

BOB FISHBURN

July 4, 1996

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**Mame Warren,
Interviewer**

Warren: I'm Mame Warren, and you are Bob Fishburn. It's the 4th of July. We're working hard on this holiday, and we're in Lexington, Virginia. And you are class of 1955. Now, I did a little bit of homework on you. I don't like to learn too much about people before, because I want to learn it from you. But I did look at the *Calyx*, and I got real excited when I looked at the *Calyx* because you look like you were really involved socially.

Fishburn: Socially?

Warren: Socially. I was real excited, because it listed that you were in the Mongolian Minks and the 13 Club.

Fishburn: Both of which, as far as I can tell, were clubs where you met and partied once a year and had your picture taken once a year, so that's two times a year.

Warren: Will you please explain that to me? I found references. Tell me what it meant to be a Mongolian Mink. How did you become a Mongolian Mink?

Fishburn: I was asked. I don't know whether or not it was a mutual back-scratching society or not. I really can't tell you much about either group, except it was something of a minor thrill to be a member. But I'm very serious when I say my memory tells me that we had one party — in both cases — one party a year, and then we had our picture taken together. And I think with the Mongolian Minks, the sillier you could be in the

picture, the better, and I think you saw that in the *Calyx*, too. I have no idea what the purpose was, except to get together and drink.

Warren: But it was by invitation.

Fishburn: It was by invitation, oh, yes.

Warren: Was there a special place you met?

Fishburn: There were lots of crazy clubs. I don't know if you – the Gully Bridge Hunt Club back in the early fifties.

Warren: Were you in that?

Fishburn: No, I was not.

Warren: What did that mean?

Fishburn: That was restricted to West Virginia guys, Gully Bridge Hunt Club. I have no idea what it was. There was a Civil War battle fought at Gully Bridge. But anyway, these guys got together and formed the Gully Bridge Hunt Club, and I guess they knew what they were about, but no one else did.

There were a lot of secret societies, too, not like Virginia, where you didn't until you died and your fellow club members came and put whatever it was on your grave. It wasn't that secret, but there were some secret societies where you had membership and you weren't supposed to tell you were in them. I was in one of those.

Warren: But you probably wouldn't tell me.

Fishburn: No, I would tell you. I'm near enough to – I have intimations of mortality, so I'd probably tell you.

Warren: Well, the 13 Club, what was that about?

Fishburn: The same thing. I have no idea. I really don't remember ever getting together much. I remember it was purely a social club of supposedly like-minded individuals, but we met so infrequently that it was hard to tell whether we were like-minded or not.

Warren: Were there specific places that these groups met?

Fishburn: No. I mean, we had no secret handshake or club rules or club roots, as far as I know. I really can't tell you. The seine that is my mind has sifted out those minor details. I really don't know.

Warren: I have a photograph of a bunch of guys standing around in pajamas, some kind of a pep rally or something, and then there are some people standing off to the side who have 13s on their back and they're all carrying paddles. Do you know what that's about, what's going on there?

Fishburn: There was a paddle with a 13 on it. I think it was just the emblem of the 13 Club. As far as I know, the paddle was not for any kind of hazing or any club ritual. Back then, a lot of organizations had whatever it was the organization was on a paddle, because it acted as a plaque on a wall or something like that. I think that was totally innocent. I don't think it meant anything.

Warren: So it wasn't functional? The paddle wasn't functional?

Fishburn: No, those paddles were not functional. I remember seeing a lot of paddles with a lot of inscriptions and organizations and emblems and things like that on them. It was just because the paddle was something of a symbol of – it wasn't even a symbol of the process. It was just a convenient way of putting an emblem on something. Lacrosse paddles, like lacrosse sticks, I've seen those on walls when people didn't even know what lacrosse was, so I guess it was a safe thing.

Warren: Well, there seems to be a lot of that kind of thing in the background of photographs, and, of course, it intrigues me. I'm wondering what am I seeing here.

Fishburn: No, there was some paddling in the fraternities. I will not deny that. I can remember only one case where there was paddling in the Phi Delta Theta house, and that was because we were not sufficiently solemn and we lined up – I think there were thirteen of us, thirteen pledges. It was during the pledge period, and we added a Sigma Nu to the end of the class and chanted into the sanctum sanctorum in the basement of the Phi Delta house with this one extra guy in the back, and they thought that was such

a terrible thing that we did get paddled at that point, one each from your upperclassmen, your big brother. I thought, I remember at the time, that my big brother was a little bit too, shall I say, attentive to his duties.

But as far as I know, there was no paddling for initiation, at least in my experience. There was paddling for really bad transgressions of the secrecy of the fraternity, all of which sounds very silly now, but it was taken quite seriously back then. We had handshakes and secret chants and *omnia thorestia* [phonetic] *dinoria* [phonetic]. I have no idea what that was, but I remember it to this day, and I'm probably telling something on the national Phi Delta Theta Society may come down and rip my membership out from under me like a rug. I don't have any idea what it was, but we had to learn it. It was mock mock ceremonial, I guess. I think all that has been dropped, and nowadays if you want to get in a fraternity, you don't have to go through anything, except maybe a beer bust.

Warren: I don't know. I think they take it all very seriously. There's a lot of ritual around here.

Fishburn: They still take it seriously? Well, I'm all for ritual, provided it has some meaning behind it. I mean, I wouldn't go to church if I weren't for ritual. But some of it is done out of whole cloth.

Warren: So you were Rushchairman. What does that mean?

Fishburn: I was Rushchairman my sophomore year, and I think it was only because at that point in my life I could remember names. Thank God I don't have to now. And that was also the year we got something like five pledges, four or five pledges. I think we called them "The Fearless Five." And then they went and recruited some pledges from other classes, which didn't sit very well with Red Square. You know which Red Square is.

Warren: Tell me.

Fishburn: Well, Red Square was the one, two, three, four fraternities right in front of the campus, in front of the wall, and politically it was Red Square versus the rest of the fraternities. I don't know when it started. I don't know historically when it started. But Red Square was a political entity and the rest of the campus were "the other fraternities," Red Square, I assume, thinking it was comprised of fraternities better than any others on campus. It was one, two, three, four, five fraternities, just the ones centered on Henry Street.

Warren: Do you have any idea why it's called Red Square?

Fishburn: You know, that's a very good question. I don't know. It could have been the predominantly red brick, I don't know. I don't think it has any political overtones, as such, but I've just always known it to be called Red Square.

Warren: It's an intriguing name, and nobody seems to know when and where it started.

Fishburn: It has nothing to do with the Communists, I can assure you that. If there was a socialistic thought back in the early fifties in Red Square, I would have been very surprised.

Warren: Well, it goes all the way back to when the houses were first built. When they were built, they talk about it being in Red Square.

Fishburn: It's very much more a red square now than it was then with all that extra brick work. But then all the houses were red. That's the only thing I can tell you.

Weren't they all red brick or is Beta and Pi – what's the one on the street –

Warren: Today they're all red brick.

Fishburn: Today they're all red brick.

Warren: And I think, at least in my time, they always have been.

Fishburn: And some of the outlying fraternities were white clapboard or white brick, etc. That's the only thing I can think of.

Warren: Perhaps that truly is the distinction.

Fishburn: Sometimes, you know, they say don't look for any hidden – don't dig too deep in history, because a lot of times it's exactly what it seems to be. So it could be that they were just red brick buildings, I don't know.

Warren: Let's go back to being Rushchairman. I went to a school where there were no fraternities, no sororities. I'm getting my whole education about fraternities here, honestly. You're the first Rushchairman I've talked to. Educate me, please.

Fishburn: Well, you'd have to almost do a history of fraternities in colleges and universities throughout the country to understand the fraternity system. Back in the early fifties, remember, there were no facilities for non-fraternity members, so I imagine the sign-up percentage among undergraduates was well over 70 or 80 percent.

I don't know what it was, but I knew very few people – and that was my fault – but I knew very few people who were not fraternity pledges in my class. The only thing they had they could call their commons was the old student union building, which is just the corner of what we call the student complex now. You know, the main dining room, the meeting rooms, all of that was not there. It was just that one student union building on the corner, that still exists, but it had a commons meeting room in the bottom and then it had activities like *Calyx* and *Ring-tum Phi* and other student-run activities around it. But other than that, there was no place for a non-fraternity guy to go. There was not as much housing in town as there is now.

Now, I've heard that some of the non-fraternity people did very well, but from the point of view of those of us in fraternities, we could not imagine how you could get along socially if you weren't in a fraternity. That was the village within the university, the small place within the university where you made your friends and where you tested yourself and were tested, and it made a certain amount of sense at the time. I like what Bud Robertson said in the session. He said, "It's very unfair and probably very deceptive to judge history through our lenses." So we really have to go back and talk

about the context of what the social life on campus was in the early fifties through the mid-fifties, which is the only time I know it.

I would also have to say that – and I'm neither bragging nor complaining. If anything, I'm complaining. I came to W&L when I was barely seventeen, and I graduated when I was twenty. So in the average, I was about two years, one to two years younger than the average, I think. I think most people came when they were seventeen or eighteen and graduated when they were twenty-one or twenty-two. I was a year and a half to two years younger, so I needed all the protective coloration or barricades from life or whatever you want to call it. I'd come from a single-sex prep school. I'd had very little contact, social contact, with either people in general or women. So this was my cocoon, and the fraternity was my cocoon within the cocoon.

Now, that sounds terrible in today's rather broad coed perspective, but there was a lot of that back then, and as far as I'm concerned, I needed that cocoon. If I were to do it now, I'd probably do it entirely differently. But that was back when you were sent off to prep school. You didn't choose it. After I was sent off to prep school, the rest kind of followed naturally, the single-sex element. I couldn't imagine at sixteen going to a large university where there were, gulp, girls. I really wasn't ready for it. So I needed some place where I could go through the maturation process without stubbing my toes too badly, and I think the fraternity afforded that.

Rushchairman, the Rushchairman was responsible for sending out letters before Rush Week, listening to all the rumors and rumors of rumors about people coming in the freshman class, getting pictures where possible, getting as much of a line on the incoming freshman class as possible so as to be able to beg, borrow, and steal them and get a good pledge class. As I said, we got five, so obviously I didn't do a very good job, or we didn't have a good, as they say, we didn't have a good rush. For whatever reason, I don't remember.

As I remember, back then the Phi Deltas were pretty laid back. Their attitude was very laid back and, "Come to us. We know we're good. You come to us. We're not going to come to you," and maybe that's why we had such a bad rush. But I think we did end up with about four or five pledges from other fraternities, so we ended up with a class of nine or ten. It wasn't quite as bad as it sounded.

I remember then that I could really look at somebody, and I don't know how in the world I ever did it, because, as I say, I've lost that touch whatsoever. The only good thing about being Rushchairman was learning that if you really concentrated and got outside your little shell of particularity, you could learn people's names. You could walk in a room and learn fifty names. Well, I had to for that, and, as I say, it must have just left me my junior year, because I've never been able to do it again as long I live. But there's nothing particularly arcane about Rushchairman. It's mostly organization.

Warren: That seems to have been a really important – and still is – a really important aspect of this place is greeting one another and greeting one another by name.

Fishburn: Mm-hmm.

Warren: I've heard just amazing stories of the administrators and how they went about learning everyone's names.

Fishburn: Oh, it was important. I remember in all of my classes, virtually all of my classes, which were small, except for freshman geology, which I think was the only thing you could call a large class and I think maybe it had 100 in it or 80.

Warren: Really!

Fishburn: Which was a big class back then. Geology, yeah, I think freshman geology, because there were so many people trying to avoid physics and the other sciences that they went for geology. It was a large class. But I remember even in that class, we sat in the same place every day, and within a week or two he knew our names. And that's unusual, unusual in that it was not a small class.

But in virtually every class I took at this place, the teacher knew my name, so there was no anonymity. There was no way of sneaking up late and saying, "Do you know who I am?" and slipping your blue book in among the others and running. You couldn't do that here. They knew who you were, and they knew a great many of your idiosyncrasies, too, which made it nice. It's not that much larger now, and I think it's probably still very much the same way. But that was one of the appealing things about it then, and now, the interaction between teacher and student.

Warren: Were there any particular teachers who were important to you?

Fishburn: Oh, yeah. You'll probably hear from the people in the fifties the standard ones. Because we're doing the Civil War this week, I remember Bean, Bill Bean, fighting the battles from trench to tree and back to muddy trench, and Jenks, Bill Jenks, on virtually anything. I mean, he was just such a masterful lecturer. Let's see.

Warren: What made him a masterful lecturer?

Fishburn: One of the things, Mame, was his – there were rumors about Bill Jenks, and I'm sure you'll run into this, too. There was a rumor that he was in the Secret Service during the Second World War and that he was a dashing person who ended up behind enemy lines. I don't think any of this is true, but of course it added to the intrigue surrounding him, the mystery surrounding Bill Jenks.

But mostly, he was just a crackerjack lecturer. He could begin at the bell, and like so many good lecturers, deal with material that in someone else's mouth or hands would be dull as dishwater, and it would be fascinating. The high point of his lecture would come right before the bell, and when the bell rang, he put the period on it. Organization, perhaps too much organization for a lot of tastes, yes. But for me, I was a crimped note taker, and some of my very long words took no more than about three-quarters of an inch on a page. I mean, six-syllable words would be like that. So I was crimped and probably somewhat anal, and I loved to take notes and I loved the organization of it, and, boy, he was nothing if not organized. I mean, as you listened to

Bill Jenks, you would be going Roman numeral one, big A, little A, big B, A, B, Roman numeral two. He didn't have to say it. He didn't have to give you an outline. It was just the way he presented the material in such clear steps, and I admired him for that. But he in many other ways was a good teacher. He just knew his stuff.

I liked Marshall Fishwick. There was kind of a secret pleasure in taking Marshall because he was a great iconoclast, and there weren't too many iconoclasts back in the early to mid-fifties. But he was kind of the apple cart upsetter, and those of us who took him liked his panache, I guess you'd call it, and the fact that he was irreverent toward General Washington and Mr. Lee's college, and there was very little irreverence back then, too.

I feel that the period in the early fifties – and I'm speaking for W&L, because I can't speak for any other institution. I think the fifties everywhere have gotten a bad rap for being the Ike years, for one thing, and being somewhat conformist. I remember the big thing back then was apathy, you're all apathetic, you're probably not even going to vote when you get out of here, part of what was true. But I think in light of what happened in the sixties and seventies, again through their lenses, they have looked at the fifties as being kind of Ozzie and Harriet go to Camp Lexington. It was nothing like that. They make it sound like a bland, sleep-producing era, and it really wasn't. I mean, we had people telling us we were bland and nonconformists, and they told us every day, and we had our gadflies and we had arguments, and it was an alive place.

But I must say, the difference to me – and I was writing editorials in the sixties and seventies – the difference to me, as I saw it from my little ivory tower perch in Roanoke, was that some of the civility that existed in the fifties was gone by the sixties, just the simple act of saying, "You and I can disagree, but we're not going to become *ad hominem*, we're not going to become strident." We're not going to try to attack each other, in other words.

There was a stridency that came in, and I think it came in to this place, too, in the sixties, because it permeated higher education, an intellectual smugness, a lack of civility, a stridency, that I don't remember ever seeing in the fifties. There was passion about opinions we held, but it was not I'm right and you're wrong. It's going to sound corny as hell now, in the light of everything that's happened in the last twenty years, but I think there was a belief in that we were all involved in a search for truth with a little T and that it was possible to find something close to the truth. Again, I think sixties and seventies kind of shot that idea in the saddle, and everybody's opinion was the same.

In the fifties, you could still say, "Well, I'm right and you're wrong, but I'm not going to hold it against you," you know, in a civil way. Through argument and evidence, it became apparent that one position was stronger than another position, not all positions were equally valid, and I think that was probably the last time that one place, this place, could say we're in a — you know, Francis Pendleton Gaines could come out with some of the worst, I mean they sound like ringing clichés these days, but they were believed back then. Have you ever heard any of his speeches?

Warren: Yes.

Fishburn: They sound like 19th century Lincoln-Douglas debates, except they don't sound quite as good as the Lincoln-Douglas debates. But all of those ringing phrases, by and large, were believed in. They sound — and I'm going to say it — a lot of them sound fatuous today, but they didn't back then. Again through our lens, they take on a different coloration, but I remember being absolutely — he was a stem-winder was Dr. Gaines, and I remember just being absolutely taken by his oratory.

Of course, the older I got, the more I found out, you know, that this was his shtick, and the oratory didn't sound as good. But it meant a lot to an entering freshman in 1951 to have the president say the things he said, using almost Roman oratory as his

example. Nobody could get away with that today. I mean, he or she would be hooted off the stage. But it really meant something in 1951.

Now, I've gotten pretty far afield. Where were we?

Warren: I'm on the same field you are.

Fishburn: Get me back on track, please.

Warren: You know, I'm sorry that that's the case. I loved the group of speeches that I was able to listen to. That voice is passionate.

Fishburn: Oh, it was—he came from a small town in South Carolina, and where in the world he learned to speak like that, I don't know. But he could alternately stir and charm in his speeches. The only person I've heard who could do that was the chancellor of Vanderbilt, when I went to one of my daughter's orientation sessions, and I thought, "This is Francis Pendleton Gaines' ghost, and he's right there." I've forgotten, Dr. Wyatt, maybe, from Vanderbilt. Whoever it was, he was wonderful. I could see the expression on the faces of these young Vanderbilt freshmen, and they were just rolling their eyes as if to say, "Where is this man coming from? This is 1978, for God's sake." And I was lapping it up. The nostalgic part of me was lapping it up, thinking, "How in the world is getting away with this in '78?" You can gather I'm something of a traditionalist, just a little bit of one.

There's just so much about the period of '51 to '55 that I think it's precious. I don't mean precious in any other sense of the word than it was wonderful because it was so fragile. In retrospect, a lot of that fifties naiveté. The country was naive and the undergraduates were naive and I was naive, and maybe Eisenhower was naive, I don't know. But the country was stable. We had a sense of purpose. We agreed on most things.

That situation was so fragile and so destined to be swept up in the turmoil of the sixties, and that's maybe why I look at it as I would look at a doll that's been smashed and trying to remember what it was like before it was smashed. I probably make it

seem much more beautiful than the doll really was. But there was something very precious about those times, because there was sort of a consensus. There were wild people around and they did wild things, but there was a consensus, and it kept wild people from really going absolutely totally bonkers.

I mean, we had our problems. We had a freshman suicide in '51 in the freshman dorm. It wasn't that we were totally protected from the winds of life, but to a certain degree – that's why I call it a cocoon. To a certain degree, we were in a cocoon. We were in a beautiful place at a stable time, and as I said, it was a very fragile time, because I can read now about the things that in the fifties were precursors of the sixties and seventies. So it was on the edge of vast changes, some of which have been wonderful. I think the sixties and seventies made have been so much more an open, tolerant society, but I think we have traded some of these other things I've been talking about for the pact we made during the sixties and seventies.

Want to get me back on track?

Warren: You're on the track I want you to be on. I mean, I've got other questions.

Fishburn: This has very little to do with W&L.

Warren: Oh, no, it does.

Fishburn: It really does. I remember – and you're going to laugh at me, but I remember it was just so – this I can remember as though it were yesterday – the Southern Collegians, a small, white, gentrified jazz band, sort of the kind that came down from Eddie Condon in New York. It was New Orleans jazz as filtered through Eddie Condon in New York. It was New Orleans by way of Chicago, New York, and back to the campus at W&L. It was Dixieland jazz. The Southern Collegians had a group that played jazz. They always played Dixie and they always played the Washington and Lee swing and they always played "When the Saints Go Marching In."

I remember the first time I ever went to a keg party, and I got my beer and I had a date and I had my arm around my date and I had my beer in this hand and it was a

beautiful day. It was somewhere, I think, in back of, it may have been on the lawn on in back of a fraternity house. I was sitting there with the September sun shining down and my beer and this wonderful music coming that I absolutely loved, and I thought, "God, this is the only place in the whole world to be." Now, it was naive, but I remember it to this day, and I've never felt more in a place and of a place since then. I know it sounds silly, but it was powerful working on the psyche of a seventeen-year-old who didn't have a particularly good prep school experience. I mean, it was powerful. I thought, "I may never leave," which was to say I was really saying, "I may never grow up." Well, that's okay. We all have to go through that, too.

Warren: Yeah, there are a lot of Peter Pans around.

Fishburn: Oh, yeah.

Warren: Did you ever consider going to school anywhere else, going to college anywhere else?

Fishburn: Are we being honest here?

Warren: Yes.

Fishburn: You're forcing me to be honest. I didn't do too well at prep school. I'm a almost classic late bloomer, and I didn't catch on. I had a good enough background at Episcopal High School so that I could—I knew how to study. So my first year, I made As, Bs, and C-pluses. I think I was the only one in my class that was doing well. The Phi Delts were not known for their intellectual attributes. I had sophomore slump, classic sophomore slump, and then I caught on a little bit junior and senior.

But the upshot of it was, I came into W&L with less than good grades, but my father knew Dean Gilliam. And you will find, I think, in your interviews that a lot of people who were late bloomers and having trouble getting in places attribute their being at W&L to Dean Gilliam, because he got a lot of legacies in and he got a lot of sons of people he knew in. Now, again that sounds preposterous in this day and age of egalitarianism, but it wasn't bad then because most of the people I know who got in

with help from Dean Gilliam did extremely well along the way. I mean, they were late bloomers, but they did well by the time they graduated, and they have been some of W&L's staunchest supporters.

So Dean Gilliam, though he might not be considered a classic Democrat, he might even be accused of elitism, but I think he did a lot of good. There are a lot of people who are devoted to him, and I'm devoted to him because he got me in. A long way of saying I did not apply to any other place, because I probably couldn't have gotten in. I know I couldn't have gotten into the University of Virginia. My father was third in his class at Princeton, and I had no earthly hope of getting into Princeton. I mean, that was just out of the question. So my father drove me to Lexington one day, and we looked at the colonnade and he said, "Butch (as he called me), do you like the looks of this place?"

I said, "Yes, Dad, I do. I think it's a beautiful campus."

He said, "Good, because this is where you're going."

It didn't mean that—I mean, if I'd had all Fs at EHS, I couldn't have gotten in. He knew I could do the work, but he also knew that I skipped the eighth grade and probably was not socially where I should have been and that probably held me back in my grades. By the time I got to W&L, I was still very much susceptible to peer group pressure, more so than your average entering freshman.

Warren: So a while ago you implied that the idea of girls was a pretty strange thing for you by the time you got here.

Fishburn: At sixteen, I am sixteen going on seventeen. Isn't there a song? She was sixteen going on seventeen or something. Anyway, I was seventeen going on sixteen, very, very immature.

Warren: But within a year you're standing there with a beer in one hand and your arm around a girl. What did W&L have that enabled you to do that?

Fishburn: It enabled me to do that. It might not have enabled me to do anything after the beer ran out and the sun went down. I was okay as long as I had my fraternity brothers around me.

Warren: Where did the girls come from?

Fishburn: Oh, the girls came from, as you said today, the road schools. I dated one girl all the way through Washington and Lee, and I dated her my senior year at EHS. I met her my senior year at EHS and dated her all the way through W&L. So I had the same date from Mary Washington the whole time I was here, and wouldn't have had it any other way, because we were very close and that gave me a feeling a stability, too. If I'd have had to meet or court or go after or play games with any other girl, I probably would have tripped badly, but she and I had been through it.

I did have a date at Sweet Briar my freshman year. It was one of those mixers that they used to have where the fraternities would bundle up their freshmen and take them over to one of the road schools and push them off into the middle of the room with some of the Sweet Briar freshmen or the Hollins freshmen or the Randolph-Macon freshmen. I met this gal who was a friend of my sister's. My sister was in her senior class at Sweet Briar, and I met this girl and just absolutely fell madly in love while I was dating my high school sweetheart.

My big brother at the fraternity, who was supposed to be there to protect my interests, took her over and I never saw her again. Well, I saw her again, but she was always with him. So the fraternity big brother system failed me miserably, but it was supposed to help some other people. Let's see, he took my girl and he hit me unusually hard when he paddled me. If I hadn't known my big brother, in retrospect I'd say he was something of a crudball. But he wasn't. He was a wonderful person.

Warren: Well, you're the first person to call someone a crudball. You have that honor.

[Laughter] I need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: All right, I'm going to jump back to the beginning of where we started here. What are the White Friars, please? You were a White Friar.

Fishburn: Was I a White Friar?

Warren: *Calyx* thinks you were.

Fishburn: I was a White Friar!?

Warren: What does it mean to be a White Friar?

Fishburn: I know this is going to sound stupid and it's going to seem that I went through four years in an alcoholic haze, and I really didn't. I don't know what a White Friar is.

Warren: Oh, good.

Fishburn: I really don't know. You may not find – White Frair may be along with us Mongolian Minks.

Warren: They take their picture.

Fishburn: I remember gathering and thinking, "Do I know you?" gathering for the photo and thinking, "You're Bill, but I don't remember your last name." That's terribly embarrassing. It's terribly embarrassing to admit it after all these years. One of them may have been publications oriented, because I was with the *Ring-tum Phi*, and did a dreadful job. God, that was embarrassing.

I remember after my year at the *Ring-tum Phi* was over, during which I left the – you know, this was where you typed out on these little old plates and then ran it through the Multilith or lithograph or whatever it was for the address, and the ink went through the little plate. Well, I got the plate screwed up, I couldn't type, I got the list screwed up, and at the end of the year I was automatically on the publications board, which led to being on the Executive Committee, because they took one person from the publications board.

We met to choose my – this is for my benefit, because I felt so guilty about this. This is one of those times when you wish you got before Saint Peter and he said,

"Fishburn, I'm going to give you twenty minutes in one minute increments, and that means you can go back to Earth and right twenty times, R-I-G-H-T, those few moments when you did something that you wish you hadn't done." This would be among my twenty.

We were choosing my successor, and politics got into it. I knew exactly the young man who should have had it. He helped me. He straightened me out. He got my files going. He was wonderful. He was enthusiastic. He wanted to be in journalism. I had it tossed at me, and this guy wanted it so badly he could taste it.

The politics of it was that it was Red Square versus something else, and Red Square was trying to wrap up the publications that year and get all of the dance posts and all this, you know, chest beating, and I voted against this apprentice and went with some jerk who was a Red Square candidate. I won't say jerk, because you can look in the *Calyx* and find out who the next guy after me was. But the young man who really wanted it and who had worked for me and I knew deserved it got it the following year and was wonderful as the business manager of the *Ring-tum Phi*.

I wake up in the middle of the night about this, I really do, and I want to call him and say, "Marvin, I'd like to apologize to you for overlooking you that time because of campus politics, because it was petty and stupid and asinine and juvenile." I went so far as to write him one time when the new W&L registry came out, alumni registry. I never got a reply. But before I leave, throw off this mortal coil, I'm going to get in touch with him and apologize. It's just those little things that get you.

Warren: Oh, truth telling.

Fishburn: Yeah.

Warren: I'm going to pause for a moment. [Tape recorder turned off.]

I'm just really kind of interested in all these things that you were involved in.

Fishburn: Okay, there was one more. In conjunction with this, there was Marvin laboring in the shadows because of the Red Square. It wasn't Red Square. There were two sets of fraternities, and I've forgotten –

Warren: Was it Big Clique and Little Clique?

Fishburn: Big Clique and Little Clique, you've got it.

Warren: I've heard that expression, but I don't really know what it means.

Fishburn: Big Clique was Red Square, and the Little Clique was – and essentially you had the Red Square fraternities versus the others, and being a member of the Big Clique, it was important. Why, I don't know, because it now seems so unimportant. But when I voted against Marvin, it seemed very important. It seemed almost as though the fortunes of the Democratic and Republican party were going to ride on my vote that day, and, of course, the whole thing was a stupid, it was a mock battle, mock political battle.

There was another thing that will remind, I think, some people of that period. All the sets at all the dances, virtually every drop of paint, every nail, every board, every backdrop, every design, was done by one person, a guy named Henry Heyman, and all the – I'm not saying all of them, but I know that the people I knew who got any kind of dance chairmanship, in which your responsibility was to get appoint a committee to get the band and then decorate the gym, Doremus Gym. They were the only two things you did, really, is set a date, get a band, and decorate the gym.

Henry was always so enthusiastic. He wanted to do the decorations, and as I remember, he did such a beautiful job. I think I was head of one dance, and this is tell it all, brother, time. I think I went over there maybe five times to check up on his progress, and that's about all I did for that dance. So sometimes you see these lists in the *Calyx*, and the lists may or may not mean very much. As a matter of fact, the recipient of that ink might not even know what those organizations were that he was a part of.

Warren: Well, you were Fancy Dress vice president. Is that what you're talking about?

Fishburn: Well, I was thinking of Fancy Dress, but I think I was also —

Warren: You were also one vice president of Spring Dance.

Fishburn: Yeah. In one case I was in charge of decorations, and, of course, all I did was go straight to Henry and say, "What do you have in mind?"

Warren: What did Henry have in mind? What kind of things did he do?

Fishburn: Henry was just full of ideas. You don't have a *Calyx*, do you?

Warren: No, not here.

Fishburn: You'll find him in there. He was this wonderful guy who loved, I guess — I hope he turned out to be a scenic designer on Broadway. I have no idea what happened to Henry. But he's my other guilt trip, because he just was there to —

Warren: It sounds like he was having fun.

Fishburn: Oh, he was having a good time, and I guess it was a symbiotic relationship. But I always felt after I graduated and got a few years on me that Henry was terribly used, because as far as I know, he never got any recognition. I think it was H-E-Y-M-A-N.

Warren: That's what I was going to ask you.

Fishburn: I'm not sure. We can look it up. But as far as I know, that's all Henry Heyman did was decorate for dances, and I think he did it at least once or twice every year. He may have done every dance for two years. I really don't know.

Warren: Take me to one of those dances. What was it like? Walk me in the door.

Fishburn: You're talking about a Fancy Dress or a regular dance?

Warren: Both. What's the difference between?

Fishburn: Not much, really. Fancy Dress, of course, had a lot more prestige because it was the dance of the year. But I think in general you had two divisions on campus. One loved to, quite frankly, drink, because it was an excuse for some heavy partying and drinking, and loved to dance. The other element wanted to get as far away from all

the foolishness as they possibly could, and you're just going to have decide yourself which was the more mature of the two groups.

But the dances were wonderful, because they could transform that rather dark, dingy gym – at least Henry could – into a wonderful place. Of course, back then they still had the big bands coming around, and we had Tommy Dorsey and Stan Kenton, and I'm sure we had Glenn Miller's. If there was a Glenn Miller Band, it wasn't Glenn Miller because he died during the war. But we had all the major bands and probably occasionally some regional bands for the off dances, Spring – what did we have, Spring and Fall and Fancy Dress?

Warren: And there was openings and finals. They just seemed to go on and on.

Fishburn: They did go on and on, because that was the excuse for partying.

Warren: But how dressed up did one get?

Fishburn: For Fancy Dress, they picked the theme, of course, and it had to be a reasonably practical theme, and you went to a certain room and ordered your Fancy Dress costume long in advance of the actual ball. That was reserved for the best bands and the most gorgeous backdrop and scenery, etc. I think our year it was the Roman – it wasn't a toga party, but it was Roman, I think. I think our senior year was Roman, and Henry, of course, had the columns and the capitals and the steps. It was wonderful. I like to dance. I love to jitterbug. I thought it was just quite special.

There was no hoopla. I mean, it was drinking and dancing. We didn't have a figure, as such. I think at one point the president of the dance and the vice president and maybe about three or four couples would come through the arch or whatever it was with their dates and start dancing, and that was it. That was the only ritual. But it was just very special. It was a way of saying, not just come over and sit in my fraternity house in the basement on the sawdust and drink some very bad punch. It was a way of saying, "This is special. Come over and go to a dance." I mean, that was a much higher order of date. Do we still have dances?

Warren: I went to my first Fancy Dress this year.

Fishburn: You've got Fancy Dress, but they don't go in for it the way we went in for it.

Warren: No, unfortunately. But Fancy Dress was fun. It was really fun.

Fishburn: It's great fun. I'm not apologizing for it. I'm apologizing for Henry's doing all the work.

Warren: You said it wasn't a toga party.

Fishburn: It wasn't a toga party.

Warren: Were there toga parties in your day? When did the toga parties start?

Fishburn: I would say toga parties were – there were panty raids, I think, in the fifties. I know there were. I think the panty raid, the rage for panty raids I believe started sometime in the early fifties.

Warren: For posterity, explain what a panty raid is.

Fishburn: A bunch of drunk guys get together, pick a particular women's – it's better if it's not coed, because you don't want guys around protecting the – I started to say virginity of, and I don't mean that – protecting the reputation of the women. So you pick a fairly obscure dorm on a fairly obscure women's campus, and you get together in a car or three cars or four cars and you Rushthrough the dorm and steal panties and then run out again. I guess they counted the number of panties or whatever.

I had to, for my freshman, one of the things I had to do for the Phi Deltas, go to a college in I think it was Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, or one of the Pennsylvania colleges, Chambersburg, maybe Chambersburg, unimportant, and get signed underwear from some guy's girlfriend that he had up there. I think that was sort of an offshoot of the idea of it's great fun to raid a dorm and steal panties. Then I think part of it was to come home and hang the panties out of the windows of the fraternity house, and, of course, the more panties you got, the more successful was the raid.

Now, if you're asking me to justify it, I mean I can explain it, but if you're asking me to justify it, I have no idea. I do know that a lot of the women considered it a

privilege to be raided and would leave the panties out in very prominent places in order to make it easy. That's a panty raid.

The toga party came later. Of course, you know that the fifties were not in any way goody-two-shoes, and we certainly had some drunken parties. I don't remember anything that could be vaguely called—I won't say that. I started to say I don't remember anything that could be vaguely called orgiastic, but there were some pretty raunchy parties.

The Phi Deltas got put on social probation the first time, I can remember. The Phi Deltas were put on social probation, I think, about three or four times for untoward activities. The first time they got a couple of strippers from a carnival in Buena Vista and brought them into the house and thought that was great fun, and the administration did not think it was nearly as funny as the Phi Deltas thought it was. I was not there. That was my freshman year. I remember the aftermath of it because we couldn't have a party in the fraternity house for a long time. But I actually was seeing *Joan of Arc*.

Warren: And you expect me to believe that?

Fishburn: No, I really absolutely was. I missed it entirely. I would have been there and I probably would have joined in the hooting and the hollering had I been there, but I missed it entirely. But fraternities were routinely put on social probation, not for just drinking, but for damage or anything like—I would imagine back then a toga party would have done it. But toga parties came in in the late sixties, seventies, didn't they?

Warren: I have a photograph that I'd say is about '63 or '64 of a toga party.

Fishburn: Here?

Warren: Uh-huh.

Fishburn: Huh. I guess I was thinking about *Animal House*.

Warren: Well, I think by that time they were so well established.

Fishburn: It had sifted through the public consciousness. No, I didn't realize it was that early.

Where are we?

Warren: We're all over the place. This is just wonderful stuff.

So you were on the EC, because of being on the publications board.

Fishburn: Right. I was on the Executive Committee during the time that they had the football scandal, and that was painful.

Warren: You were! Oh, my God, I hadn't done that arithmetic. Will you please tell your experience of that.

Fishburn: Watty Bowes was the head – that's B-O-W-E-S, Watty, Watson. They called him Watty Bowes, who was really probably our class star, very smart and into everything, was the head of the Executive Committee. You know the background.

Warren: Please tell the story.

Fishburn: Here we had a school of, what, 1,000, 1,200 undergraduates. Was it that large? It was around 1,000. Let's just say it was 1,000, 1,000, 1,100, not including law school, trying to support a major football program. Not a major athletic program. Basketball was good, but we didn't field every team that the NCAA has, but we fielded teams.

We tried to have a professional football team. I won't say professional, a good college football team in the middle of a small university – you would almost call it, in size, a college – which was very difficult to do unless the athletes were housed separately, fed separately, unless they had some feeling of being separated from the rest of the institution. You had to have an athletic dorm, although I remember that Bob Thomas, who was a great athlete. I think our athletes lived in the dorm, but they must have been separated in some way in what they ate or their athletic facilities or something.

But, by and large, not the athletes I knew, but a great many of them felt that they weren't a part of the university, they were somehow separate from and probably a little bit above the student body, the slobs, the everyday potbellied slobs. And you can see why. Good athletes in the middle of a university where day-to-day contact is very important, and they are segregated in certain ways. So they didn't feel a part of the university, and I imagine they took a somewhat jaundice view, some of them, the ones who were involved in this scheme, took a somewhat jaundice view of the Honor System, because they just didn't feel they were part of it. They were playing for dear old Washington and Lee, but I don't think some of them felt any allegiance to dear old Washington and Lee.

So they, as I understand it, got in good with one of the secretaries, who had a key to the third floor of one of the administration buildings and therefore had access to the Multilith machines, where the exams were copied, and somehow got copies of exams and took it from there, and suddenly were making wonderful grades in certain courses, and somebody figured it out.

Warren: So they had advance copies of the exams.

Fishburn: They had advance copies of the exams, because the professors would, in advance, make the class copies up there. Somehow they got the master copy or got a copy of the exams. I don't know in which courses. I don't know anything about it. That's just the way it came to us.

I do not remember too much about the testimony. I just remember it was an extremely painful process because they were caught dead to right, and it was the bulk of the offense and a lot of defensive players, all of whom everybody knew. So they paraded in front of the Executive Committee one at a time, and the Executive Committee had very little recourse. Most of them were open-and-shut cases. There were a few who kind of got dragged into the scheme kicking and screaming, and I think

there were some special circumstances. But mostly it was just lower the boom, lower the boom.

I remember Watty Bowes being very organized and everything was fairly cut and dry. I say cut and dry legally, because there wasn't anything we could do about it. But it was so painful because it wasn't like kicking out Joe Schimitzki [phonetic], Michigan State All-American. It was the guy whom you'd lived with in freshman dorm and it could have been a fraternity brother or it could have been your best friend. That seems to contradict what I said about their not being part of the university. They were part of the university, but there was a psychological, probably a psychological segregation.

Warren: Were there very many? How many of them –

Fishburn: God, Mame, don't pin me down about that. I just remember that we couldn't honor our contracts to play the next year because we just didn't have any players. I seem to remember that virtually the whole offense was wiped out and most of the defense, so that would have been – gee, you know, you can go back and check – at least twenty people.

Then at that point, of course, we decided to go, we called it amateur, and play the small colleges in our division. We did field, I think, in 1955 we did field a team. We played the schedule in '55, I believe, with people who were horses who wanted to go out and just see how they could – they all played in high school, and some of them played for W&L and were not involved in the scandal, in the cheating scandal. So they fielded a team the next year, I think it was something of a disaster.

Warren: How did it feel to be in the middle of that?

Fishburn: It felt terrible. I mean, my God, because you were not only sorry to see some very decent people go who got caught in a rather ridiculous situation, and some of them did get caught. They just had the damn exam thrust under their noses and said, "This is it."

But it was terrible, although I think there was a suspicion on the part of the W&L community that we could be quite good with people like VPI, Virginia, University of Richmond, and still have our butts kicked by the major colleges. See, we were in kind of limbo. In '50, we went to the Gator Bowl. We lost, but we went to the Gator Bowl. '51 we had a wonderful Gil Bocetti. You'll run across his name. And Bob Thomas was the end, and they set all kinds of records. We beat Virginia 42 to 13 or something, and, I mean, it was just great. But we realized that even though we could play competitively in Virginia schools, that year Maryland, which was national champion, came down and beat us 55 to nothing. So we just were so wavering.

I think the worse thing we possibly could have done, and I think history's proven that, for a small institution to try to field a large football team is just ridiculous, because it takes so many resources. We didn't have the alumni to get the players. We didn't have the facilities. I mean, it was wonderful while it lasted, but I think there was a feeling that this was sort of a clarifying, as bad as it was, it was a clarifying issue that pushed us to make a decision that we would have inevitably had to make anyway. Can you see us playing a major foot – basketball, fine, because it's only ten people. It's all you need. But football, sixty players. You just couldn't do it. So that really pushed us, I think, on the road to inevitability. But it was terrible. You can talk to some of the people who were on that Executive Committee. It was awful. I don't remember anybody else, except Dewey Oxner, who is now a lawyer down in South Carolina.

Warren: Did it strengthen or make you question – what did it do for people's feelings about the Honor System?

Fishburn: From my memory and my point of view, there was kind of a protective rationale. We didn't say, "Oh, God, there goes the Honor System. We're doing everything wrong." We said, "This was a special case where you had a group that was not really a part of the university."

Now, that may be a really bad spin and simply a rationalization to help us through a bad period, but I think a lot of people took it that way. It's not broken. It still works under normal circumstances, but these were extraordinary circumstances, and I think we told ourselves you can understand why it didn't work under these circumstances. This was a very tight-knit group within the university and yet not fully a part of the university.

And yet, God, we lost some very decent guys who just kind of got caught in the web. I'm not saying they weren't guilty, but they were just decent people. Every time I saw one of them walk out of the room, I thought, "My God, what is this going to do to his life?" Because like every other thing like that, it seemed like wonderful fun at the time. But it was just so damn clear cut. There was nothing anybody could do about it. So a lot of what we did was almost a formality. We did not have great long trials with ringing defenses and ringing prosecutions, because by the time they got to us, most of them had admitted what they had done, so it was just, boom, but nonetheless, painful.

Warren: When you arrived, was the Honor System something new to you? Was it drilled in?

Fishburn: We had it at the prep school I went to.

Warren: Was that true for a lot of people?

Fishburn: No. There were really three groups in '51 when I arrived. You had the public school people, of course, and you had the prep school people, probably far more preppies that you've got now, which is probably a good thing, and then you had the veterans. Still in 1951, the veterans in fairly large numbers were taking advantage of the GI Bill for both W&L and the law school.

And there were three entirely different perceptions. By and large, the preppies came in better prepared, but also more laid back, more ready to, having been in a rather restricted situation socially, they were—I remember the first time I stayed in freshman dorm I bolted up from looking at the schedule or something and said, "I don't have to

be in tonight. I won't have anybody checking me out of the dorm, checking me in the dorm." For four years, I had been under very tight supervision. I could go out and do anything I wanted to. Well, for most prep school kids, that was a tremendous sense of freedom, and so they naturally took advantage of it and studied only what they had to study, but made good grades, again because of this preparation. They knew how to study.

The public school kids came in with all kinds of intensity, but not knowing how to study and not having the boost of the course material that we had had and didn't do as well. But pretty soon, crossover. We were like this and they were like that, and in most cases they passed us rapidly.

And then there were the GIs, who wanted to take advantage of every single second. They ruined the class curve because they could party, and I swear they could party all night long, the ones who weren't married, and get up and study hard. They knew the importance of their time and this education, and they were dedicated partiers and dedicated studiers, and they could somehow mix the two.

Those of us who tried to emulate them were dead in the water. I never did, because I had the good sense to know that they had the years on us, the stamina, and the maturity. So I didn't do it, but a lot of people said, "Oh, hell, if this guy can do it, so can I." Well, boy, the veterans really cut a huge swath through the W&L in the early fifties, and I think there was still a few when I graduated in '55. I don't when the great influx was. I guess it was '46, '47, but again, you can check that.

There's an interesting, I think, I guess you'd call it a sociological study to be done on the impact of the veterans on this place in the late forties, early fifties, because it was really intriguing. Of course, those veterans who were married came in with a tremendous advantage. I remember the law students who were married just did nothing but hit the books, because they couldn't have as much social life. I mean, they

were not dry as dusts, but they knew how to allocate their time, they were driven, and they were absolutely awesome.

I remember one law student, Jim Foltz, had a corner room. He was not married, but he had a corner room in the Phi Delta house. You'd walk in his room, and he would have, I don't know what they called them. They were large sheets of paper about like this. He wrote tiny, too, and every single case that he covered in there was done by one of these sheets. He had, in effect, rewritten the book in his language.

I looked at that and said, you know, he reminded me of some medieval monk doing illuminated manuscripts. It was beautiful in a way, but it was so frightening in a way because I'd never seen evidence up until that time of that much just sheer hard work. If I had entertained any, any desire to be a lawyer, at that point it went right out of my head, because I just decided there wasn't any way I was going to be able to do that. Marginalia was all I was destined to do.

But the veterans really set the pace and the tone of a lot that went on on campus in the early fifties, which is both good and bad. The good being that there was a level of maturity we needed. The bad being that if we tried to do what they did, we were lost in the wake.

Warren: One of the distinctions that you had, and you keep downplaying all these things that I think you did.

Fishburn: Well, no. I'm just being honest.

Warren: You were tapped for ODK.

Fishburn: Well, that was probably the only legitimate thing on the list.

Warren: I go to those ceremonies and I say, "Wow, these must be cool people."

Fishburn: But see, it follows from the things that I had downplayed, because with ODK you had to have a certain number of activities. For ODK purposes, it didn't make any difference if Henry Heyman did the actual work while I took all the glory of the dance. It didn't matter to them that I probably never opened my mouth in the Executive

Committee. I can remember opening my mouth about twice in the Executive Committee. It didn't matter to them that my Executive Committee position came from publications.

Warren: Who is "them"?

Fishburn: Well, the ODK, they have a screening committee, don't they? I don't know, Rupert Latture, didn't he found ODK?

Warren: Did you feel honored to be tapped?

Fishburn: Oh, of course I did. I'm playing this down. I loved it. I loved the activities, and there was a certain amount of satisfaction in the activities. I'm just saying that some of it just you fell into by virtue of being in a certain fraternity and knowing certain people. It wasn't by virtue of being a R.E. Lee type person or a great leader or anything else. I mean, you kind of fell into it.

Warren: So I should be less impressed when I see these people?

Fishburn: I think, by and large, the amount of ink in the yearbook is not really the final indication of what type of person you're dealing with. In many cases, of course it is, and in many cases it's an indication of very hard work. But I'm being quite honest in saying in my case it was just kind of being in the right place at the right time. But I was proud of ODK, and I did go with Rupert Latture to an ODK meeting in Louisville and drove him down and drove him back. That was a very interesting trip.

Also, talk about Saint Peter and the gate and that one minute. I also had to escort Russell Kirk around the campus, I think about 1953, '54, and I remember that as being very, very stilted, because here was the modern engineer, one of the modern engineers of the conservative revival, one of the great conservative scholars, from all indications a wonderfully funny and engaging man, and I doubt that we said more than three words. We had nothing in common particularly, but I was his escort on campus. I was too embarrassed to ask him a question. I was afraid this great mind would think it was a totally stupid question. I've since learned to ask questions whether you think they're

stupid or not. No other way, I say I'd like to have that moment back, one of those not so golden moments. Boy, would I ask Russell Kirk a lot of questions, because this was about the time he put out *The Conservative Mind*, which was a seminal book. You know, the innocence of youth.

Warren: We're at the end of this tape. I have a few more questions. Can I put another one in?

Fishburn: Sure.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Warren: This is Mame Warren. This is tape two with Bob Fishburn on the 4th of July 1996, in Lexington, Virginia.

You have been a newspaperman, right? That's been your profession. And you're in the neighborhood. So surely you've kept an eye on this whole coeducation issue as it developed at Washington and Lee.

Fishburn: And you want me to comment on that.

Warren: I'd like to hear what your perceptions were.

Fishburn: You want me to stick my head in the lioness' mouth. No, I'm kidding.

Warren: I'm interested in what you thought at the time and what you think now.

Fishburn: I will admit to having some misgivings ten years ago. I had a sneaking suspicion that a certain president was brought in to accomplish this, a suspicion that has been confirmed. Being something of a traditionalist, I was thinking, "Is there any way we can do this more slowly, because this is a great change, and can we do it kind of slicing thin slices of the cheese?" Then I realized that was ludicrous. If we were going to do it, we had to just go on and do it.

I heard the probably apocryphal stories about what they were going to do with the bathroom facilities around campus when they realized they didn't have enough bathrooms for the women, and the story went around that they just decided to put

potted plants in urinals and make them into ladies' facilities. I don't know if that's true or not, but it makes a good story. So I had misgivings.

Warren: Make them easy to water.

Fishburn: Yeah, it would be easy to water. [Laughter] I want to tell you a Churchill joke after we cut it off.

I had misgivings. The prep school I went to went coed some years back. I think in my mind I could justify Washington and Lee's going coed much more than I could prep school, because prep school seems to me to be a particularly vulnerable time in a young person's life, and I think I can still say that there's a justification for having this sexual cocoon I've been talking about in prep school. But then I decided there was absolutely no justification for it in a college, because most of the people who go to college are more mature than I was, so they don't need this cocoon.

So I became, I guess you would call it, inured to it. I didn't really know how things—I mean, I watched it from a distance and I saw the boisterous masculine reaction to it when it first came about, you know, better dead than coed and all that kind of foolishness. It really wasn't until I did a very short stint as a substitute teacher over here in the journalism department that I realized that the whole tone of the place was just different. I talked to the professors at that time and, to a person, they said that it was just, as far as academics, as far as classroom attentiveness, decorum, level of discussion, it was a far different, far better place. I made the typical remarks about, you know, hell, they're taking over everything. Are we going to be able to keep our little leather chairs and our own dens, etc., etc., which was part jocular but partly an early reaction to it.

Now I guess I'm enthusiastically in favor of women at W&L, because I've seen what a difference it's made in, I think, the tone on campus. I know there have been some problems. I do hope, though—and this is just my caveat. I do hope, and maybe it's a distinction without a difference, but I do hope they still, for the foreseeable future,

bill Washington and Lee as a men's college that admits women, for the people for whom that is symbolic. I think it would save a lot of wear and tear on some of the alumni, and try to keep it as even as possible, because if you go totally gender neutral or gender blind, it would be 60-40 women or 75-25 women, because they just simply do better. I won't say they're any smarter, but they do better on SATs, they're more driven at a younger age, they mature faster, they take their responsibilities more seriously at that age. I've talked about late bloomers. It seems to me that too damned many men are late bloomers. They don't get it until they're twenty-four or twenty-five. Women don't have that problem. So if it were totally open, I think it would be a predominantly female institution, and I'm not sure, I think it would be strong academically, but I think we'd lose something in the process.

I don't want to get into specifics about what we might lose, because I couldn't. I just have a vague feeling of uneasiness about Washington and Lee being predominantly female. So that's a job for the word merchants and the spinners [phonetic] and Bill Hartog, and all I can say is, I wish them luck. But so far, I don't think anybody can say that it hasn't been a tremendous success. There are some things about it I wish had happened differently. I do think it was a power play on the part of the board.

Warren: Take me back to that time, because I assume you were covering it.

Fishburn: I wasn't covering it, no. I was an editorial writer, and I'm not sure I ever commented on it. I don't think I would have commented on it on the editorial page because I was too close to it. In a very pale way, it was kind of like Justice Marshall not commenting on the VMI.

Warren: Justice Thomas.

Fishburn: Clarence Thomas, because his son was at VMI. I felt, as an alumnus, I really shouldn't get into anything like that, because I might take some prejudice into it. So I don't think the editorial page ever commented on it one way or another, nor do I think the *Roanoke Times and World News* covered the politics of it or the mechanics of it to any

degree. What little I know about it is just really based on rumors, so I wouldn't want to go any more than that.

But I do think it's well known that John Wilson came in determined to take it coed. There's nothing wrong with that, because they needed a strong person to do it, and he seemed to be the one to do it. They were very successful, and I think, as I say, by and large—I don't mean by and large. I won't even put that in there. I think it has been a very good thing for the university.

Warren: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Fishburn: No. I could get philosophical and talk about liberal education, in general.

Warren: Oh, please do.

Fishburn: I get very wistful about that.

Warren: Do you have a handkerchief with you? If you do, we're all right.

Fishburn: No. One of the things I read an awful lot about, and I consider myself a little bit of an amateur I don't even want to say expert, but if I'm caught up on my reading on anything, it's on education. I've read a lot of definitions of what a liberal or liberal arts education amounts to. One of them goes something like it teaches you to entertain yourself, a friend, and an idea, which I've always liked.

But I think the definition I have come to understand, which sounds so highfalutin, is that a liberal education, liberal in the classic sense of the word as opposed to conservative, but a liberal education teaches you about the lifelong process of learning. I didn't really understand what that meant until I sort of caught fire during the navy and started reading for pleasure, of all things. Again, I was a late bloomer, but I think that it's still a good definition of the education process, and I credit, or blame, Washington and Lee for giving me something of that, some insight into that process. And it is a process. It's a never-ending process, and it is probably, next to my family, the biggest joy I have in my life, and as far as I'm concerned, it was because of W&L. That's it.

Warren: That's a pretty nice wrap-up. You are a man of words. Thank you. This has really been a delight.

Fishburn: Thank you. I hope you got something out of it.

Warren: Oh, I can already see it on the printed page.

[End of Interview]