

# JOHN DONALDSON

October 30, 1996

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Mame Warren,  
Interviewer

**Warren:** This is Mame Warren. I'm in Atlanta, Georgia. Today is October 30th, 1996, and I'm with John Donaldson.

I'm going to start off with just the usual question I ask everybody, which is, why Washington and Lee? Why did you go to Washington and Lee in the first place? What attracted you?

**Donaldson:** Well, I went in part because of friends of my parents and in part because of friends of my own from high school who had gone there. I never met any alumni who haven't had really great things to say about it, and so that was what convinced me when I was in high school. I had gone to see Charlottesville and then went on to Lexington and really fell in love with the campus and the whole experience, and then confirming that with other friends and friends of my folks. It was just someplace that I knew I wanted to be and applied early and got in, and that was that.

**Warren:** Where did you come from?

**Donaldson:** From Baltimore.

**Warren:** Oh, you're kidding! I'm from Annapolis.

**Donaldson:** Oh, right here.

**Warren:** I didn't realize you were from Baltimore.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, Old Line State.

**Warren:** Yeah, really. Good for you. So then you must have known a lot of people from W&L.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, I did. There was a pretty good crowd. There's always a big crowd from Baltimore. I had grown up with a few people from home that had gone there and they liked it, and so they're good salesmen.

**Warren:** So what did you think you were going to do when you went there? Did you know what you wanted?

**Donaldson:** No, it was wide open. I think I started sure that I was going to be a C School major and go on straight into business, and as has happened frequently in my life, it took a different turn and wound up as a history major with kind of a dual emphasis on American and African history, and I went into law school after that. So it worked out well.

**Warren:** Were there any teachers who made a big impression, who made a difference to you?

**Donaldson:** Yeah, let me think who were some of the big ones. I took a lot of classes in the history department, Professor Merchant, obviously, and his Civil War emphasis. He'd recreate the battles and generals and life at home during that period. He really had a gift, or has a gift, for that kind of putting you on the scene.

And Dr. Porter, as well, who was my advisor for four years and really guided me in a lot of different ways and kindled an interest in British colonial history and in history in general. His focus is so broad and he has such a knowledge of so many different countries and personalities and the legends, really, it's very impressive. He was a tremendous mentor for me and a great help with law school and that sort of thing, as well.

Who else? There were so many. Professor de Maria, who I worked a lot with the Mock Convention, he's a fantastic guy and a great teacher as well. He and I worked together on a few independent projects and I learned so much about media and about filmmaking and that sort of thing.

I'm trying to think who else. Professor Connelly, too, who I worked with Mock Convention. He's really, it seems like has come out and is getting a real national reputation for commentary. But he really had a tremendous interest in what we were doing and gave us incredible support all the way, all along the line in everything from talking to other professors about our workloads to lining up speakers and everything in between.

**Warren:** You've mentioned Mock Convention. Why don't we just go for it. How did you first find out about the Mock Convention and how early did you get involved?

**Donaldson:** One of the chairmen from '88 was a member of my fraternity. He graduated, but one of his classmates had stayed behind and was a fifth year when I was a freshmen. He, the fifth year who stayed behind, Jeff Schwartz, just raved about the entire experience and about how we needed to get involved, "we" being the pledges at the time. So I just did a little research. It was so early at the time, I mean, it was maybe spring of '89 or maybe it was probably winter of '89, our second semester my freshmen year, that I don't think anybody else really knew about it, and so I kind of got a jump on it because I had been primed and been talked to about it. So I think I just put in an application and had gotten to know some of the interim, the chairmen that were kind of overseeing in the dormant years, and they gave me a good recommendation, and then the E. C. appointed me when I was a freshmen, and then just carried on.

**Warren:** You were appointed when you were a freshmen?

**Donaldson:** Yes.

**Warren:** Appointed to be chair of the—

**Donaldson:** Well, they did it on an annual basis. They reviewed it every year.

**Warren:** Explain it all to me, just for posterity. How does it happen?

**Donaldson:** The way that it works, and I think it's true with most of the student organizations that the E. C. controls, is that they accept applications, then they bring you in for an interview, and then they make their decision from that. For Mock Convention there were two chairmen for I guess what would have been my sophomore year. There was one my freshmen year. Because it's quadrennial, the chairman who was chairman when I was a freshmen was not going to be there for it. So they knew that was just an interim solution, and so what they did then was for my sophomore year was they picked me, knowing that I would be around, and then they continued with the interim chairman who had been chairman when I was a freshmen, who wasn't going to be around. So that was not a permanent situation. So I think after that first year, which was in my sophomore year, then my junior year they appointed two other chairmen to run it through '92.

**Warren:** So you really were sort of destined to do this.

**Donaldson:** Well, it worked out that way. It's one of the lucky things that happened to me.

**Warren:** So how much of your life did it consume through the four years?

**Donaldson:** It was probably—for the first two years, it was a pretty big commitment. There were always things going on that I had to see about and plan for. But really from the second semester, from winter term of my junior year through winter term of my senior year, it was probably 60 percent of my time, 70 percent of my time. It was a pretty intense experience. I haven't replicated that since. Work is obviously different, but in terms of having that kind of a team project, it was amazing, a tremendous experience. I'd like to find something similar to it out in the real world if I could, if I'd get paid for it. But it was a lot of time, though, and it just escalated, and through the winter term senior year, I mean, it was probably 80 percent of my time.

**Warren:** Did you have any idea when you got started, what Mock Convention really was?

**Donaldson:** No, and that's part of the beauty of it, really. I mean, you have this general idea, you can read the history books, you can look back at old *Ring-tum Phis* and figure out sort of what the general premise is, but the fact that you can kind of create it yourself, you have the overarching principles and you have the understanding of generally what it is, but when it comes down to the details, that's where every convention is put together. They can really put their own imprimatur on the history of it, and that's pretty neat, because the E. C. or a lot of the other student organizations, I mean, they're very constant and it's a little bit more evolving than the Mock Convention. The Mock Conventions really—I mean, they can change dramatically in four years. I mean, that obviously has to do with which party is the subject of the Mock Convention, but it's pretty neat. You have a lot of creative power over it, and I think because of that you come away with a lot more reward in the end because you kind of start from just a really rough outline and you fill it in from there.

**Warren:** So how much historical research did you do? How much did you know about earlier Mock Conventions?

**Donaldson:** Well, I think every convention tries to leave the next convention some sort of a testament to what it is that they did and to try to give some detail in terms of how they prepared and how they selected the various members and management and chairmen and that sort of thing. But frankly, and I know that the '96 people felt the same way, or the '96 people realized this, by the end of the experience, recording it is difficult to do because it's the spring in your senior year, you've kind of come off this tremendous high, and for a lot of us, we kind of had to salvage our academic records, as well. So that was not done as well as we would have liked in terms of preparing the kind of manual to run the next Mock Convention.

Because I was interested in it and interested in W&L history, I did a lot of research in terms of going back to old pictures and reading old *Phi* articles and stuff like that, and so I liked that part. I spent a lot of time trying to looking to the past to find interesting things to include in our convention. So I think we had a pretty good understanding of what happened at the previous conventions. The problem always is, how do you plan for those things and how do you make them happen. I mean, you can review the history, but it's hard to get the nuances of how everything was prepared for.

**Warren:** So as it builds up, your responsibilities were enormous.

**Donaldson:** Yeah.

**Warren:** How did it break down? There were numerous people, but how did it break down? Who did what?

**Donaldson:** Well, we had three chairmen and then we had a number of steering committee members, and they would include everything from public relations and those people, and that chairman dealt with people in town and people kind of getting the word out around campus. We had two media chairmen actually who dealt, obviously, with setting up and trying to lure in news people from across the country and then hosting them once they were there.

We had five regional chairman that were in charge of roughly ten states apiece in terms of getting funds raised, making sure that the political research was done correctly and just kind of steering them along the process, somebody who they were accountable to directly as opposed to just the steering committee. We had a parade chairman, of course.

The chairmen, the tri-chairmen, kind of split up. Jamie Tucker, who was the political chairman, his bailiwick was the prediction itself. Then David and I focused more on the mechanics of getting this whole thing across the finish line.

**Warren:** David?

**Donaldson:** David Bohigan.

**Warren:** You said raising funds. What do you mean, raising funds?

**Donaldson:** Well, I guess the Summers Foundation, and I'm trying to remember this specifically, I think they pay, or they set up an endowment that produces about half of what the convention costs, which is about 125,000 or so, which is really a phenomenal endowment to the university. I mean, it has produced so much in the years that it's been there. I think it started in 1980. But that builds up for four years and then they release it during the year of the Mock Convention.

Then we were handed the task of raising another \$125,000, which is what we estimated the budget to be to pull the thing off. So the fundraising consisted of primarily solicitations of the alumni, and it was really impressive to see how many donations came in for that and how strongly alumni felt about their experience. I think it varies a little bit depending on how old the alums were when they were at W&L for the Mock Convention. I think people that were seniors generally felt more strongly about it because they typically were the most involved, whereas people that came in as freshmen typically don't have as much involvement. They're involved as delegates, but they haven't seen the process through like seniors have. But it was amazing how many checks came in from parents and from outside businesses. I think we did some other solicitation of foundations that I think had mixed success because we just didn't have time to—

**Warren:** How big were the big checks?

**Donaldson:** I think the biggest donation that we had was a \$5,000 pledge. I think that's right, I can't remember. We had several thousand-dollar checks come in.

**Warren:** From alumni?

**Donaldson:** Uh-huh. There were a consistent hundred, hundred and fifty, two-fifty from alumni, which was really something else. There's many different times throughout the year that they're hit up for W&L contributions, and then the fact

that they could come through that strong, it's pretty neat. That just goes to show how much the experience means to a lot of people, which is pretty neat.

**Warren:** So who solicited the big names? How did you pull that off?

**Donaldson:** Well, we had a speakers chairman, who I should have mentioned, on the steering committee, and his sole purpose in life was to recruit speakers to the Mock Convention.

**Warren:** Who was that?

**Donaldson:** That was Ted Elliott, who was a sophomore at the time. Ted's a pretty interesting character. If you're ever out in San Francisco, he's somebody you want to call when you're out there. I think we were able to build off of the momentum from '88 and on years past in attracting speakers partly because of the news coverage. Politicians generally like that, obviously. We have the luxury of paying the speakers, as well, which is always an additional enticement.

We did a lot of networking within the W&L alumni and through parents to try to find connections to speakers who would be interested in coming, then usually send a letter and then follow up with a phone call. Then maybe follow it up with an alum calling or with a personal visit or something like that. We also used the speakers bureaus, as well, which often greased the wheels of commerce when it comes to getting speakers. They have a longer standing relationship. We used some of the same agents who had helped in '88, and so that helps as well in terms of getting people. But, as always, it's down to the last minute in terms of making sure that they show up, because a lot of times they'll back out, especially those that aren't being paid, at a moment's notice.

I'm trying to remember who we had scheduled. I think it was Jesse Jackson was going to come and then he canceled like in February, two months beforehand, which threw us into a complete panic, because at that point there's so much momentum, that you lose a centerpiece like that and it really can take the wind out

of your sails. But as it turned out, it was probably the best thing that happened for us in that convention, because, as a result, we got Mario Cuomo to come. So that really upped the ante in terms of news coverage and excitement and that kind of thing, and it was a phenomenal address that he gave as well.

**Warren:** So Jesse Jackson was supposed to be the keynoter?

**Donaldson:** Well, I can't remember if we had him slated as the keynoter or not, but he was one of kind of the big three that we had gotten at the time, and he bailed on us, as he's wont to do. It was literally six or seven weeks before the convention, and all the news packets had gone out with his name in it, and it was pretty tense. I'm trying to remember exactly how it worked with Cuomo. I think we went through an agent, but then I was sitting in the office and the phone rang, and it was Mario Cuomo on the telephone saying he wanted to speak to John Nelson [phonetic], and I just about fell out of my chair. He's a pretty hands-on guy, he wants to know what the deal is. He wanted to know what the topic was and what kind of environment he was going to be getting into, and we probably chatted for ten or fifteen minutes.

**Warren:** So what did you tell him?

**Donaldson:** Well, I told him about the history of it, and I think that that appealed to him, and the fact that Truman had been there and his nemesis, Clinton, in '88. But I tried to explain the fact of what it was that we were doing, that it was a political exercise and an educational experience and something that we had worked very hard on, that he would have a very receptive audience, which actually turned out to be true, which is sometimes difficult to imagine in as conservative a place as W&L giving Mario Cuomo a standing ovation, but it happened. I think the whole idea of it he liked. He obviously can be as selective, or could be at the time, as selective as he wanted to be in terms of taking speaking engagements. I think he could get his standing fee without too much effort. But then we sent him the Mock Convention

video and he looked at that, and I think he was really attracted to the idea, and it turned out great.

It's funny, he called—actually, one of his henchmen called, and Mario had looked at the video and had seen the podium from the last convention, which had Bill Clinton behind it, and said, "No, no, no, we cannot have that podium. I can't be photographed behind that podium." So one of his lieutenants sent down, in a box, by Federal Express, the governor's podium, which we used for the whole convention, which I thought was kind of funny. It probably cost \$250 to send it Fed Ex, but he had to have that podium.

But even with Cuomo, I mean, talk about last minute, it was eleven o'clock and there were two thousand people waiting for him to speak at eleven, and it was a foggy day, probably not unlike today, and you know how it is to fly into Roanoke. If it gets foggy, it's just a roll of the dice. You don't know where you're going to land or when. So they had to reroute him from—he was on a charter flight, but they rerouted him to Lynchburg, and so he was about an hour late and we were totally nervous that he wasn't going to show at all, which would have been disastrous. We were getting five-minute updates about where he was, coming along 29 and 81. So it worked out well, but it was really down to the wire.

**Warren:** So was everybody there in the gym—

**Donaldson:** Oh, yeah.

**Warren:** —getting these reports?

**Donaldson:** Oh, yeah.

**Warren:** How did you keep things going?

**Donaldson:** I would credit—if you get a chance, I know [Bob] de Maria has all the videotapes. It's was pretty funny. We were just getting up and thanking people. It was pretty hard. David Bohigan kind of got up there and filled about fifteen minutes of it just kind of speaking extemporaneously, which I have the ultimate

admiration for, because it kind of saved the day. But it was a pretty tense morning. You put so much time and effort into it, and when it comes right down to it, it's up to fate at the end.

**Warren:** Was he the only speaker that morning?

**Donaldson:** I'm trying to remember. I should have brought my program. But I think that we had an earlier speaker that morning to kind of prime the crowd. But that morning the keynote speaker speaks and then the voting process begins, which can take a while. So I think there may have been one other speaker, but we didn't want to load it up that morning, also because we didn't want to have start too early because attendance would be weak. But I think he was the only speaker. I can't remember right now. But we couldn't begin the voting process until we had somebody speak, and so it held things up a little bit, but nobody seemed to mind. We were out of there by 2:30 on a Saturday.

**Warren:** So you mentioned the keynoter in 1988. Had you heard lots of stories about what happened in '88?

**Donaldson:** We had. We had. That was a rumor that I heard right when I started, I mean right when I got involved in '89, the year after he had been there.

**Warren:** Who is "he"? We're talking posterity here.

**Donaldson:** Right. When Clinton spoke in '88, there were plenty of rumors about him playing the saxophone and getting drunk out at Zollman's and running around with various young ladies. No one was ever able to give first-hand information or even second-hand information about that. In fact, I think it was early in the primary season, probably January of '92, there were numerous reporters that phoned into the W&L news office, and that I talked to as well, trying to get information about Clinton's visit there in '92.

**Warren:** In '88.

**Donaldson:** I'm sorry, in '88. And they kicked up again the closer it got to the convention, because it would have been a good story had they had any confirmation of it. It just has become part of the W&L mythology, which is kind of neat.

**Warren:** I've actually found a picture of him.

**Donaldson:** You have?

**Warren:** Playing his saxophone at Zollman's. It's a terrible snapshot, but I've got a picture.

**Donaldson:** Wow, that's pretty neat.

**Warren:** That's my big find.

**Donaldson:** Wow, where did you find that?

**Warren:** In the news office.

**Donaldson:** Really?

**Warren:** They didn't realize they had it. It was buried in a file in the news office, but I knew what I had as soon as I saw it.

**Donaldson:** That's great. There's got to be some folks with those out there, as well. That would make a nice contribution to the—

**Warren:** Well, it's a really lousy snapshot.

**Donaldson:** You need to find a good one, if you can.

**Warren:** It's a challenge.

**Donaldson:** You look at the class of '88. I keep in touch occasionally with one of the former chairmen from '88 and I'll have to ask him if he knows anything about that.

**Warren:** That would be great. That would be great.

Well, when you were chatting with Cuomo, did you tell him that he had to bring a saxophone, at least?

**Donaldson:** No, Mario—

**Warren:** You should have told him he needed to come in a night early.

**Donaldson:** Yeah. He was in and out. I mean, I don't think he was in Virginia for more than probably six hours total. He does his own thing. I don't think he takes orders from too many people, so I certainly wasn't going to even ask him to do more than what he had contracted to do.

**Warren:** Who were your other speakers?

**Donaldson:** Tip O'Neill and Michael Dukakis and Larry Fromm—Al Fromm, who is one of Clinton's Democratic Leadership Council friends. He was the one I think who helped Clinton move to the middle in '92. Who else was there? Brian Shaw, of course, then Councilman Shaw. I think those are the big ones.

**Warren:** He'll love that. So did any of these big-name people interact with the students?

**Donaldson:** I'm trying to remember how that worked. Yeah, both Dukakis and Tip O'Neill had come in early on Friday and had dinner with the steering committee and their families, then I think they had sort of a post-reception for them, as well.

My father tells an interesting story about the next morning. He stayed at the McCampbell Inn, and he went down to have breakfast, and there was Roger Mudd and Michael Dukakis and Tip O'Neill all having brunch. So my dad just sat down and joined them and had this really interesting conversation with these three national figures in Lexington, Virginia.

But they were very nice, took a lot of questions afterwards from students and student reporters, as well. Tip O'Neill's speech was kind of neat. I think he died within a year or two of that speech, probably a year. They welcomed him with the "Cheers" theme song to get him on stage, and Dukakis with "Coming To America," which was probably my favorite part of the whole—well, one of my favorite parts. The speakers chairman gave this very rousing introduction and then the music came on, Neil Diamond, "Coming to America," which is just the height of schmaltz, and then Dukakis came on stage and the place went nuts. It was Friday

night, so people obviously had proper preparation for the evening. It was pretty neat. It was just kind of a nice cap to a very, very long day.

**Warren:** You mentioned earlier that Washington and Lee is a conservative place. How much play-acting is going on and how much do people really get caught up in the spirit of the thing?

**Donaldson:** Well, I think they run together. I think that the spirit of it, you know, people get excited about it. I think that the vast majority of students in 1992 would have voted, or probably did vote, for George Bush if they voted. There is some mock excitement for Democratic causes and leaders, but for the event itself, I think, the enthusiasm was genuine. I was there in '92 and '96, I saw it. I think that people were more sincere perhaps in their enthusiasm for the content of speakers' speeches in '96, because I think that was more closely aligned with their own political views.

But I think part of it, and I don't know that this is true every year when there are Democratic conventions, but I think that the speeches were really pretty exceptional, Cuomo's especially, in '92. So it's very difficult to listen to a speaker like that and not get excited about the rhetoric, whether you disagree or not with the underlying substance. When you're there with an emotional speaker, it's hard not to get excited. In the same way, I think the research that the students did may have been more objective because they were not as swayed by underlying political motivations when they were. That's a gross generalization, but I think, overall, people were able to be a little bit more objective since a lot of the votes were going to go to the Republicans anyway and reviewing who the Democrats would select.

**Warren:** That's an interesting point.

**Donaldson:** They didn't get as caught up emotionally in the candidates, perhaps, although Clinton was a seemingly moderate Southern Democrat. He'd been to W&L before. So I think that of the bunch in '92 that the students were probably—he would have been the odds-on favorite just if you'd taken a poll subjectively and not

looked at what the states themselves would have done. If you just asked the students they would vote for among the Democrats, I think it would have been a knockout for Clinton. That was kind of neat. That was kind of interesting.

**Warren:** The article I read in the alumni magazine said that you all were thrown into a tizzy because there was some kind of rumor like the night before the voting or something, there was some rumor that some rumor was going to come out.

**Donaldson:** Oh, we had been in touch with some political journalists who intimated, at least, that there was some real substantive proof to, I guess as the press called it, another "bimbo eruption" in the Clinton campaign that might have been even more damaging than the Jennifer Flowers episode. I don't remember what the details of this alleged rumor were, but I remember it did kind of throw people off, because I think at that time, barring—no, I take that back. Clinton was just beginning to emerge as the frontrunner at the time. I mean, it was the germination stage of his eventual victory. There was still a lot of uncertainty about Clinton and the character issues and about what might come up in the following six or eight months. So it was an authentic prediction, and I think that differs from many years past. I think '88 was following Super Tuesday, so a lot of the votes had been cast, the momentum was behind "the Duke" at that point.

In previous years, partly to make sure that there was good weather for the parade, the convention had been almost in May, and by that time it was getting to be almost a done deal for the primary season. We moved it back in '92. They moved it back a little bit further even in '96, and I think that adds a lot of legitimacy to what the exercise is.

**Warren:** What determines the timing?

**Donaldson:** That is a very difficult process, as you can probably imagine, with as many different events and organizations that there are on campus. We made the decision on the timing based on the very first agenda that we got from the

Democratic National Committee about the scheduling of primaries. As soon as we got that, which I think was probably maybe a year before the convention itself, we went ahead and had, I don't even know if it's even around, the University Calendar Committee had a meeting and then we set Mock Convention, we set Fancy Dress, and I forget what else there was that had to be accommodated at that point. But we tried to get that on the calendar first, and I think that the university is pretty supportive about making all the necessary effort to get that on a weekend that works best for the convention.

**Warren:** Well, I think that timing is critical. It certainly was this year.

**Donaldson:** Yes.

**Warren:** A week later it wouldn't have made any difference.

**Donaldson:** Right, exactly. It goes towards making it interesting both for the students as a predictive exercise and a learning exercise, and interesting for the media, because otherwise they don't have any interest in seeing or confirming the obvious. If it's timed properly, as it was in '92 and '96, it makes for a great side story. When the country gets wrapped up in politics, it's just a perfect special-interest story. So there's a lot of value in doing that. It's nice to have some external confirmation of what you're doing, and the Mock Convention now has gotten such a track record that it's a very appealing news story for a lot of organizations. If you time it wrong, it's not that interesting, and that's one of the strengths of getting it in early and getting it while the country's mood is involved.

Because if you remember even in '96, three weeks after the convention, [Robert] Dole was—one week after the convention in '96, Dole was the walk-away frontrunner, but the news coverage just about evaporated. But at the time, when it was right, it was the same day as the South Carolina primary, just before Super Tuesday, it was the news.

**Warren:** It was thrilling.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, it was a pretty neat experience. I had a great time in '96.

**Warren:** Well, tell me about that. Tell me about going back. What was it like to go back and not be on the podium?

**Donaldson:** It was a neat experience. It was nice to not have that responsibility and kind of get to enjoy it as everybody else did four years prior. They did a great job. I had been in touch with one of the chairmen throughout, and he made great accommodation for us to be involved in all of it. It was fun. It was a lot of fun. It wasn't as weird as I thought it was going to be. I didn't know exactly what to expect, and it was really a very fun weekend. We had a nice weekend. All the other chairmen came back. I'm trying to think what else. It was neat to see it from the Republican side as well. People were pretty enthusiastic.

One other thing I should tell you, the Mock Convention did produce at least one marriage. The treasurer and the secretary got married, Elise Bryan and Jay Darden. They had worked for two years on it each, and then they got married about two years ago, three years ago now. It was kind of funny. We used to laugh about it at the time, and sure enough, they got hitched.

**Warren:** Not a mock marriage?

**Donaldson:** No. No, no, hopefully not. Hopefully not. '96 was fun. They did a really good job.

**Warren:** I need to flip the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Warren:** I was very struck about halfway through the event this year, and this was my first Mock Convention, I was very struck by realizing that what I was seeing, I mean, I knew a good bit about the Washington and Lee student body and I knew how conservative it was, and I could feel the enthusiasm and I thought to myself, what has it been like the previous three conventions? How did they get this much

enthusiasm up? That's my question. Was there really the same level of enthusiasm?

**Donaldson:** It's funny, I can't explain why and how it happened, but it was not that much different. I mean, I had a different perspective because I was on different sides of the podium for the two conventions, and so I saw it a little bit differently. I didn't see what it was like to be out in the crowd in '92. But if you look at the video and you look at the tapes and you talk to people that were there, I mean, it was a very enthusiastic crowd. People gave standing ovations to Michael Dukakis, which it's hard to imagine really when you think about the place that W&L is. I don't think it was a complete sham. I don't think that many people voted for Dukakis in '88 and I don't think that too many voted for Clinton in '92, but the enthusiasm for the event and for what they were doing was certainly genuine.

**Warren:** Well, I was tickled by it. I just thought it was fascinating.

**Donaldson:** It was a neat experience.

**Warren:** Another thing I read in the magazine is that you're the ones who instigated the idea of having the big video screen?

**Donaldson:** Yes.

**Warren:** That was the first time?

**Donaldson:** The first time. Yeah, the video and the sound part were probably—they were probably my favorite aspect of the whole thing. Bill Parks, who's a W&L grad and has been involved in all three, since '84 he's been involved in the technical production part of the Mock Convention, came up with this screen, and I think they got a bigger one in '96, as is the normal course of history. But we got the big screen and that was pretty dramatic. It made it look a lot more authentic or more like the modern conventions, and we had a pretty good sound system, as well, and tried to keep the music going at all times. We had a few bands that came and played and

just tried to make it kind of a really realistic modern convention that way, try to make it feel less like the gym.

**Warren:** It had a very authentic feel to it.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, it's hard to believe it's the same place that they teach.

**Warren:** You got really good media coverage.

**Donaldson:** Yes, we did. We did. That again goes back to timing and the speakers. I think those are the two central components to a successful one. We had interesting speakers, Cuomo especially because of the time. There was still the rumor that he might throw his hat in the ring, and that attracted a lot of people. People giggle about it now, but it was a very real possibility at the time. We had news articles written about Mock Convention and the possibility that it could be a possible place for him to at least hint at getting involved, and he didn't, which was fine, but just the prospect of that got a lot of extra news coverage there. Roger Mudd was a tremendous help in lending some legitimacy.

**Warren:** Tell me about that. What did he do?

**Donaldson:** Well, what we did, we put together two videos before the convention itself. One was directed at getting speakers, speakers and media. It was about an eight-minute video and it was one that we sent out to prospective speakers and news organizations just to say this is a real thing, it's not going to be like showing up at a high school gym. That was also produced by Bill Parks, and that was something that I had worked with especially de Maria on editing and putting together.

**Warren:** Had that ever been done before?

**Donaldson:** No. No, I take that back. I'm trying to remember. I think they actually did a short one before. They did do one, and it was either in '80 or '84. But that was more of a summary of the convention. What we wanted was a selling piece, and so we went up and interviewed Roger Mudd and Senator Warner and Charley

McDowell and Steven Danzanski, who was one of Bush's Cabinet members. Here we are, we got the W&L video equipment and just kind of showed up and interviewed all of them and asked them about their Mock Convention experiences, and then came back and put this thing in a media package.

It was great because we had these guys saying what a good thing this was. These were mostly people that they recognized and knew wouldn't get involved in suspect undertakings. We were also able to throw in footage of every national speaker who'd been there. There was Clinton in '88, there was shots of Truman and Nixon and all of these different folks, which just kind of really, I think, presented a very attractive marketing piece to the news organizations and speakers, so that helped a lot. That was a pretty neat experience just in terms of just going over and getting twenty minutes with John Warner or Roger Mudd and Charlie McDowell. It was a pretty neat experience.

**Warren:** Well, I'm glad to know that exists.

**Donaldson:** It does. de Maria's got it. You got to pin him down on that.

**Warren:** I'm going to take a look at that.

**Donaldson:** Brian's probably got it, too.

**Warren:** Well, I need more on Mock Convention and that will be a nice—

**Donaldson:** There's also, I think that the news office put together, a summary of the major news stories from '92. There's a "McNeil-Lehrer" piece. I mean, that was phenomenal, and that was all Roger Mudd's doing, and that was about a twelve- or thirteen-minute piece, which if you can imagine that. That was Roger Mudd's campaign contribution through the century, I think. It was a full "McNeil-Lehrer" piece on it, and then CBS had a story on it and then there were a few others on there, too. But it was pretty amazing, really. Brian's got that, I know.

**Warren:** And "McNeil-Lehrer" did it again this year.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, they did.

**Warren:** In '96 they did a long piece.

**Donaldson:** They did.

**Warren:** You couldn't ask for a more wonderful publicity for the school.

**Donaldson:** No, you can't buy coverage like that. No, that's true.

**Warren:** To me, it's remarkable what you guys pulled together.

**Donaldson:** Well, it's a real collective effort. The university puts tremendous support behind the convention and they are very flexible and accommodating in terms of scheduling and certainly keeping an eye on the people that are involved and making sure that they're not doomed academically. The alumni, too, the amount of financial and connection support is really impressive. It's a great event and it pulls the university together in a way not too many school-sponsored events do, because you get the law school tied in, you get the faculty involved and the students, and it's a shame it's over so quick in a lot of ways because it takes a long time in preparing for it, not unlike a lot of things.

**Warren:** How do you keep your nose above water academically?

**Donaldson:** It was a struggle.

**Warren:** Do you get any academic credit for what you do?

**Donaldson:** No, although from what I understand, the last group did get some independent study credit for it, not a lot.

**Warren:** I would think so.

**Donaldson:** Well, I got some academic credit with Professor de Maria for putting the videos together, and he was quite helpful in that regard. It was a great learning experience, too. I wasn't totally screwing around. I did learn a lot about filmmaking and that kind of thing. The fact that the university will let a bunch of nineteen to twenty-one-year-olds run an organization with a \$250,000 budget, it is unbelievable. I mean, the trust that the university places on you is daunting almost. It's difficult to find too many out-of-college jobs that you would get that much or kind of

responsibility. It's something that you walk away feeling a lot stronger about W&L because of. That doesn't happen at many other places.

I went to Virginia to law school and was involved in a few things there and to get twenty-five dollars for paper clips, you've got to go through forty-eight channels and appeal and get everybody to sign off on there. Gosh, there were days when we spent \$30,000 and there was no university true supervision. I mean, obviously we were accountable for it all, but that's pretty unusual these days.

**Warren:** It's pretty unusual anytime anywhere.

**Donaldson:** Right.

**Warren:** Well, this whole idea of what makes Washington and Lee different is the theme I'm trying to pursue, and obviously Mock Convention is one of the major manifestations of it, but the whole idea of the Honor System and how there's student self-government. What did that mean to you as a student and what has it meant to you now that you're not a student anymore?

**Donaldson:** Well, I think the freedom that that allows you and the trust that the university and the community places on you, that is really the defining part of the W&L experience for me. That freedom to run an organization like Mock Convention really without too much of a safety net below you, and I say that in the positive sense, it builds up your confidence in a way that I think would be almost impossible anyplace else without having to deal with somebody constantly looking over your shoulder. At a young age it gave me the confidence to handle three significant life experiences. Having seen it, having gone to another school, which was also a great place to be, but very different, I just appreciated it so much more. The freedom and the trust that you have at W&L, it makes it such a more pleasant place to be, and, overall, I think you come away with a stronger experience because of that. I'm kind of rambling.

**Warren:** Let's talk about the Honor System. Do you remember how you first learned about it?

**Donaldson:** Yeah, I think the first time that I really got into the nuts and bolts of it was at the honor orientation, which, of course, is mandatory for freshmen right after you enroll. And that's pretty heady stuff when you're eighteen. You go into the Lee Chapel and you've got somebody who's either a senior or a law student that puts across the responsibility that comes with the freedom that you have under the Honor System. You're in the Lee Chapel and everybody—it's, I wouldn't say nerve-racking, but the seriousness of it certainly gets across. Then you kind of break down into groups and you talk about what is and what is not an honor violation.

You think about how that's going to affect your life at W&L and about you need not necessarily to change, but just to be aware of it on a constant basis. What might have been okay in high school, not in terms of cheating, but you just need to be always aware that your actions have consequences that you just need to conscience of.

I'm trying to remember. I don't know that there were any honor trials my freshmen year. I think there was one, and that's kind of where the rubber meets the road in the Honor System. When you're there for a public honor trial, that's just—"unusual" is a mild way of describing it in terms of the university putting all the cards in the students' hands in evaluating actions of other students. Honor trials are pretty scary. Have you been? No? You definitely walk away from those thinking long and hard about honor and what it is and how it applies to your daily life.

**Warren:** Tell me about that. Tell me about the experience of going to the trial.

**Donaldson:** Well, these were people that I knew. They weren't, I wouldn't say, good friends, but they were people that I knew socially, I had had classes with them. It's pretty scary to sit there and have all those issues played out and knowing in the

back of your mind that there's a good chance that they're not going to be at W&L next week because of it. The first one that I went to they were actually exonerated in the end, and the thing to remember is the only reason is, the only reason—and I can't remember how the mechanics of it worked, but I know in their case they had actually been found, I don't remember what the term of choice is, guilty or convicted by the Executive Committee. So the reason that they were there is because they were basically expelled by the Executive Committee and were rolling the dice with an open trial. If they had just left following their being found guilty by the E. C. it wouldn't have been on the transcript. By taking it to an honor trial you are setting yourself up, potentially, at least, to have a tremendous stigma on your record and résumé in life.

It's uncomfortable to sit and watch that, knowing that in the back of your mind, but at the same time you realize that's the price for having all the freedom that you do at W&L. It's impossible to walk away from there without talking to other people about it and thinking about just how you conduct your life. It's something that has stuck with me down the road.

I went to one—there was an honor trial my last year there where they were found guilty, and that was one of the strangest experiences I've ever been in in my entire life. When the "guilty" verdict came down, I mean, Lee Chapel was absolutely dead silent and nobody really knew what to do. Do you walk out? Do you let them walk out? Eventually people kind of got up and milled around, but it was very, very strange. I wouldn't want to go through that process, that's for sure.

**Warren:** What happened the first time when the person was exonerated?

**Donaldson:** Well, that was actually—that was in the law school moot courtroom, and I think that was different because I think the verdict came back pretty quick, and so people didn't have time to go, because a lot of people had kind of come in and out for those, and a lot of people did not have time to get up and back to the law

school before the verdict was read. So there weren't a lot of people, it was mostly these people's friends, and it was kind of a cheering kind of congratulatory atmosphere.

The other trial was in the Chapel, and it was jam packed, and I think that there was an announcement that the verdict had been reached and so people were able to get down there pretty quick, and so the Chapel was just about packed, as I recall. You could hear a pin drop after that verdict was read.

**Warren:** What is it about Lee Chapel? You're implying both when you went for the honor explanation, but there is something loaded about Lee Chapel.

**Donaldson:** Sure. No doubt about that. When you've got the recumbent statue of General Lee, you've got the portraits of Lee and Washington. The chapel really is the center of W&L. There's so much history tied up there. You look down and you see the pew where General Lee went to services while he was there. You look around and you see the plaques about alumni who have accomplished and done great things throughout there. It's also a very stark place, and the starkness is part of its attraction, but also it has a very, I don't know what the real term would be, but it's got a very solemn feel to it. And to have an honor trial there, I mean, it's the appropriate place for that, and I think it adds to the gravity of the proceedings to have it in the chapel. It's sort of a, to use a bad term, but kind of a temple of the Honor System, and to have it there it's a much, much different experience than if you have it in the moot courtroom. A courtroom has this kind of—well, it feels like a courtroom, and that's what its intention is. The chapel just kind of takes it up a level, I think, in some ways.

**Warren:** I'm sure it does.

**Donaldson:** That was a really, really strange experience hearing a "guilty" verdict read there. It was spring term, I think, my senior year, and so you're on your way

out and it's a good—it's not a good, but it certainly makes you reconsider or think about the Honor System and its place and your role within it.

**Warren:** It's an experience I hope I get to see for history's sake, but I hope it doesn't happen, at the same time.

**Donaldson:** No, no, you're right.

**Warren:** It's not something you wish for to happen.

**Donaldson:** Not at all. Not at all. I mean, the Honor System at W&L works, I think, well because it's a small university, people generally know each other pretty well. It's also works because it's in a small town where you don't have as much outside influence and possible intrusion. An Honor System would not work as well at NYU as it does in Lexington. There are just too many external forces that would bear down.

Even in Charlottesville, which is a much bigger place, the Honor System is very different there. It's not as much a part of your kind of "walking around" life as it is at W&L. The Honor System at Virginia—and obviously I was a grad student, so it's a little bit different than I think it is for undergraduates, but it, for us, came into play just around exam time, which meant there weren't proctors and you weren't allowed to discuss the exam, which is great. It gives you a lot of flexibility in that regard, but it's not the same omnipresent part of life that the Honor System is at W&L.

**Warren:** So you're saying at UVA it has to do with exams, whereas at W&L it has to do with life?

**Donaldson:** That's not exactly true. Again, because I was a grad student, I wasn't involved in too much of it. There aren't a lot of grad students that get put before an honor committee hearing because of cheating—law school exams are hard to cheat on in the best of circumstances—or for stealing or for lying. I don't know even if the lying really applies as much at Virginia. Although I think the president at UVA

was expelled for an honor violation while I was there. But because W&L is smaller and because you kind of know people, it's a topic of conversation more often.

There's a lot of trust. You're just constantly reminded. You go in the library and there's no gate blocking your entrance. That's completely different than most major university libraries and so you think about it a lot more. You think about what you're doing and about how that applies in the context of the Honor System.

**Warren:** Another thing that I think you were there for, and I think you were there for the bulk of it, for Fraternity Renaissance.

**Donaldson:** Yeah.

**Warren:** You're the first person I've talked to who lived through Fraternity Renaissance. Tell me about that.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, I started in '88 and pledged '88-'89, and then moved into the fraternity house in '89. I was a Beta. I was the—let me think just a second. Yeah, I was the last class to live in the house before reconstruction. I think that began in '90-'91, and then we were back in the house for my senior year in '91-'92. Just totally different. Those houses were—it's hard to believe I lived in a structure like that. At the time it didn't seem so bad, but all those houses were really five years from collapse. They could not have continued much longer along that course.

**Warren:** What course?

**Donaldson:** Of reckless disregard for them. We would try to clean up for Alumni Weekend and for Parents Weekend and that sort of thing, but you just can't get past the inherent structural damage and kind of polish up a dung heap. I mean, they were that far gone. It's difficult to pinpoint the source of the problem, but the general conditions fostered kind of a pretty reckless atmosphere in terms of window-breaking was pretty common, people just didn't have any respect for the house, for the structure itself. And that changed pretty dramatically. I think those days—I was glad to have experienced those. I don't know, five years into it, how the

process has gone, I don't know what the reviews are, but I think, overall, it was time for that change.

The fraternities sacrificed a lot of their autonomy by signing over the deeds to the houses, but, frankly, 90 percent of the fraternities couldn't have afforded that kind of rebuilding of the house, and so I think it was an equitable trade in the long run, and I think it's unprecedented that a university puts that much financial capital and resources and effort behind a fraternity system. There was a lot of talk at the time about, "You know, this is just an effort by the hill to come down and take charge and then this is going to be the German-speaking house at one point and next door is going to be the French house or whatever." But I think W&L's the kind of place that there aren't too many subterfuges that way to usurp power. The commitment that the university has put behind it is really unbelievable.

Other schools, "antagonistic" is a euphemism for the relationship between the colleges and the fraternities. W&L is embracing them and saying, "This is an important part of our history and will continue to be," and that's great.

**Warren:** So the houses were in ill repair. You moved out. What did you do the year—

**Donaldson:** Yeah, that year was pretty terrible.

**Warren:** What was it like? I've seen some pictures, but describe it for me.

**Donaldson:** They did them all in phases and so we were, I think, the second round of houses. Well, the first was SAE, and I think they did PiKA, then they did Red Square next. So we were out that whole stretch.

**Warren:** All of Red Square was done?

**Donaldson:** I think simultaneous. I think they did Phi Kap and Sigma Nu and Beta, Phi Delt and PiKA all at the same time. Then they did the second wave after that, the third wave, I guess, technically. But it was tough. The houses were the center of fraternity life, and when you take that away and you've got people living all over

town, it was a difficult year socially for all the fraternities. Some of the more cohesive fraternities had a less hard time.

**Warren:** How? How did they solve it?

**Donaldson:** They rented out different warehouses in town and made those kind of the regular band places and party places. But when you don't eat together all the time and you don't have a place to come down to after classes, it's hard. It puts a lot of pressure on the social events to be the unifying forces within the fraternity. So that year was pretty tough. There were things kind of spread all over the place. You didn't have Red Square parties, you had a lot more country parties, there was a lot more driving as a result. People were having to drive out of town, with the incumbent risks that that brings.

Then that was for all of junior year, and I came back my senior year and the houses were done, and it was tremendous change to walk into what really had been a rubbish heap to this sparkling new house with a housemother, of all things. I mean, that was a dramatic change from what we were used to. It made fraternity life a lot more expensive, and for that reason I think that's a negative, because the houses were nicer, the rent's gone up, the food has gone up in price, as well, from what I understand, dues went up to pay for the new houses. So I hope that doesn't exclude people too much from joining fraternities. I know I had a battle with my old man to try to get him to pay my dues, and I don't know what they are now, but he probably wouldn't pay them if they were much higher than they were five years ago.

It was a big change. I mean, our housemother came in and said no sleepovers, no hats at dinner. The fraternities, prior to that, were the center of male life. There were no real restrictions other than those imposed by the fraternity, and to have somebody come in and start making rules, it took a little bit of adjustment. I think eventually there was a mutual consensus put together about—our

housemother at least kind of backed off some of her strident rules and we kind of cleaned up our act a little bit and met in the middle, and for that it's worked out. It seemed to work out pretty well at the time.

**Warren:** Are there university rules or are they the housemothers' rules? Who set up the rules?

**Donaldson:** Well, I think they're both. There were certainly heightened restrictions on what you can and can't do in the fraternity house itself, from the university. They sunk a lot of money into it and I think they have every right to protect their investment. But the housemother brought sort of social rules that we weren't used to, and took a little bit of getting used to.

**Warren:** What kinds of things?

**Donaldson:** No girl sleepovers, no hats at the dinner table. I can't remember. Those were two that seemed to bring up a lot of flak, I guess. There was a lot of resistance to those. I'm trying to think what other kind of restrictions. I think it was just the presence of an authority figure in the house that threw people off, because they were just kind of bastions of doing your own thing. I mean, whatever you want to do, within reason, you could, and then you had this older woman who you didn't know, for one thing. You certainly had not entered fraternity life with this sort of a figure around, and then these rules were being made, and you had a lot more restrictions than you were used to.

**Warren:** I'm just real curious. Could the housemother be the one to say no sleepovers, or is that the university saying no sleepovers?

**Donaldson:** No, that was the housemother.

**Warren:** Who hired the housemother? Did you hire her?

**Donaldson:** The housemother was hired by the housing board or housing corporation and I think that's true with most of them. I think that perhaps the university solicited a whole bunch of housemothers at one time. I don't know, they

may have put an advertisement in somewhere, and then the housing corporation that governs the fraternity would interview them and ultimately made the decision and wrote the checks.

**Warren:** That must have been a real battle royal.

**Donaldson:** Yeah, it was. W&L is not a very—I mean, people generally have good manners, but it's still sort of unrepentant, and I don't know whether it is as much now, but it was five years ago in terms of sort of a male—it was male-dominated for so long. It was still evolving when I left there, and I think there were a lot of housemothers who had come from places that weren't used to having housemothers and were not prepared for the resistance that they encountered, and as a consequence, a lot of them did not stay very long.

**Warren:** The housemothers didn't?

**Donaldson:** Yes.

**Warren:** That's no surprise.

Can we go a few more minutes?

**Donaldson:** Sure, that's fine.

**Warren:** I want to pop in another tape.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

**Warren:** This is Mame Warren. It's tape two with John Donaldson, October 29th, 1996 in Atlanta, Georgia.

As we've mentioned back at the beginning, you were in the first class who came who knew you were going to be coed?

**Donaldson:** Well, no, I was in the first class where all four classes were coed. The prior year to my entry, there was a class of all men.

**Warren:** Okay. So you never experienced that, but these guys you talked to back in Baltimore had gone—

**Donaldson:** Right, a lot of them had. A lot of them had. It took really until the end of my four years there before I think most of the—maybe it didn't take quite that long, but it was an evolving process while I was there in terms of alumni getting used to coeducation. I think are were still alumni out there that graduated that are unhappy that there are women at W&L, which I find moronic, I mean, partly because I don't think that the experience has changed that dramatically. W&L is really not too terribly different, I don't think, than when they graduated. I think there's a crowd probably in the late seventies and early eighties that were close enough to the time of when coeducation occurred that carried some resentment.

But I think, too, if you look on a very base level at a W&L diploma as sort of a stock certificate, the value of your diploma has increased quite a bit because of coeducation. Certainly not a way that I like to think about it a lot, but if you look at it really on its most basic terms, the value that the world puts on your diploma has increased a lot because of that. How you feel about it and how you feel about your experience is completely different, but from an external observation, because the scores have gone up, because the school has gotten much more publicity, it is more valuable.

I think if you look at, say, Hampden-Sydney, that has remained all male, I mean, W&L and Hampden-Sydney were thought of not much differently in 1982. Now they're not even in the same ballpark. I think if you look at what's happened to them, you should be grateful that W&L went coed, I mean, not to disparage another place, but I think it's interesting contrast.

**Warren:** And it's right there, isn't it?

**Donaldson:** There aren't too many people, probably, who graduated in '82 would have thought that W&L admission SAT average would be what it is today. It has certainly raised the level of the academics, but I don't know that it's changed the

student body as much as people think that it has. I think it's still the same kind of W&L crowd as it's been since the place got going.

My wife and I laugh all the time, we go to different alumni events, and it's sort of the same crowd throughout the generations. I mean, the names change, but the faces kind of, from the people that are still in school to older alums, it's remarkable how little difference it seems that there are between people. I don't know whether that's all good, but it's unusual.

**Warren:** My observation is that there's definitely a W&L cookie-cutter, and it doesn't make any difference whether it's male or female either.

**Donaldson:** Probably not, not now.

**Warren:** The women seem to be the same cookie-cutter.

**Donaldson:** It's funny though, I look at these guys and I'm like, all these guys could have been friends of mine five years ago, and my friends and I probably looked not much different than they did running around there. It's funny. But my wife was in my class, as well, and she was one of the first women—she was the first woman to be elected to one of the executive spots on the Executive Committee. She was the first secretary, and then I think she was secretary of the E. C. I still think that there was some resentment on campus that I think subsided by the time that we got out, but when we were in our middle years there, about women in positions of power that took the earlier classes of women really taking charge to try to eliminate that perception or that animosity towards them, and for that they deserve a lot of credit.

**Warren:** You're telling me your wife went to W&L. How about road trips? Were they important to you?

**Donaldson:** Road trips got to be less important. Well, Carol and I dated for most of our time there, but road trips, I think, really started to subside in importance when I was there, starting when I got there and more so towards the end. I think the social dynamics of that part of Virginia had changed pretty radically once W&L went coed.

I think a lot of the women's colleges shifted their focus towards UVA and Hampden-Sydney, probably UVA more than anyplace, I think.

There were still plenty of W&L, Hollins, and Sweet Briar romances and that kind of thing, and we would go down to Hollins and Sweet Briar occasionally, but not on a regular weekly basis, or at least my friends didn't, and I don't think a lot of people did, or nearly as many as in years past. Certainly that.

But W&L kind of became more insulated in some ways because of it, because there wasn't as much reason to travel, which I didn't miss too much. It's a more normal experience, I think.

**Warren:** Let's end on a party note. Tell me about Fancy Dress in your time.

**Donaldson:** Well, let's see, I'm trying to reconstruct. What about Fancy Dress is interesting that I can tell you? Fancy Dress is still, I think, one of the best parties, as an event, better than anything I've been to on a consistent basis. It's a party that I think used to have a national reputation and it certainly still does in the Southeast. The amount of effort that people put into getting ready for it and the decorations and the band and the hype and whole thing is pretty neat, because it happens in such a dead time of the year, it's early March, I think. It gives you a little hope to make it through the Virginia winter.

I think my favorite Fancy Dress story was walking around in there, and I forget which one it was, it might have been the last one, but I looked around and I noticed that there was this guy who looked sort of out of place. I mean, he had sort of a long like trench coat on and he was wearing like a funky hat, and I realized it was Michael Stipe, the man from REM who just happened to be up there. He had made a trip and he was walking around with all these little kids. I guess he's friends with Sally Mann up there. But there's Michael Stipe with this international band, who just happens to be cruising around Fancy Dress. I think there were a lot of interesting stories like that, that have come out of it. I can't think of too much else.

**Warren:** Was there a conflict between Mock Convention and Fancy Dress?

**Donaldson:** We resolved it very early and amicably. We set the date, we explained our reasons for wanting to move it up and cross into what previously had been Fancy Dress weekend. John Flippen, who at the time was the chairman of Fancy Dress, was very accommodating and, I think, understood our predicament well. As a result, having it a little bit later—

**Warren:** Having what?

**Donaldson:** I'm sorry, having Fancy Dress a little bit later was not a bad thing for them, because the weather is better, there's more you can do outside. As I recall, it was a really nice weekend for Fancy Dress. It's kind of a packed month with Mock Convention at the very beginning and then Fancy Dress at the end. I mean, there's a lot going on in a short stretch. And I don't think it diminished the success of Fancy Dress at all.

**Warren:** There was some feeling this year that it did.

**Donaldson:** Is that right?

**Warren:** And I wondered whether that had been the experience for you, too.

**Donaldson:** I don't remember that. I don't remember that vividly, probably because John and his crew really did a spectacular job in putting that one together. Maybe, too, I wasn't paying that much attention, and I was just kind of glad to be at somebody else's party. It didn't seem to me at the time. You may find other people had different perceptions than I.

**Warren:** Well, it seemed people were saying this was something new this year, that there was a sense this year that something had been different than it had before.

**Donaldson:** Oh, really. What was the theme this year, do you know?

**Warren:** Alice in Wonderland. What they said was that some of the same people were doing Fancy Dress who had been involved in Mock Convention, and they were just exhausted.

**Donaldson:** Oh, okay.

**Warren:** So the decorations weren't up.

**Donaldson:** I don't think we had too much crossover in that regard. I think they were pretty distinct organizations. I don't know what these people were thinking if they thought that they could do both within a month of each other. That's a prescription for disaster right there, I think. That's funny.

**Warren:** I don't know, this was my first year, so I don't know what it was like in the past.

**Donaldson:** Well, it's kind to be kind of a strange experience coming in as an observer. I'll be really excited to read your book about your observations there.

**Warren:** It's not my observations, though, it's everybody else's.

**Donaldson:** Sure.

**Warren:** I'm pulling in everybody else's.

**Donaldson:** Right.

**Warren:** That's exactly why I'm doing what I'm doing. It's your story. I mean, this is Washington and Lee's story.

**Donaldson:** It's a spectacular place, a defining experience probably in my life, for sure.

**Warren:** Well, that's a pretty nice way to end. But there is anything more you would like to say?

**Donaldson:** No. I'm trying to think if there's anything that we missed. This is something that I don't know whether you—I suspect you're probably not going to talk about in this book, but about the whole Blake Kummer [phonetic] episode. You probably knew about that. About the woman that was killed, who was a freshman.

**Warren:** I'd very much like to have you talk about that.

**Donaldson:** I don't know whether I'm real comfortable about—I mean, I can talk about it, but I'd rather not you quote me on that in the book. Is that all right?

**Warren:** That's fine. That's fine.

**Donaldson:** Just because I've got some friends that—I mean, I was a sophomore when that happened, but that was such a bizarre episode at W&L in terms of a cover-up, that it was hard to put boundaries on who was involved. This woman that was killed was a freshman at the beginning—well, winter of my freshmen year, and this huge investigation that went nowhere until the following year when one of this guy's fraternity brothers came forward and said that he knew who had done it. Apparently this guy had gone up to D.C. and replaced his windshield. Do you know much about this story at all?

**Warren:** A little bit.

**Donaldson:** Then had lived this really, really mysterious life for a year denying the whole—not denying it, but not talking about it to other people, I think talking generally about it in the normal conversation that you hear about this, and then the rumor has always been that a lot of other people knew about it and never said anything. I don't know enough about the situation to really speculate on that, but I've always thought it was one of the negative experiences that I had there, and that made me sort of just question a little bit about the Honor System and about how that could happen if people knew about it. Not to end on a negative note.

**Warren:** No, but that's been said before. It's said by administrators. You're the first person who was a student that I've talked to in that time period, but there's some residuals about that floating around.

**Donaldson:** It's something out of a movie. I mean, I think sometimes when I get in my creative moods, that would be a great screen story because it's so—I mean, it's stranger than fiction, really. You've got a homicide of some variety, you can define it as you want, and then just this crazy cover-up afterwards, and really without a lot of—I don't know that the residuals were that dramatic. There may be some

resentment, or I don't know what the description of it would be, but there wasn't much publicity about it afterwards.

**Warren:** What did happen?

**Donaldson:** What happened to—

**Warren:** Once it came out who had done it.

**Donaldson:** I didn't really know Blake at all. I mean, I kind of knew who he was. He was two years ahead of me. People were just kind of flabbergasted about it at the time. They couldn't believe it. At least my friends, people were just absolutely shocked. I can't remember if there was a trial or maybe he pled—I don't remember exactly the details of it. But it was really, it was such a low point for W&L, I think, really, not through any collective experience, but just because of one individual and what can happen in that situation.

That's about it, really, I think. I can't think of too many other—

**Warren:** Well, this has been a really very broad interview. I thought we were going to talk about just Mock Convention, and it's been very good and broad and deep.

**Donaldson:** Well, good. Good.

**Warren:** I thank you.

**Donaldson:** My pleasure. I'm glad I could help. I look forward to reading about W&L in the future.

**Warren:** So do I.

**Donaldson:** You probably have a few miles to go before—

**Warren:** I do indeed.

[End of interview]