanies were for. It never made sense to me. Of course, no one asked me whether it made sense or not, so it really didn't matter.

Warren: How did the Assimilation Committee function? Did they really go after people?

Dobyns: Which one was the Assimilation Committee?

Warren: I think they were the ones who, if you didn't wear your beanie, I think they were the ones who came after you.

Dobyns: Oh, yeah, if they were the clothes people, the Assimilation Committee enforced the rules rather strictly. I was up in front of them, oh, several times.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Dobyns: I couldn't see the point. I understood the point of wearing a tie on campus. I never saw the point of wearing a tie if I was going to Doc's Corner Store to get sloshed on beer. I mean, you know, a drunk in a tie, is just as drunk as a drunk without a tie, so I'd take the tie off, and somebody would turn me in. They would call me up and explain the tradition of the University required that I wear a tie. And I said, "No, it don't work that way. Traditions don't require anything. A tradition is not enforced. You either do it, or you don't do it. So if you tell me it's a regulation that I wear a tie, fine, then I'll wear a tie." And I never got fined, because they never had an answer for me. They couldn't quite explain.

The *Ring-tum Phi* this week has a headline that I just love, "1996 Convocation A New Tradition." I'm just trying to puzzle out what a "new tradition" means, I really don't know. But they had some very silly rules in those days. On the other hand, I knew them when I came here, before I came here. They made it very clear, this is what you were going to do. So I can't really complain that I didn't know what I was getting into, I just thought it was sort of an obligation that I should rebel, see if I could make their lives as miserable as they occasionally made mine, and I think I was successful.

Warren: So I take it you didn't join the Assimilation Committee when your turn came around?

Dobyns: No, nor was I ever invited.

Warren: Was one invited to join the Assimilation Committee?

Dobyns: As I remember, yes. I would hate to swear to that. As I remember, that was the process.

Warren: Oh, isn't that interesting.

Dobyns: Obviously, I remember H. Merrill Plaisted III became a member of the Assimilation Committee, and H. Merrill Plaisted III was the best dressed young man I have ever known in my entire life. I never saw him in four years when he was not wearing a tweed jacket. I mean, in the springtime, when a tweed jacket was singularly inappropriate, that's what H. Merrill Plaisted III had. And whatever was fashionable, he had it first, and he really cared. I hope in life he has done well, because he sort of dressed for it.

Warren: [Laughter] You haven't followed his career?

Dobyns: No. No. I just remember him and wondering how much money he actually spent every year, so that he rarely wore the same jacket twice that you would notice. I just wondered what he did, and what he might have done with all that money had he not spent it on Harris Tweed jackets. None of my business, so it doesn't matter.

Warren: The issue of dress seems to have been really important around here.

Dobyns: It was, it was very important. My roommate, in my senior year, was a man named Jerry Hopkins, who went on to become a writer, and Jerry's way of rebellion was, he lived in New Jersey, so he would go to someplace in Paramus and buy day-glo orange shirts and chartreuse ties and these wonderfully outrageous combinations of things, and wear them, and since he was within regulation, of course, he could never be called up before the Assimilation Committee, although his goal was to be the worst-dressed person on campus, and he achieved it, and that was his rebellion. It was terribly important, and the more people would talk to us, and Jerry, and ask him, couldn't he just make an effort to try and dress more gentlemanly, which was the word used, his reply was probably not recordable, but it equated to no, and he never

changed. I think as soon as he left college, he burned all those stupid shirts and ties. He didn't like them himself.

Warren: Did all this come from your fellow students?

Dobyns: Oh, yes.

Warren: Or were you getting pressure from the faculty?

Dobyns: Faculty never mentioned my dress to me, nor did they ever mention it to Jerry, except Pax Davis once laughed so hard, I thought he was going to fall out of his chair when Jerry came in, in striped shirt and a patterned tie, and, I mean, it was ugly, really truly ugly, and Pax just laughed hysterically, thought it was wonderful, couldn't have cared less. Those students, in those days, the faculty, to the best of my knowledge, didn't care about it. Students did.

Warren: So you mentioned Lexington being a big place, from your perspective.

Dobyns: Oh, yeah. The only thing at Fork Union Military Academy was Fork Union Military Academy and a service station.

Warren: How did you get here in '53? How did one arrive in Lexington in '53?

Dobyns: By car. I lived in Newport News, Virginia, so it was a fairly easy drive, even in those days. My father and mother brought me up with my clothes, which was about all you brought in those days, and I think I had a gooseneck lamp, and you reported to the freshman dorm, and that was that. Everything else was furnished. Maybe I had some sheets, I just don't remember. But everything I had could be carried in suitcases. I had two suitcases; that was it.

Warren: All those Harris tweed jackets could be carried in two suitcases?

Dobyns: Well, since I didn't have any, the jackets I had fit quite nicely.

Warren: So you arrived in Lexington. What was your impression of the town?

Dobyns: Well, you see, I didn't get to see the town very much, just the drive through, and go to the freshman dorm, and then you were busy as heck, because you then went to Freshman Camp.

Warren: Tell me about Freshman Camp.

Dobyns: I don't remember anything about it, except you had to go, and you wore casual clothes, no ties. It was across a weekend, and things were just explained to you, how the campus worked, how classes worked, who was responsible for what, who your advisor would be. The dean, in those days, stood by the path that led to the dining hall, and you were required to wear name tags, and we would all walk past him. It was the only way to get to the dining hall, and he never, after that, forgot your name. He looked at you and your name tag one time, and that was it. If he saw you years later, he would call you by name. Damnedest display of memory I've ever seen.

Warren: Who is this?

Dobyns: Francis Pendleton Gaines.

Warren: Oh, President Gaines.

Dobyns: Oh, President. Oh, yeah, okay, sorry. Yes, that was it. Amazing.

Warren: Yes, he seems to have been quite a character.

Dobyns: I don't know, I think that was probably the last time I ever saw him, other than just, you know, casual observation around the campus. I think he spoke at a couple of things I was required to attend, and that was it. He was a neat man. And that's all I remember about camp. It was boring. You learned a lot that you needed to know to start classes on, I would suppose, Monday, and then other than that, I remember nothing about it. In those days, very early on, was Rush Week with fraternities, and that was just sort of running around frantically.

Warren: And you joined?

Dobyns: Kappa Sigma. My brother was in it, took care of that problem.

Warren: So had you already decided that was what you were going to do?

Dobyns: I think it was kind of a foregone conclusion. The other fraternities, you know, were pleasant enough to invite me to their parties and things, but they knew I was going to be Kappa Sig, they just let it go.

Warren: And was that a good match for you?

Dobyns: I suppose so. I got to be president of the chapter, and then I haven't done anything with it since I graduated, because in the second semester of my senior year when I was the chapter president, Jerry Hopkins' brother was blackballed, and he quit the fraternity, and I didn't quit, because I was the president, I just left and never had anything to do with it again.

Warren: Tell me what you mean, blackballed.

Dobyns: Oh, if one member of the chapter voted against, that was it, you would not be asked to join. The vote was taken with a cigar box with a hole in the top, and a whole bunch of white and black marbles in a little container. They went around first, and everybody reached in and got what they wanted, and then the cigar box came right behind. Whoever was chapter president opened it up, and if there was anything black in there, that was the end of that guy. So Jerry's brother, John, who came the same as I did, Jerry was the older brother, and his brother came his freshman year, when Jerry was a senior, his brother was a freshman, wanted to join Kappa Sig, and somebody blackballed him, and so Jerry quit, which I think is perfectly reasonable.

Warren: I never knew that blackballing was literally a black ball.

Dobyns: It is quite literally, in this case, a black marble, and I suppose that's rather standard.

Warren: Wow. Girls don't do these kinds of things. [Laughter]

Dobyns: Thank God. They really are kind of silly. Because everybody in the chapter, except that one guy, obviously voted for Jerry's brother. What are you going to do? You certainly won't blackball somebody's brother, but somebody did. And I've always wondered whether it was because of John, who got blackballed, or Jerry, who didn't. Jerry could be obstreperous.

Warren: So take me to a fraternity party back in those days.

Dobyns: Well, in the first place, there were no coeds. So most fraternity parties were held on Saturday night, so that you would have time on Saturday afternoon, because there were Saturday classes in those days—I don't know if there still are—to drive to Hollins, Randolph-Macon, Southern Sem [Southern Seminary], and frequently, Sweet Briar. There's one in Harrisonburg, but I always forget the name of it. And pick up your date and come back. You would have made arrangements at one of the rooming houses for your date to have a room, and that's where you'd take her, and you'd pick her up at the appropriate time for dinner, after she had changed clothes.

You'd go out to dinner, and then you get to the party, oh, 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock. There was always a band, and there was always an open bar, because liquor was perfectly legal as long as you didn't sell it, so we didn't sell it, we just gave it away. By about 10:30, almost everybody there was in the bag, and by midnight it was a guaranteed certainty.

Kappa Sig, on Sunday morning, we would mix up a huge vat of milk punch, which is ice cream, milk, and brandy, and that would cure the hangover, and then just after lunch you would get in the car and drive your date back to wherever her college was. Come back on Sunday night, finish up the milk punch, and start classes Monday morning.

Warren: Did studying figure in to anything anywhere?

Dobyns: Oh, yeah. Most of us studied quite hard, but not on Saturday night. I strongly suspect we studied more during the week than the students do now. In journalism school, it was a rare day when I didn't have two, three, or four stories to write, and would quite often still be writing at one, two o'clock in the morning to meet the deadline, and everybody else was doing the same thing. They were very demanding and not very understanding.

Warren: Tell me what you mean by that.

Dobyns: Professors I work with now tend to see their job more as helping the students learn, if they want to, and if they don't want to learn, you can't teach them anyway, so why bother. But in those days, the professor saw his job as, by God, he would beat it into you, no matter what it took. So if you were having trouble, he wouldn't particularly help you, he would just give you additional homework to help you on your way, which, of course, didn't help a damn thing.

Warren: Who were talking about here? Tell me about faculty who were important to you.

Dobyns: Most of them I've forgotten. The two who were important to me were in journalism school, Pax Davis and O.W. Riegel. And until Pax died, I stayed in touch with both of them, still in touch with Tom. Was at a club meeting with him last Monday night. He is very proud of the fact that in the second semester of my senior year, I flunked the motion picture and television course he taught, went on to have a reasonable career in television. I reminded him of that on my twenty-fifth graduation anniversary, and had found the report card so that I could demonstrate I was telling the truth, he said, "I couldn't have done that."

I said, "You did." I refused to go to class. I didn't have to, had unlimited cuts. There were eight of us in the class at the beginning, and Tom and the other seven students who were interested in avant-garde motion pictures, and I wasn't. I thought they were boring, I thought they didn't do anything. I like telling stories. If you're not going tell me a story by the film, don't make the film. I guess I went to three classes and argued with everybody in there, and it suddenly occurred to me one day, "Why am I doing this? I'm taking all the fun out of it for them, and making myself angry," so I called Tom and told him I wasn't going to come anymore.

At the end of the semester, he called me at the Kappa Sig House and said if I would come down and sign a blue book for him, exam book that you took in those days, he'd give me a C, because I could have gotten a C just by wandering in every now

and then, but he really would rather give me an F, but he didn't want to jeopardize my graduation. And I said, "I have about thirty more credits than I need, so why don't you just give me the F and let's be done with it."

And he said, "Please go check at the registrar, and if you really have extra credits, I'll give you an F, and take three of them away." I thought that was a reasonable request, so I went to the registrar. He said, "You've got thirty extra credits."

I told Tom, and he said, "Oh, good," and gave me an F, the only F I've ever gotten in my life. I just thought it was funny as hell.

Warren: [Laughter] That's great. Did they ever get around to talking about television in the class?

Dobyns: Television in 1957 didn't get talked about.

Warren: And, yet it was a course on film and television.

Dobyns: Well, because television news started in 1953 or '52, during the Korean War or just at the end of the Korean War, and they were aware that sooner or later they were going to have to start teaching this stuff. Now, why they put it with motion pictures was because it had pictures, right? So they didn't put in the radio course, where, reasonably, you would find it. Radio was taught separately and very extensively. But television, that was the one course we had then, and nobody wanted to go into it. I went into it not because I wanted to, but because the *Times and World News* offered me \$67.50 a week as a cub reporter, and WBBJ, which the Times World Corporation owned, offered me \$75.00 a week. That was a no-brainer, as far as I was concerned.

Warren: Pretty good reason.

Dobyns: And I figured I can always get out of the stuff and go back to my first love, magazines and books, and I did; it just took until 1986.

Warren: You were talking about having a lot of deadlines for your classes. Were the deadlines for the classes or for *Ring-tum Phi*?

Dobyns: All of the above. I worked the *Ring-tum Phi*, I worked for Frank Parsons in the University News Bureau, I was a stringer for the *Rockbridge County News*, which is now the *News-Gazette*, and I was a stringer for the *Roanoke Times and World News*. I worked for anybody who would pay me money.

Warren: Tell me what it means to be a stringer in Lexington.

Dobyns: Oh, that's wonderful. First off, do you know what the term means?

Warren: Tell me.

Dobyns: Okay, a stringer. I went down and applied for a job, because Pax Davis said they were looking for somebody who could write, and I was a good writer in the class. So I went down and talked to Matthew W. Paxton III, who is now retired. He was then a fairly young man, and he hired me for eleven and a half cents a column inch, so if you didn't produce, you didn't get paid.

Now, the way you measure your inches is, you take a string given to you by the editor, and you tie a knot in one end, and then you just move it down all the columns, all the little articles that you've written, including pictures that you've taken, and tie a knot in the other end when you reach the end of what you've written, and you give it to the editor, and he measures it against a yard stick, and then he calculates that times, eleven and a half cents. I made a great deal of money, because eventually he trusted me enough to leave on vacation, which he hadn't had in a long time, and I got eleven and a half cents a column inch for the entire paper, advertising and all, because I was the editor that week, which was a substantial check in those days.

And then at the University News Bureau, I got seventy-five cents an hour. I've really forgotten what the *Times and World News* paid, because I didn't get that many stories in, but it was no more than that. One of my functions was far-flung correspondence, which are generally little old ladies in various communities. We'd send them their weekly stories about the covered-dish suppers and the Sunday services, and I had to edit them, and I got paid eleven and a half cents a column inch to edit

them. After Mr. Paxton carefully explained to me that what he was looking for in editing those was not change of content, he knew what they were, "Don't get us sued, don't libel anybody, and get the verb tense right. Otherwise, leave it alone. If you offend those people, they won't send their copy anymore." He was absolutely right.

But it was great training, because the more you wrote, the more money you got. So you learned to write all stories quite long, so you learned what made them long. So when I got into television, it was very easy to make them short, because you knew where all the padding was. In its own way, it was probably the best television training I got while I was here.

Warren: Isn't that interesting.

Dobyns: It's just one of those things that, you know, as you learn to write long, it never occurs to you until you need it, that you're also learning to write short, just by taking all the long stuff out. So when I started working at WBBJ, and they said, "Keep it to a minute," I knew what a minute was. Take the long stuff out, hey, there's a minute. Worked fine.

Warren: So what kind of stories? Were there any big stories?

Dobyns: Oh, no, not interns. If news, I did a couple of features that they liked a lot. One of them was about Charlie the certified dog at VMI, who used to attend classes over there, and was well loved by the dates of W&L students. On Saturday nights he would pick a fraternity house, and just sort of wander in, and he would go downstairs to the lounge, where all the lounges were, and he would find an absolutely adorable coed from someplace else, and sit on the sofa with her, and drink her beer out of a paper cup all night. And no one ever refused him that I saw, and then somebody shot him to death about six months later. It was a great scandal in Rockbridge County that somebody had shot Charlie the certifiable dog. He was a spaniel of some kind, and really was very nice and very sweet. He attended classes at VMI, and people just accepted him as Charlie the certified dog.

And then I did a long feature on the Rockbridge County Fire and Rescue Service, which was a single unit in those days, which made the Fire and Rescue Service very happy. Not much had ever been written about them. They were a very good group. And mostly I just covered news events, county supervisor, city council, courts, cops, the stuff you cover.

Warren: Were you covering events at Washington and Lee?

Dobyns: No, except, that I was the University of News Bureau student assistant, so I had to deal with Pax Davis. On my beats reporting, which I had to do for class, I would put in two carbons, if you remember back to when we said things like "carbons," and I would type three copies of the same story. One I would turn in to him as my class assignment, one I would give to Frank Parsons in case he had any interest in it for the University News Bureau, and one would go to the *Rockbridge County News*. So I would get my grade, but I would also get paid seventy-five cents by Frank and eleven and a half cents a column inch by Mr. Paxton.

Warren: You were working the system here.

Dobyns: Well, I was better than that. In those days, not many people could type. So I made seventy-five cents a page typing legal briefs for the law students. Because, remember, you had to be a good typist, because you couldn't go back and correct it the way you can on a computer. If you got the word wrong, you had to start at the top of the page, so you learned not to make mistakes on a keyboard, which was very handy later on. It makes you fast, which in television takes care of your problem.

Warren: There was one major story that I know happened while you were here. Surely you were there.

Dobyns: Oh, yeah, when Alben Barkley dropped out, sure, '56 Mock Convention.

Warren: Were you a delegate?

Dobyns: No, no, I was assigned. I was the University News Bureau. That was my assignment. I was there as a reporter when he died, both as a reporter and as the

university's contact with professional reporters who were here. There weren't that many, but there were some. Actually, it was the first time I ever got written up in a newspaper, because Charley McDowell wrote about three of his students who had done professionally well at that event, Philippe Labro, who was the French exchange student, a third guy, I cannot remember to save my life, and I have long since lost the article that Charley wrote, and me, because, generally speaking, I worked the next seventy-two hours straight, answering calls, many of them from ministers who were terribly upset, because the quote had been quoted incorrectly in a number of papers, and they wanted to know why Alben Barkley was comparing himself to God. I had to explain that, no, the quote was, "I would rather be a servant in the house of the Lord than to sit in the seats of the mighty," and therefore he wasn't comparing himself to God. No, no, no. He wanted to be a servant. I said that enough that I actually came to believe it. But the quote was right.

Then later, in '72, because I was in Paris, a couple of university professors, not from here, published a book on *Great Closing Lines*, like Oscar Wilde's line, "Either the wallpaper goes, or I do," and they did the Barkley quote, only they put in Lexington, Kentucky, got the quote wrong and the date wrong. It was reviewed in *Time* magazine, so I wrote to *Time*, and they printed the letter, and I've always felt very good about that, to put it to a couple of professors who did research so poorly, they got the wrong state. But that was an interesting time.

Warren: Take me to the event. What happened?

Dobyns: Oh, it is the usual crowded floor, the usual yelling and screaming, and it is all men, all the states have their delegates there, and Barkley is the keynote speaker. I don't know if you've ever heard him, but he was an old fashioned stump orator. He never used a note. His preparation was that he had lived all his life in politics.

He was thundering on, and some delegate who was obviously either in disagreement with what he had just said, or didn't back the candidate that he backed, or

didn't like Harry Truman, I don't know what, began to heckle him a little bit, which is fine in politics, and Barkley just ate him alive, and really caught fire after this guy was heckling. He screamed, "The old fire horse hears the bell," and just great rambling, and everybody's screaming and applauding, and he said his closing line, and went straight over backwards. He didn't fall down, he just fell back, and was spread-eagled on the rostrum behind the lectern. He was seriously dead, and so everybody filed out, and then I guess that was it. Mrs. Barkley was taken to wherever they took her, and by that time, I was working the phones like crazy. I don't know precisely what happened after he collapsed, because then I was in my university mode, and trying to get things done. It was interesting. Great preparation for breaking stories.

Warren: I was going to say, that was a real education there.

Dobyns: I was watching how the pros did it, and I guess that's when I figured out that most pros are kind of dumb and don't do things very well. The exception was a guy named Whit Miller. I have no idea where he came from or where he went to, but he had a tape recorder, which in those days, you must understand, were suitcases, they were large heavy things, and he had gotten a really good recording of the closing lines. He stayed on the phone, called one radio station after another, one broadcast network after another, and sold the tape recording to all them, and he did it in about thirty minutes flat. He'd call and say, "Do you want it?" He'd make the connection, play the tape, and take the connectors off, and rewind it while he was telling them where to send the check, and make the next call. I mean, wow, this is how the independent pros make money. You sell it forty times, that's wonderful. Maybe it's a little ethically shaky, I don't know, maybe it's not. I never ever asked.

Warren: Well, I don't know. I'm the daughter of free-lance photographer, so, no, it's not.

Did you come back for any other Mock Conventions?

Dobyns: No. I wouldn't have gone to that one, except I was assigned to it. I have no interest in politics. My father was a very minor lieutenant in the Byrd political machine in the thirties, forties, and fifties. My brother, oh, I guess seven or eight years after he left college, became an administrative assistant to a Virginia congressman, and then became a lobbyist, which is sort of the progression. Politics, to me, you know, I grew up around it, and it wasn't my idea of a good time. I will cheerfully confess that there are journalists who may not be the nicest people you have ever met, but they don't come close to most politicians for not nice. I just didn't want to do that.

But Frank was paying me, and if he says, "Go," you say, "Yes, sir," politely, and get your notebook and go. But he had handled all the advance stuff, and I don't know why he sent me to the event, but he did, and I went.

Warren: I guess I was under the impression that Mock Convention was something everybody participated in.

Dobyns: I don't know, maybe it is now.

Warren: But it wasn't then?

Dobyns: I don't know. Because whatever anybody would say to me, I would say, "I work at the University News Bureau," so if I would have been required to go, I would have found some way not to. As it was, I found a nice legitimate way, because I was employed and working.

Warren: How about other traditional Washington and Lee things, like Fancy Dress? Did you go to Fancy Dress?

Dobyns: Sure, yeah. I went to all the dances, my God, about the only real organized fun there was. Went to the football games, went tubing in Goshen Pass, did all the things that students did in those days. But I didn't go to all of them that I would have. I went to all the dances, but other things, I would sometimes have to work, so I was doing one thing, they were doing something else.

There was not much sporting life in those days, because there had been a scandal two years before, and all the first-string football team had been kicked out on Honor Code violations, and that was the start of what Frank Parsons called Simon Pure Sports at Washington and Lee. We wrote, I guess a dozen press releases a week on why Washington and Lee didn't have a football team, because, you know, people would call up and say, "What have you done?" and the alumni were all generally furious. All scholarships had been – people who were here on a scholarship, the scholarships were honored to their graduation, but no new scholarships for athletics were awarded after that, and I think they're still not. I don't see any indication of any of them, anyway.

But it was a transitional time. Hadn't began talking yet about admitting women. That wasn't until the eighties. Let's see, '57. I guess at my twenty-fifth reunion it was a hot topic, or maybe it was the thirtieth, I just don't remember. I always thought it was a great idea. I had to say that even if I didn't think it, because my two daughters would have killed me, two daughters and two sons.

Warren: Your two daughters aren't here. Did you really think it was a good idea?

Dobyns: Yeah, I did, for a variety of reasons. I went to a military academy from the third grade on, and then I came to Washington and Lee. I had a very hard time socializing with the opposite sex, because I had never socialized with the opposite sex. I learned to dance my senior year at Fork Union, because Dr. John J. Wicker [phonetic], a leading light in the Southern Baptist Church, said in church one Sunday morning, "Dancing is the doing of the devil." And then he went on to describe why with a "rubbing your bodies together," and it sounded like such fun, I spent all my money that summer learning to dance, and so I've got to thank him for that.

Now, there have been experiments that proved me utterly wrong, one of them going on now in Harlem, that going to school together tends to make you learn how to get along with the opposite sex in the everyday business and scholastic world, and that if you go to a single-sex institution, you somehow get shortchanged. I'm not sure that's

true, but I know that's what I believed then, and still believe for most people. I can understand that if there's a shy woman who won't speak up in class, she might be better off with other shy women, but I don't know if that's true either. But I thought it was a good idea. And for one thing, look at what it does to the potential student pool. I mean, you've just gone up 51 percent in one move. The young women who are students of mine are, I hate to say this, but they are smarter than the young men who are students of mine, and, so far, at least, seem to be more serious about what they're doing.

Warren: I'm not quite ready to shift over to professor yet. I do want to do that. There are a couple of things I want to talk about before we go on.

Dobyns: Actually, I can't say anything about professor, I've only been at it for two weeks now.

Warren: I know, but it's interesting. There's something here at Washington and Lee that's not unique, but it's fairly unusual: the Honor System. What did it mean to you?

Dobyns: Almost nothing, because I'd been under it for nine years, same Honor System applied at Fork Union. So when I came here, just continue doing what you're doing.

Warren: Did you see other people struggling with it?

Dobyns: No. I never saw anybody struggle with it. I don't see it around here now the way I saw it then, but it used to be in '57, it was ordinary to walk outside and just put your books on the ground and your bag and your coat and whatever, your overcoat never your jacket, and go on to what you were doing, and then come back and pick them up later. And if it rained, somebody would come along and move them on the porch or on the Colonnade or something to get them out of the rain. No one struggled that I know of. Obviously someone struggled, because the whole first string of the football team disappeared, but that was before I got here. Actually, I think it was the year before I got here.

Warren: '54.

Dobyns: I was here. Don't remember at all. Remember the result of it. They had gone to what? My brother was very proud of it. They'd gone to something, I think in those days it was called the Orchid Bowl, whether it even exists anymore –

Warren: The Gator Bowl.

Dobyns: No, no, because my brother went, and they had flown over the stadium and dropped a load of orchids out of a small plane. Frank might remember.

Warren: I know they talk a lot about the Gator Bowl that W&L was in.

Dobyns: I don't remember that one at all.

Warren: Frank remembers everything. I'll check with him.

Dobyns: But I have no memory of it, except what my brother talked about, so it had to be before he graduated, and he graduated in spring of '54.

Warren: That's when I think it was happening then.

The red light is flashing, so I'm going to flip over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: So I also saw in the *Calyx* that you were in Troubadours.

Dobyns: Yeah. I don't know why. I did a lot of plays for the Troubadours. I did summer stock one summer at Colonial Williamsburg in the Common Glory. When was that? '55. And I did male roles at a lot of the women's colleges. I enjoyed it enormously. To be crude about it, it's a great way to meet attractive young women, which I think was my true motivation, but what the heck.

Warren: Who ran Troubadours then?

Dobyns: I have no idea.

Warren: Were there no professors who were important to you outside of journalism?

Dobyns: Nope.

Warren: Nobody stands out?

Dobyns: Some I enjoyed. We had Dr. Shelly [phonetic], who taught ancient Greek, and was one of the more delightful men I've ever known in my entire life with his wild,

crazy sense of humor, but I only took that for one year to replace a math course. No, the rest of the people were perfectly nice and, Lord knows, better than competent, but basically I was here for journalism and that's what I studied. I took the minimum number of nonrequired courses. Any free period I had, I'd put a journalism course in.

Warren: So you felt, when you got out there in the real world, that you were well prepared?

Dobyns: Oh, yeah. And let's see, I knew journalism. I knew Civil War history. I knew freshman geology. Had not studied economics at all, which made it hysterically funny when I started specializing in economics in 1980. A good background in history. Never studied political science. Never studied commerce of any kind. Didn't study math. Never took science courses beyond freshman geology, which was all doable in those day. I'm not sure you could do it anymore, I'll have to ask and find out.

Warren: And you were in ROTC?

Dobyns: ROTC, yeah. It would have been silly for me not to be. I mean, I'd already knew it, and ROTC paid \$27.00 a month to juniors and seniors, so you did two years for free, and then you started getting paid, and that means one more source of income for me and no work of any kind, because I'd been doing this stuff for nine years. I would go in class and sort of sleep and answer the questions when asked, and collect my \$27.00, and go teach other kids to march, because they didn't know how, and I did, and it was really fairly simple. And then I was commissioned a second lieutenant to and did two years and one month in the Army, and got out, and went back to work.

Warren: Did a lot of people participate in ROTC?

Dobyns: Yeah. It was a reasonably large organization. You've got remember the Korean War Armistice was in '53. There was no guarantee that was going to hold. We'd been in war from '39 to '45, World War II had gone on, we joined in '41. In '50 to '53, the Korean War, we figured for sure there was going to be another one, and if you had to go, you might as well go as an officer, and you could go to the Officers' Club,

and not have to be going around in the mud and the muck all the time, and that was the motivation for that. If you had to go, go as something. Then they had so many second lieutenants right after that, because they began to demobilize the Korean War troops, that Jerry Hopkins, my roommate, did six months in U.S. Army Intelligence and that satisfied his requirement for his two years of service.

They needed an information specialist, and I were one, so I got to go to the Mojave Desert at California, after my training at Fort Knox. One thousand square miles of desert, the largest military post in the free world, and had 1,100 people in the permanent party, and an Officers' Club built of native stone by Italian stone masons who were prisoners of war, and held in the desert during World War II, and the commanding general's home was built the same way. They were the only permanent buildings on the post. I lived in – my wife and I and two children, lived in a migrant worker's federal housing shed that had been transported over land from the San Fernando Valley on the back of a flatbed truck, and put down on four concrete feet that had been poured into the sand. It was twenty feet by twelve feet, two eight-by-twelve rooms on either end, and a little living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom. The bathroom was two feet by four feet in the middle.

Warren: Kind of moved around carefully.

Dobyns: Well, if you sat on the toilet, you couldn't close the door. We bathed our two kids by putting a galvanized tub in the shower, and then filling it with water, and then putting the kids in the galvanized tub, no bathtub, I mean, clearly two-by-four, no bathtub.

Warren: Speaking of living conditions, where did you live when you were here?

Dobyns: Freshman dorm. Mrs. Davis' rooming house, which was then on South Main Street. I have an idea what it is now, although I did notice there's some rooming houses still out there. And then the fraternity house junior and senior year. The senior year,

because I was the president, I got to pick my own room, which, of course, I took the biggest room.

Warren: So you lived in a rooming house. What does that mean, that she'd rent out?

Dobyns: She rented out rooms. And Jake Lemon [phonetic] and I lived on the third floor, and we shared a bathroom. Jake was good to have around. He was a returning Air Force vet, dead serious about getting his education, because he had seen what the world gave you if you only had a high school diploma, and he wanted more than that. So he was damn good for study habits, because on Saturday night you could count on Jake for anything you wanted to go do, but Sunday through Friday, he was going to study. So you just got in the habit, because if you made noise, Jake was bigger than me, and would come over and persuade me that I wanted to stop doing that. So I just studied, and typed, and did papers and beat stories and things.

Warren: Did you have any relationships with law students? You were typing their papers.

Dobyns: Only typing their papers.

Warren: Did you socialize with them at all?

Dobyns: No, they weren't going to socialize with an undergraduate. I was a convenient secretary that they paid money to, to do their bidding. They had no desire to socialize with me, nor I with them.

Charley McDowell's father was a professor in those days, and he'd just written a book about Kentucky, as I remember, and he was a lot of fun. But I met him because of Charley, not because of me.

Warren: You weren't classmates with Charley.

Dobyns: Oh, God, no. But because of the Barkley thing, when he wrote the column, he stayed in touch with me then. Quite often, when I go to Washington, I call, and see if he wants to go have a drink. If he's not tied up, he will. I love him because he's got the world's funniest voice.

Warren: [Laughter] He does, doesn't he. He's one of the first interviews I did. I was just totally charmed by him.

Dobyns: He's just wonderful, and he just doesn't care. [Mimicking McDowell's voice]

Warren: Yeah, he's a classic, and I don't know anybody else in Rockbridge County who sounds like him. I don't know where that accent came from.

Dobyns: Nor do I. The only other person I know who came close was a guy named John Patterson, who was at WBBJ, and later was the assistant dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia, and a winner of the CBS Fellowship. But he was this brilliant reporter on television, with a voice very close to Charley's, smart enough to know that he had a very short and limited career if he stayed on the air, and that he'd better do something else. But a great reporter, really good reporter.

Warren: So did you form friendships with people in Lexington?

Dobyns: Yeah. Kitty Bishop was the actress, she's still here, and she and Lamar Bishop, her husband. I got to know Kitty first and got to know Lamar, and he ran the foot-long hot dog place and the beer place on Main Street near the Lyric Theater. It's not there anymore. But if you look at the Lyric Theater, to the left, there was a parking lot, and the next building was the foot-long hot dog joint, and then next door to that, his father's beer hall. It had been one building, and they put a partition down the middle so that the foot-long hot dog joint was about seven feet wide and so was the beer hall. Lamar, unless he has died, because I haven't heard from him in years, eventually bred quarter horses, did very well at it. He won a lot of championships. I'd go hang out when I could at the foot-long hot dog joint. I had my first-ever raw oyster there.

Warren: At a hot dog joint?

Dobyns: Yeah, Lamar liked them, so he got some, and he said "Come on, we'll have a beer and some oysters."

And I said, "What are oysters?" You know, this is from a kid who was born on the Chesapeake Bay, but I didn't go up there. He said, "It won't kill ya." If you stop

and look at the things, they really are disgusting-looking. Who was it that said it was a brave man who first ate an oyster, and I knew exactly what he was talking about. Put some lemon juice and some Tabasco, and then you just—he said, "For God's sake, don't chew."

Warren: Just swallow. [Laughter]

Dobyns: It was good. I liked it, beer and oysters. I guess he was the only person in town I knew, other than Matthew Paxton and his father, but they were my boss and the owner. They were not going to socialize with the hired help. And the other time I was working, so I never got to meet many people. If they weren't in my sort of limited little sphere, I wasn't out wondering around.

I knew Doc from Doc's Corner Store, but that was because he'd run into me. We had this little traffic accident that was Doc's fault, so he was nice to me after that. And I knew Jabbo, just because you couldn't be here and not know Jabbo. He sold all the kegs that were sold in town.

Warren: I want to know more about Jabbo.

Dobyns: Huge fat man with glasses. He sat on a stool in his joint and sold draft beer at the bar and kegs for weekend parties.

Warren: Was Jabbo black or was Jabbo white?

Dobyns: White. There were no black people in Lexington in those days. I don't think I ever saw one, certainly not as merchants.

Warren: Who made your bed in the fraternity house?

Dobyns: Me. We had a black chef. And Mrs. Jordan, who was our—I think they're called housemothers, or whatever they are called, fraternity mothers, spent two years in despair, because he said the only way he knew how to cook was with lard. He didn't know how to use butter or anything that was lower oil that might actually be moderately healthy, so everything was cooked in lard, because that was the only way he knew how to cook. But he was very good, and he could turn out the right number of

dinners very, very quickly. So Mrs. Jordan could just stay in despair, because we couldn't replace him.

We had a cleaning service. Of course, they came when I was in school, but Jerry and I made our own beds, because we locked our door when we left. We owned typewriters, a valuable commodity in 1957, '56-'57, and getting to be valuable now because there are none of them.

Warren: So you locked your door?

Dobyns: Uh-huh.

Warren: Even with the Honor System?

Dobyns: The Honor System for a fraternity house in almost the last building, on what we call, and what we called, North Roanoke, was not the safest place for material to be. We weren't worried about students. But when people would come in from Roanoke intent on doing harm, guess which was the first fraternity house? And we learned the hard way that locking the door was a really swell idea. Otherwise, we'd just leave all the typewriters in the journalism lab that was open twenty-four hours a day so people could go there and type. I don't think they ever had any trouble, because there was almost always somebody in there, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, because we did the radio and news broadcast every night from there. I think it was just one a day.

That was the first time I ever broke up on the air, because Philippe Labro, for reasons that I will never understand, had decided he wanted he wanted to do sports one night. He was reporting on the score of the game that had been won by the "Baltimore Oriol-es," and that's where I lost it. I just never got it back.

Warren: So were you and Philippe were buddies?

Dobyns: Yeah. We've seen each other a couple of times since then, usually at Tom Riegel's house. Well, you were buddies with everybody who was in journalism school.

There weren't that many of us. I mean, I had one class where there were just eight. The ordinary class was no more than ten, just not that many people.

Jeb Rosebrook, I don't know if he was a journalism major or just came over to take the writing courses, but he's been in Hollywood for thirty years, knocking out film scripts, so he must have learned something. I wonder if he took to motion picture and television?

Warren: Well, you wouldn't know, would you. You weren't there.

Dobyns: I was there for a couple of classes. And then Jerry was in the class. John Ham, who went on to – he's retired now, but spent, I've forgotten the name of it, but it's someplace in New England. He started off as a history teacher at a rather posh boys' school, which is now a boys' and girls' school, and got up to assistant headmaster and loved it. The job was just wonderful for him. Never figured that one out.

Carl Barnes wasn't a journalism student, but he took a couple of writing classes. The last I heard of him, he was a professor at fine arts at Wayne State outside of Detroit. And the other guys I just lost track of, except for Mike Murrell [phonetic], who was in the class of '59. He's an actor and writer in Hollywood. He and Jeb, when Jerry lived there, the three of them would get together quite often, and call and say, "Why don't you fly out?"

And I'd say, "For about three thousand dollars' worth of reasons. You guys get in your cars and drive six miles, and you're all together, three thousand miles from me." Jerry left there, and last I heard of him, he was living in Bangkok. A friend of mine was the ambassador, so I got the two of them together. I doubt that they hit it off, because the ambassador, who is now retired, I met him at the Paris Peace Talks in '72, Foreign Service officer, very conservative and, as is required in an FSO, very correct, and Jerry is not conservative and is not correct.

Warren: Well, that was probably a quick evening for them.

So through the years you've mentioned reunions. You've come back to Washington and Lee?

Dobyns: I've come back to two of them.

Warren: Which ones?

Dobyns: Twenty-fifth and another, I can't remember whether it's thirty or thirty-five, and obviously I will be in place for forty in May. No, I'm sorry, three of them. I came back for my tenth.

Warren: Okay, that's what I wanted to know. It took ten years to get back?

Dobyns: Uh-huh.

Warren: And then it took another fifteen years to come back.

Dobyns: Yeah, because the tenth year I remembered why I hadn't come back for the five. A goodly number of the people I went to school with were pretentious assholes, and I couldn't see any real reason that I'd want to be with them. As years pass, you both moderate your own opinion and they moderate some of their behavior, and it becomes much more acceptable.

Warren: So by the twenty-fifth?

Dobyns: Perfectly reasonable people.

Warren: And what do you think they thought of you?

Dobyns: I don't know, never cared. I didn't care when I was here, and I don't care now. I stopped caring about it. I stopped caring about what they were, because it suddenly occurred to me that they were being perfectly happy, and I was making myself upset. Really, it was terribly stupid, so I just stopped, and figured they could be what they want to be, and I'll mind my own business. Talked to Tom and some of the other people, Pax, until he died. I always go see Frank.

Warren: Which pleases him, no end.

Dobyns: And Helen Watts. She was the secretary in the News Bureau when I was the student assistant. She married Dr. Watts, and I can't remember his first name to save my life.

Warren: Bill Watts?

Dobyns: Bill Watts, yeah. I can't see them because they are gone to Turkey. I hope they'll be back sometime during the year, but I always try to find them. Until Lamar and Kitty Bishop split up, I always tried to find them. I still look up Kitty, but Lamar is somewhere.

Warren: So the twenty-fifth reunion, what do you think of that whole reunion process here?

Dobyns: I don't know. I've never known that it did a whole heck of a lot of good, but it seems to, so obviously I'm wrong. For some reason I've never really enjoyed looking back at things. I'm much more interested in what's going to happen than what had already happened. I guess it's part of being a reporter. That story's done, time to move on to the next story. They're fun, I mean in their own limited way. If you said would you like to come to a reunion every year, the answer would be, "Hell, no, not under any circumstance." But occasionally they're fun.

Warren: And now you're back as a professor.

Dobyns: Uh-huh.

Warren: How's that?

Dobyns: You mean, how did it come about, or how is it so far? Well, it came about because in '93-'94, I was invited to be a visiting professor at Jacksonville State University in Alabama, but visiting there meant really visiting. You went in for four, five days a month. I worked with kids in writing, communication, and things like that. Worked with the college administration on quality management systems, and I enjoyed it, I liked it.

And then a young writer, a female, who was my second son's girlfriend for a couple of years, and I stayed in touch with her because we both write, heard that Washington and Lee was looking for a one-year professor. She heard it from a guy at the University of South Carolina when she was looking for something. So she called and said, "Your alma mater needs a professor. Why don't you call."

So I came up to see Ham Smith, and it worked out. It's sort of semi-funny because it's a print professorship for one year, and while my background is principally in broadcasting, it didn't scare me, because I've written two books and magazine articles and newspaper stories, and I figured I could get by that, no matter what. Read the textbook the night before they do, and I'm one up, and I've got experience. So far, it's worked out fine. I got to create one course on my own, because the two that I needed to teach for Brian Richardson when he was at Oxford, his third course was one he created on his own, as I understand. I put together a long-form reporting class to show you how to write books, magazine articles, television news magazine programs, and television documentaries. I've got eight very bright students in that one. They keep asking questions, and I'm not really sure about the answers, but I've got them fooled so far.

And there's a basic writing class, that is simply a matter of making them write over and over and over again, and helping them, showing them how they've made mistakes. And then a beats class, the old beats reporting class that I was in, where you go out and cover the city, county, government, the cops, courts, the stuff you cover. And then I, in effect, become the managing editor, and just keep them on track, and make them turn it in on time.

There's a student editor who works with them as the assignment editor, because she's taking editing class with Ham Smith. It's fun so far. I haven't gotten in much social life, because I'm trying to get moved into my apartment and get set up. Tim and Mary Lee Hickman [phonetic], he runs the production studio here in town, he used to

work for me as a cameraman in Portsmouth in the sixties, so we've been together a couple of times. Sunday I'm going hiking with him and his wife, because I enjoy hiking. I guess that's it. I really haven't done much yet.

Had one club meeting. What's it called? That Club, twenty-some professors and other people, basically professors. They meet once a month and present papers on subjects that they do not teach, so they have to go out and do research and do that stuff. The one last Monday night was a chapter from Tom Riegel's memoirs, when he first got to Paris. Really very interesting, because it's back in the twenties. Stuff I never knew before. I imagine I will get into the social life sooner or later.

Warren: It's a pretty social town.

Dobyns: It seems to be. I am, as usual, working on forty-seven things simultaneously, so I don't know how much of it I'll be able to get into, but I will find time to do some of it.

Warren: Well, shall we round off this interview?

Dobyns: Why not.

Warren: Any final things you want to say?

Dobyns: No, I didn't particularly want to say those, but you asked the questions, and so I answered them.

Warren: You were very kind to put up with my questions.

Dobyns: Oh, I don't mind that. I've made a living all my life asking questions. I can hardly claim to be above it now.

Warren: Well, thank you, Lloyd, I appreciate it.

Dobyns: You're quite welcome.

[End of Interview]