

Richard W. Smith

May 15, 1996

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Mame Warren,
Interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 15th of May 1996. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, at Washington and Lee University with Richard W. Smith. Is that right?

Smith: Right. Over?

Warren: Yeah. Let's start again.

Smith: I started out by saying that Lexington is very special to me. My father was teaching and coaching at Fishburn Military School in Waynesboro in 1920, when I was born, and in the fall of 1921 he resigned his position there and came to Washington and Lee as athletic director. In 1923, he became the baseball coach, as well, and then along about 1926, I think it was, he also became basketball coach for four or five years. So I have grown up in Lexington and grown up in Washington and Lee.

Warren: Where did your family live?

Smith: Here in Lexington?

Warren: Yes.

Smith: We lived on what's called Monroe Park, Stonewall Street. That isn't where we first lived. We lived in a duplex on Jefferson Street to begin with and then an apartment, I think, on Edmondson Avenue, and then on Stonewall Street, where John—I can't think of his name. He's an anthropologist.

Warren: McDowell?

Smith: Where John McDowell lives. That was our home.

Warren: McDaniel.

Smith: McDaniel, right, John McDaniel lives. I think it's 619 Stonewall Street. The phone number was 519.

Warren: So was Washington and Lee your playground?

Smith: To some extent.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: I'll tell you, but one of the things is that when I was a kid, as most all kids of that age, ten or so, I liked to roller skate. Washington and Lee was an ideal place to roller skate, with all the walks. The trouble is, you'd get on some of the concrete walks, and they have seams every fifteen feet or so and you'd go clack, clack, clack, clack, clack, and make a lot of noise. Well, I used to skate around between the buildings, and every now and then I'd get run off. I distinctly remember Mr. Mattingly coming out and calling to me and telling me to come here, that if I didn't get away from here and stop skating, he was going to tell my father. Well, he had the magic words, because I was scared of my father. He could threaten me with anything else and it wouldn't have probably made any difference. But when he said, "I'm going to tell your father," I got the hell away from there.

He was renowned as the treasurer of Washington and Lee for many, many years, and wonderful with names. He knew everybody's name, everybody's name. Every student, he studied their files and everything, and he just knew everybody. He was quite a fellow. He lived close to the school, just the other side of what was then the Sigma Chi house.

I was a bat boy, went on baseball trips, went on other athletic trips.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: Well, I'm going to tell you about one trip in particular. I think I was twelve years old, and Washington and Lee went on a spring baseball trip, as they did every year. My father would schedule five or six games during one week during spring break,

spring vacation, and the boys would give up their spring vacation and go on the baseball trip.

He had a trip organized in about 1932 to go north, and I think we started out with maybe George Washington, the University of Maryland, the Naval Academy, Villanova, and I know we ended up with West Point, went all the way up there to play Army. In those days, the athletic department had to support itself, so it was pretty much of a shoestring operation. We traveled in an old school bus, with a Washington and Lee man-of-all-work over there named Babe McNair [phonetic], and Babe drove the truck, the school bus, and all the boys in the school bus, all our equipment there someplace, on the roof or someplace.

After we played Villanova, we went up through New Jersey to go to New York City. My father knew that a lot of these kids hadn't been to New York City – I sure hadn't – and he wanted to give them a break. As he got into New Jersey, the traffic got a little tough and he said, "Now, Babe, I want you to let me drive, because I've got experience that you don't have. I'd feel better if you'd let me drive."

So my father took over the wheel. At that time, we had started having trouble with the motor overheating. In those days, the cover on the motor – I don't know whether you can remember or not – you could fold it up and under like this so that air could get to the motor. And so we were driving along, and there was a little steam emitting from that. My father got in the Holland Tunnel and got in the wrong lane, and the cops stationed all along in the Holland Tunnel were blowing their whistles, we were going too slow, you know, and waving us on, and the boys are hollering, "Kick it, Cap, kick it."

We finally got into New York. We stayed – and I can't think of the name of the hotel now. It's just a couple blocks north of Times Square on 7th Avenue. Anyway, that's where we stayed. My father assigned Cy Painter [phonetic], who was on the pitching staff, to be my babysitter, and the boys just scattered and went to shows and

nightclubs and that kind of thing, and I went to a show somewhere, Radio City Music Hall, probably.

After we spent the night there, the next day he had tickets to take on to the polo grounds to a New York Giants baseball game, professional baseball game. So we got to do that, and they had a ball. Some of the boys had never been to New York. I remember one in particular. It cost a nickel to ride the subway, and he thought you had to put a nickel in when you got on and then a nickel when you got off. I remember that. Anyway, I had a big time. That was 1932. And then we left there and went on to West point.

Well, on the way, a couple times we had been stopped by police for doing something wrong. I remember a distinctly a guy on a motorcycle, policeman, stopping us and finding out who we were, and the first thing you know he was laughing. You know, he just shakes his head and waves us on. That happened a couple times.

We went up to West Point, and we had a good baseball team and a good pitcher named Jack Jarrett and a good first baseman who should have played big-league ball named Harry Fitzgerald, and we just beat the socks off the United States Army and then headed home. I'm not so sure but what we didn't come home nonstop, which in those days was a pretty good feat.

I might also add that 3.2 beer had just come in, and my father was pretty good about the boys having a good time because he knew they were giving up vacation to go on this trip, and he permitted them to have a little beer aboard.

Warren: But 3.2.

Smith: 3.2, and you can imagine the effect that that might have had. But we had a great time. It was a wonderful trip. I was twelve years old.

Warren: A good time to have a good memory, isn't it?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: So how old were you when you started being the bat boy?

Smith: Oh, when I started being the bat boy, I don't know, really. Probably about seven, something like that.

I remember going on a football trip to Kentucky when we played the University of Kentucky back when I was just a kid. I remember going to a hotel where they had a nice dining room and an orchestra playing. Just a few things like that stick in my mind.

Warren: Now, something that would be a pretty early memory for you, do you remember the footbridge being built?

Smith: Oh, yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: Well, I don't know if I can, expect that I don't remember much about it, and I guess what I do remember I learned about it later. All I learned was that the cost of it was something ridiculous, in today's terms at any rate. It was \$10,000 or \$15,000 or something like that. It was built by Eckles [phonetic] Brothers, I believe.

Warren: How were they able to get it built for so little money?

Smith: Well, that money was a whole lot different than it is today.

Warren: But even then that wasn't much for that kind of bridge.

Smith: No, and there were alumni connections. In other words, this Eckles Brothers had Washington and Lee alumni in it. Maybe it was, was it Depression time and things were—

Warren: Not quite. It was 1927.

Smith: Was it '27? It wasn't Depression time. Those were high-rolling times. Beats me. I don't know how he happened to be so low?

Warren: Did your father take a lot of pride in the bridge?

Smith: Oh, I think he did, yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: Well, I can't really tell you much. I can always see him crossing the bridge. He carried a satchel with baseballs in it. He was very careful about keeping up with the

baseballs and not losing any of them. He was accused of being way too tight, but he had to be, really, to make the athletic association self-sustaining. He couldn't throw money around, really. But I can see him after baseball practice carrying his bag across that bridge.

I guess the most famous person related to the footbridge, in my memory, was Forrest Fletcher Jr., also known as "Nub." Coach Fletcher was in the phys ed department and was a track coach. He lived over on the hill next to Dean Gilliam's house, back of the stadium, the current stadium. He liked to go barefooted most all the year, and he would walk across the bridge, but he wouldn't walk on the bridge, he'd walk on the railing all the time. How about that?

Warren: Good Lord.

Smith: I'll tell you a little story if you promise not to use it. He had two sisters. I went with both of them, one of them for quite a long time, back before World War II. I remember when "Nub" Fletcher got a little older, he asked me one time if he could borrow a pair of shoes to go to a dance at Mulberry Hill, Tyrees across the street. Young Tyree is back and lives there now. I remember going to the party, and somewhere toward the end of the evening he asked me if he could see me outside. He sat down on the front porch and handed me my shoes back. He had borrowed my shoes.

But at any rate, the story I wanted to tell you was that Mrs. Fletcher was former Laura Tucker, and she had sort of FFV background. Someone asked her one time wasn't she worried about her children sort of running wild, barefooted, and that sort of thing, and she said, "Not really. When you plant a delphinium, you get a delphinium."

Warren: Oh, that's wonderful. That's a great story. And is he a delphinium?

Smith: Absolutely.

Warren: That's a great story. I love that. Well, he sounds like a character.

Smith: Oh, he is. He lives in Staunton and works at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center and is married to the daughter of a former Washington football coach, Tilson.

Warren: Tex Tilson?

Smith: Tex Tilson's daughter, Helen.

Warren: It's a small world around here.

Now, you mentioned how tight the budget was for athletics. I read a reference that that's how the Co-op store started.

Smith: That's right.

Warren: Do you know about that?

Smith: I think my father was very instrumental in starting the Co-op store, and so the profits from the Co-op store went to the athletic association. Also, the Co-op employed athletes to give them jobs to do in the operation of the Co-op. That's about the story.

Warren: Was that still true when you were a student?

Smith: I think it was, yeah. Yes, it was.

Warren: What was the Co-op store? Where was it when you were a student?

Smith: Let's see. Well, it was sort of in the basement of the dormitory. I keep wanting to say one of the new dorms. I, incidentally, helped build the dormitories, as well as the old library building.

Warren: You helped build them?

Smith: I worked on them.

Warren: You worked on McCormick Library?

Smith: I was a laborer.

Warren: And which dormitory would that have been?

Smith: It was the one furthest south and the closest, one right behind the president's house.

Warren: Is that Lees? There's Graham and Lees.

Smith: The first one that goes up the street toward Doremus Gymnasium, the first one on the right-hand side. In the basement, there was a Co-op store. Now, the Co-op store was also across the street in one of those houses at one time.

Warren: In one of the white houses?

Smith: I don't know what kind of houses you call them, and I can't think of the name of the street. What's the name of the street that goes on down to –

Warren: West Washington Street?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: The one that curves around?

Smith: Yeah, right. It was down there on the left-hand side somewhere at one point. And Laird [phonetic] – what was Laird's last name? I'm trying to think of the manager, Laird.

Warren: We can find it out.

Smith: Age has got me. I'll think of it later.

Warren: I've never talked to anybody who worked on the construction of the buildings here. Tell me about that.

Smith: Well, it was just a summertime job and manual labor, like rolling wheelbarrows full of mortar up ramps to get up two or three flights. It damned near killed me.

Warren: Were you a student here then?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: You, of course, had a sense of history and realized that you were help building this great university, I'm sure, right?

Smith: I had no idea, no idea at all. The only thing I'd ever known was right here. You know how it is with things that you're familiar with. You don't really appreciate them until you lose it. But any rate, I didn't work more than several weeks at a time.

Warren: Who else worked on the building?

Smith: Young Cy Young, Nealy Young worked on them. I really can't remember anybody else.

Warren: Were you working for the university or the construction company?

Smith: The construction company. I had a Social Security back then, and I don't know whatever happened to it. I've got a different one now. I never tried to run it down. But at any rate, it was hard work. The other thing that you might be interested in, I think I got 18 cents an hour, a little different from the current minimum wage.

Warren: A little bit. So that was a summer job?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: Was there summer school going on back then, too?

Smith: I don't remember summer school. I don't think we had a summer school.

Warren: I don't think so back then. I have a real basic question that I cannot find the answer to. Why was Captain Dick called Captain Dick?

Smith: Oh, easy. He was at Fishburn. When he left Washington and Lee as a student, he went to Fishburn. And incidentally, he was the class of '13, and they say in this article that I'm going to give you that he graduated in 1913. Well, he didn't. He didn't graduate. He did not come back for his senior year, but he went back to Fishburn, where he'd gone to school, and taught and coached.

As they used to do with what they call the subs at VMI, they were all captains. That was their rank. Fishburn Military, being a military school, he was captain, just because that was his rank as a teacher, a new teacher. They start them out as captains, I think. I think the same thing is true at VMI. So he was Captain Dick at Fishburn, and it just followed him over here. When he came over here, somebody referred to him as Captain Dick, and everybody picked up on it and that was it.

Warren: Did students actually call him Captain Dick?

Smith: Oh, yeah, absolutely, with a lot of respect attached to it. It wasn't being smart.

Warren: It wasn't being smart?

Smith: Oh, absolutely not.

Warren: It was a respectful informality.

Smith: I'll tell you another little story. My mother had forgotten to get her license renewed, driver's license, and she got stopped by a state policeman between here and Buena Vista. He wanted to know about her license, and she said she didn't have it. She said something about, "Well, I'm Cap'n Dick Smith's wife."

He said, "You're what?"

She said, "I'm Captain Dick Smith's wife."

"You're Captain Dick's wife!" he said. "Drive on, lady."

I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's the story that was told.

Warren: So what was it like being Captain Dick's son?

Smith: It was tough. It was really tougher on me than I realized, because I was so anxious to do well athletically. I was pretty good in high school, Lexington High School, but then I had a little bit of health trouble as I made the transition from high school to college and I was skinny as a rail, and I never did materialize as an athlete. I played baseball, not very well, and that was it. I tried to play basketball, but I just didn't have it. But I wanted to so badly, you know, so that was something of a disappointment for me, as well, I'm sure, as for him, and I knew it was. Other than that, I was proud of him, and still am.

Warren: What was he like?

Smith: He was the most masculine man I have ever met. There wasn't a sign of any kind of weakness about him. Now, he wasn't an artist. He wasn't a musician. He lacked some of those things. But strictly speaking, he was perfect in the role he had, and the boys looked up to him. He commanded respect. He had lots of humor about him, but also he had coal-blue eyes and you understood he meant what he said. Highly principled person. Great man for a daddy.

In the summertime, beginning in the twenties, he and two friends of his had the first boys summer camp in Virginia on the Jackson River, Ed Smith and Billy Gooch [phonetic]. Well, it was a funny thing. At Fishburn Military School, he had Billy Gooch as one of his students and players, and Billy Gooch became athletic director at William and Mary. He had a man who subsequently became athletic director at VPI known as Monk Younger. And so he had unusually good rapport with the other university athletic departments.

It's sort of a funny thing. When he came back to Washington and Lee in 1921, the head coach of football at Washington and Lee was Bill Raftery, who had gone to Washington and Lee, and a few years after he came here, Bill Raftery went to VMI as the head football coach and was there a good while. He may have been athletic director down there, too. But we had good friends at VMI, and we did not compete at all except at Southern Conference tournaments. But Blandy Clarkson [phonetic], who was athletic director; Son Read, who was track coach and the father of my very good friend, Beverly Read, who died about a year ago, who was my same class, class of '41, but at VMI. We went through public school together. One of the great things about Washington and Lee is, in the public schools we had such good people, who were children either connected with the two schools.

Warren: Tell me about that. Tell me about growing up in Lexington.

Smith: Well, that's a pretty broad question you got there. I suppose some people might think that it wouldn't be too good an atmosphere if you're exposed to some of the fraternity house shenanigans, but I don't remember anything negative, really, in that regard about growing up.

You had pretty good competition in academics in public school. Lexington is composed of the two institutions, and the people who service those institutions pretty much is all that's here. So you don't get a large group of, say, blue-collar, lower echelon blue-collar type people. The rest of the community is agrarian supported, farmers. It's

really a great place, especially for a boy. I can understand how it might not be too good for a girl, unless she goes away to school when she's prep school age. The pressures on her are pretty terrific.

Warren: How do you mean?

Smith: I mean, boys are after her.

Warren: That might not be too bad.

Smith: It depends on the girl, I guess, but it does put them under a lot of pressure.

Gosh, I can remember before I became a student at Washington and Lee and I was a senior in high school, I went to all the Washington and Lee and VMI dances and heard all those great bands, wonderful bands that we had. I could get in for nothing. But then when I became a student, I could no longer go to VMI.

Warren: Why is that?

Smith: Well, they've just got a rule, I guess.

Warren: Just wasn't acceptable?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: So tell me about those dances. Tell me what went on.

Smith: Oh, they were just wonderful dances, and there wasn't anything bad went on. It was all really just good. There was, of course, cheek to cheek, as well as a sort of jitterbug, I guess, a little bit. And the bands were so good. The music was so good. The late thirties, the music was just terrific. It was exciting. Benny Goodman, Howard Kemp, all the big bands, all the biggest and best bands in the country came here.

Warren: Don't you think that's remarkable?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: That these amazing acts came to this tiny little town.

Smith: Yeah, and they were good. Terrific.

Warren: How do you think we were able to attract them?

Smith: Well, I don't know. Of course, there was no such thing as television. The competition wasn't as fierce as I guess it is now, and certainly the compensation wasn't as much as it is now. I don't know. I wasn't on the dance committee that had anything to do with trying to line up a band or bands, so I couldn't tell you, but somebody who was at that time might be able to tell you.

Warren: Did your father have any problem with giving over the gymnasium for dances?

Smith: Oh, no.

Warren: Did he go to the dances?

Smith: Sure. My parents went to a good many dances.

Warren: Did he cut a smooth figure out there on the dance floor?

Smith: [Laughter] No, I don't think he did too much out there.

I would not have been aware of conflicts. The only conflicts that I was aware of had to do with the staff at the university faculty, I guess. Certain elements in the faculty resented the athletes and the athletic, and I think it was probably justified. Certainly college athletics has really gone crazy since that time, and we were in at the beginning of it, as a matter of fact. Competition got serious just before Washington and Lee dropped all athletic scholarships, and we had a cheating scandal that precipitated that.

People don't believe that things were quite the same as they are now, and they weren't, but they were getting close. I can remember Washington and Lee being after a boy in West Virginia who was a good football player, and they had talked his parents into it and talked him into it, and Duke was also interested in the boy. Along about the time school started, people from the Duke athletic department showed up and took the boy to Duke. I can remember my father getting two assistant coaches and telling them to get in that car and go to Duke and bring that boy back here. Now, can you imagine that? And they did.

Warren: When was this? Do you know who the student was?

Smith: I think it was a boy who was a halfback named Broyles [phonetic], and it would have been about 1949, '48.

Warren: Did he stay here?

Smith: Yeah. He was in the backfield the best game I ever saw. Washington and Lee had a really great football team, in effect the same team that went to the Gator Bowl, which I think was 1950. I'm not positive. They had Gil Bocetti, who was a quarterback, and two halfbacks, Abrams [phonetic] and Broyles, and they had a fullback, and honest to Pete I'm so ashamed I can't remember his name, because he went on to play professional football and became a professional football coach. I can't think of his name.

The year before the game I'm speaking of, Virginia had a heck of a good ball club. Tom Scott, all-American. They had an all-American guard. I was practicing law in Staunton, but I had to go down in the company of a Wahoo. I got invited out to some Wahoo's home for lunch before the game and heard somebody say Washington and Lee wasn't in the same league as Virginia, which upset me. Went to the ball game, and Washington and Lee was leading with just a minute left in the ball game, and they made a mistake and threw the game away, and I didn't speak to this guy driving the car all the way home.

Well, the next year Washington and Lee played Virginia over here at Wilson Field, and on the kickoff of the game, Virginia ran the kickoff back for a touchdown. Washington and Lee went on to win the game 44 to 14, the best team Virginia ever had. They didn't lose a game that year except to W&L, and they just beat them to death. Bocetti, the quarterback, was an option quarterback who could run with the ball and a good faker. You know how you start out like you're going to run and you fake it like you're going to throw it back. Well, he faked Tom Scott right off his feet, just fell over backwards, all-American defensive end. Anyway, that was a great game.

Warren: Did you go to the Gator Bowl?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: Well, we lost to Wyoming in the Gator Bowl. We just weren't up to snuff. We had some problems. One of the backs, I don't remember whether it was Bocetti or the fullback whose name I've forgotten, his father died the week before or something, and just didn't get it together. They should have won the ball game. It was a competitive game, but Washington and Lee lost. Had a good crowd of people there.

Warren: Were people crazy about being there?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Had a good time.

Warren: Was your father really excited?

Smith: Oh, yeah. He had a good time.

Warren: Tell me about that. Let me know what that was like.

Smith: Well, I can't remember. I remember staying at Ponte Vedra and playing golf. Of course, it was exciting. Washington and Lee had never been to anything like that before, and never did again, either. You couldn't help but be very excited.

Warren: Did a lot of people go?

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: How did they get there?

Smith: I think they either flew or they drove. They did have planes back in those days.

Warren: I just wondered if there was a big bus load of people who went.

Smith: I don't know whether there were or not. I went down with several people from Staunton, drove. But it was a big time.

This thing I'm just going to leave with you. You might find something in here that's interesting. This is a column that appeared I don't know when. I'm guessing along about 1936 or something. There's a couple stories in here.

Warren: You've alluded to what happened in 1954, the scandal. What's your understanding of what went on, and how did your father react?

Smith: Of course, he was terribly disappointed that it happened. One of the things I'll say with no question about it. As far as my father was concerned, athletic scholarships were primarily to enable young deserving people to get a college education they couldn't otherwise get, and education was the reason for the scholarships, the principal reason, the education of these kids and not necessarily the total thing of winning football games.

Even though he built up the Washington and Lee athletic program over a number of years, and some of it with the help of scholarships, he never for a second lost sight of the fact that the primary goal was education. He would be shocked what goes on today with athletic departments in effect setting curricula and the salaries that coaches get. It's gotten to be just way too big and not good at all for the education, an institution's primary purpose.

When Washington and Lee decided to eliminate athletic scholarships, he was very disappointed because he knew that there'd be lots of young people who might otherwise get an education that wouldn't at Washington and Lee. He probably, like some of us, thought that it would be better to do away with football scholarships, continue to give a few scholarships in basketball and other sports so we could have some interaction with our traditional rivals. However, looking around the country, I'm personally just as pleased that we didn't and that they took the step that they took.

Warren: What did your father think?

Smith: I think he felt so, too, the same thing. Of course, it was something of a shock to him, but he never wavered in his loyalty to Washington and Lee on that account or any other account.

Warren: Was that pretty close to the end of his years here?

Smith: Yeah. He retired in '55 or '56, so he was ready to retire almost anyway. At sixty-five, I think he retired.

Warren: It's kind of awkward that it happened all at the same time.

Smith: A little bit.

Warren: Did he talk about that at all?

Smith: Not much.

Warren: I need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: So tell me about being a student here. Did you know you were going to Washington and Lee?

Smith: Oh, sure.

Warren: Was there any other place you were interested in going?

Smith: Yeah, the United States Naval Academy.

Warren: Really?

Smith: Really. And that was because I'd been up there on athletic trips and I was impressed with it, really was. That was my first ambition was to go to the Naval Academy, and I don't know really what happened to that, although I told you I had some health problems, and I think that interfered with a whole lot of things. I was pretty young to come to college, immature, and I probably would have gone away to prep school or something if I hadn't had – allergies is what it was. I had a rough time with allergies.

Coming to Washington and Lee, I knew that I was going to get a scholarship, as every other child of an employee did, and I stayed at home, so I got a very cheap education. I had enough of it by the time I was finished, I think, and got my A.B. degree in that I hadn't been away, you see. I was in the marine corps during World War II, and when I got out, I had had one year of law here as my senior academic year, so I had the GI Bill and I went to the University of Michigan Law School, so I got away.

But going to school here was terrific, you know, wonderful, and being that close to my father probably kept me out of trouble, to some extent.

Warren: Did you join a fraternity?

Smith: Beta Theta Pi, influenced in that direction by Edgar Finley Shannon.

Warren: Senior?

Smith: Well, no. He became the president of the University of Virginia.

Warren: Oh, okay. So he was a friend of yours?

Smith: Oh, yeah. We both grew up here. He's a couple years older. He was in the Boy Scouts and I was in the Boy Scouts. But I admired him, and so that's the primary reason I went Beta. The trouble is, then I found out that there's such thing as a real good time that didn't have anything to do with books.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Smith: You have to put on a priest's gear, don't you, to get a confession of that kind.

Warren: Oh, come on, now. I'm looking for the true Washington and Lee story here.

Smith: Oh, well, If I had been mature at all, I might have spent some time in the stacks working, but I didn't. I did as much as I could possibly do and have a good time in a useless way, without getting in trouble at home.

Warren: Did you live at the fraternity house at all?

Smith: No.

Warren: You lived at home all four years?

Smith: Lived at home, yeah.

Warren: So you couldn't have been too wild and still gone home at night.

Smith: Well, yeah, but I had ways. I'd come up around that curve and turn the lights out on the car so they wouldn't shine on the house. I wasn't very good.

Warren: So being a local person, you must have known all of the local hangouts.

Smith: Yeah, and the local girls.

Warren: You're not going to tell me anything, are you?

Smith: No. I'm just going to say yes and no to whatever you ask me.

Warren: Oh, that's no fair.

Smith: Well, there was Mike's Place. Mike's Place was out where the road turns off of, I guess it's where 11 goes into the country club. There on the corner was Mike's Place. Mike had a pet bear and he sold beer. It was a joint, you know, beer joint. I guess I had one or two bottles of beer out there.

Warren: I won't tell your father, I promise.

Smith: He's laughing right now. Let's see, where else? There was Steve's Diner. Do you know where Steve's was?

Warren: No, I don't. Somebody's mentioned that, and I don't know where it was.

Smith: I'll tell you. If you come in by Cameron Hall – gosh, there's a lot of people in town, VMI. Both sides of the street are totally packed with cars.

Warren: There must be something going on up there.

Smith: Oh, yes, bound to be. I came in that way, and as you get to where you turn right to go up Jefferson off of Main, right there on the left, it would be the left side of Main, was where Steve's Diner was.

Warren: And what kind of place was Steve's Diner?

Smith: Oh, great place, a quick bite to eat and beer.

Warren: I'd love to find a picture of Steve's Diner, because a number of people have mentioned that. And I'd like to see Mike's bear, too.

Smith: I bet you would. Mike Brown.

Warren: Mike Brown. Well, I should would like to find pictures of those places.

Smith: I'm sorry, I don't have any. It would have been so easy to get one if I'd known I was going to be talking to you.

Warren: Do you know somebody who has some?

Smith: No, I don't.

Warren: That would be great.

Smith: No, I don't.

Warren: So when you came to Washington and Lee as a student –

Smith: Then you could go to Buena Vista and drink beer and maybe see a Southern Sem girl. Of course, the boys pretty much traveled a lot, went to Hollins and Sweet Briar and Randolph-Macon, Mary Baldwin, even in those days. There wasn't any traveling here from those places except on dance weekends.

Warren: How did the girls get here?

Smith: I don't know, unless they came on buses. I don't know whether maybe some of them had cars, because the boys had cars, not as many by any stretch.

Warren: What was your major?

Smith: English.

Warren: English. Oh, you did follow in Edgar Shannon's footsteps, then. Who were the really good teachers back then?

Smith: Oh, my. Well, I had George Jackson freshman English, and he was good, very good. Flournoy.

Warren: Tell me about him.

Smith: Fitz, Fitz Flournoy. He was good. I had, I think, a Shakespeare seminar type thing with five or six students, and he just was very interesting, you know, was into it, not reading out of a book.

Then for mathematics was Smith, Dr. Lib Smith. He was a character, good one. He taught my father.

Warren: So he'd been here for a while.

Smith: I got along pretty well in math until I hit calculus, and at that point I had decided there wasn't any math course that I couldn't learn with a book in three weeks by myself. So I skipped around. Maybe I had cuts or something. I didn't learn any calculus, I can tell you that. And then when I tried to learn it from the book in three weeks, it didn't work. I can't remember whether I flunked it or had a D, but anyway I repeated the course. I was just stupid.

I didn't pay attention. My father, every now and then he'd say, "You only come this way one time, one chance." It didn't sink in.

Other good teachers. Good law school teachers. Skinny Williams.

Warren: Tell me about Skinny Williams.

Smith: He had a certain sort of intensity about his teaching. It was good, and he was good at it. In law school, it's important that your students understand what you're saying. I found out at the University of Michigan, they had two or three professors that nobody understood what they were saying. I caught a couple of them. But you're not going to learn anything if you don't communicate, and both Williams and McDowell and Moreland and all those guys knew how to communicate, Johnson, get through to you, and you were interested in hearing them communicate. I don't know what the secret is exactly.

Warren: I don't know, but apparently some of them really had that secret here. You know, someone who I think is probably a legend around here is Cy Young.

Smith: Yeah, sure he's legendary.

Warren: You must have known him pretty well.

Smith: Sure.

Warren: Tell me about him.

Smith: He was a guy with a lot of enthusiasm and was simpatico with the boys to a large extent. Kind of a explosive kind of personality. I don't know how to say that exactly right. One of the things they all remember is when they'd have a rally before the University of Virginia game. They'd always call on him to say something, and he'd get up there and give an impassioned speech, like he was one of the boys, really. "I hate those damn Wahoos." I mean, he'd just go on and on. He was good, too. He'd get them all worked up. And he was a good coach.

Warren: What did he coach?

Smith: He coached basketball, and then he coached some freshmen sports. In those days, we had freshman teams. He coached baseball. He could coach anything because he was a four-letter man, sixteen letters or something like that.

Warren: Did you know how famous he was?

Smith: At that time?

Warren: Yes.

Smith: Oh, yeah. And then it was during my time here, I think, that he was alumni secretary. That was his principal job after he gave up basketball.

Warren: Did people talk about it being real special to have Cy Young here?

Smith: Oh, yeah, I think they did. I think everybody knew the kind of record that he'd had here as an athlete, so he was recognized for that. Very likable man.

Warren: Did he ever talk about his record or was it just something everybody knew?

Smith: Yeah. I can remember there was at least one other man who would compete with Cy Young as being the greatest college athlete ever at Washington and Lee, and that was Leigh Williams. I think Leigh Williams was the reason my father agreed to be basketball coach. My father had never played basketball. He didn't play basketball when he was coming along, and he didn't coach it except for four or five years, and I think he won the state championship every year, because he had the boys to do it, and one of them was Leigh Williams.

Leigh Williams came from the Norfolk area, and there was a sports editor down there who liked my father and they were friends, and he called my father one day and he said, "There's a young boy down named Leigh Williams who is a great athlete, and you ought to see if you can't get him to come to Washington and Lee."

So at that time, later Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell was, I think, manager of the football team and president of his fraternity, and my father said, "Lewis, I want you to take this car (the athletic association had a car), and here's five dollars for

gasoline. I want you to go to Norfolk, and don't come back till you bring Leigh Williams with you."

So Lewis didn't know, you know. So he went to Norfolk. He introduced himself to the parents. He won the parents over and won the boy over. The mother said, "He can't go to Washington and Lee unless he can room with you."

Lewis brought him back. He pledged him to his fraternity and had the boy room with him, and Leigh Williams turned out to be the greatest athlete that ever went to Washington and Lee and certainly as good as Cy Young was. He was awfully good, Leigh Williams.

The reason you don't hear about him anymore is that three or four years after he graduated, not long after he graduated at any rate, he died of, I don't know, cancer or something. But he was some kind of an athlete.

I started out by saying my father coached basketball because he had Leigh Williams and some other good players, and I think he just went along and watched them play, took credit for it.

Warren: That sounds like a good job.

Smith: Yeah.

Warren: So what were the politics between the athletic department and the rest of the school?

Smith: Well, they had an athletic committee, and I think the faculty was represented on that committee. I'm sure it was. Every now and then the athletic department would get the feeling that some professor had graded an athlete down. He might have been borderline or something. And that would get them upset, but that's just sort of a natural thing that's going to happen in any university where you've got an athletic department. Actually, I think they got along extremely well here.

Warren: Were they happy with the facilities here?

Smith: I don't know. You mean the coaches or the students or the who?

Warren: Yes, everybody.

Smith: I think so. Of course, I didn't know any better. I thought the old pool was adequate. I just didn't know any better, and so that sort of thing never really –

One of the problems with trying to have an athletic association that supported itself was that you had to make your money out of football. You couldn't draw enough people or accommodate enough people or draw them to any of the other sports. Well, football, it was bad enough trying to get crowds to the football game, you know, in a place like Lexington because we were so remote, even more so then than now. So you had to really exercise some imagination to try to do something, and in that connection, Washington and Lee and VMI would have double-headers, football double-headers. Washington and Lee in the morning would play Virginia. VMI in the afternoon would play VPI. Not VPI, but somebody good, you know.

It got so before the war that the last several years before the war there was always at least one double-header here in Lexington, the idea being that you could get people to come from Richmond or Roanoke or someplace where there are a lot of people if you had two games they could see.

Warren: I hadn't heard that.

Smith: It worked out very well.

Warren: Where did people stay when they came for two games.

Smith: They'd just come in the morning and leave at night, I think, most of the time.

Warren: That's a long drive.

Smith: Yeah. It's not too far from Roanoke. But it would start bringing them from Buchanan and other places that wouldn't normally come.

Warren: It must have been pretty exciting on a day like that.

Smith: Well, it could be, it could be. It really could.

Warren: Was Wilson Field as we know it now

Smith: Well, let's see. My father was here when they built the steel stadium.

Warren: Do you remember that?

Smith: Not really.

Warren: It was always there as far as you're concerned?

Smith: Yeah. It might have been added to once.

Warren: Do I understand that the baseball field is named for him?

Smith: I think so, yeah, the current baseball field.

Warren: Was there any kind of ceremony for that?

Smith: Not that I had anything to do with. I don't think so. I think somebody just said we'll name it on that day.

Warren: What about when he retired? Was there a big to-do? Did you come?

Smith: I don't really recall. I think he got a watch. Isn't that traditional? I don't recall.

Warren: What's your favorite story about your father?

Smith: I don't know. I feel so inadequate to remember the darn stories. I just can't. Let me look at this thing. Turn that thing off for a second.

Warren: Okay. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Smith: In about 1939, Memorial Day, VMI Corps was marching from the VMI grounds to the cemetery, I suppose to do something about Stonewall Jackson because it was Memorial Day. They came down Letcher Avenue and was marching by the Beta house. I had a fraternity brother named Mac Wing [phonetic] from Tampa, Florida. We had had a house party that weekend, and the guys who played the music at the house party had left their instruments. So Mac Wing went inside and got the bass drum, and he came out and as the VMI boys went by, Mac starting beating on the off beat. Isn't that awful? So that they were just going up and down and out of step, the whole crowd, and every now and then they'd look up, and, I mean, you're talking mad. They were furious. But they were in ranks and couldn't do anything about it, until that night.

Warren: And then what happened?

Smith: Well, in the morning the Betas woke up and found that the columns on the Beta house were painted red, white, and yellow. That was one story I had.

Well, that isn't the only time the columns were ever painted red, white, and yellow. Washington and Lee boys every now and then would go down and drag the VMI cannon off the parade ground and set them out in front of the columns in the Colonnade on the Washington and Lee campus, and VMI would get terribly upset. Of course, Washington and Lee administration would make them take the cannons back. But then the next thing you'd know, the columns on the colonnade would be painted red, white, and yellow. That happened more than once, in my memory.

Of course, those were I guess the glory days of Washington and Lee athletics. In those days, the Southern Conference, there was no ACC. There'd be Virginia, William and Mary, W&L, VMI, VPI, and Richmond, the big six in Virginia. And then also in the Southern Conference you'd have all the major schools in North Carolina – North Carolina, North Carolina State, Duke, Davidson, Wake Forest.

All these schools would play each other, and then in addition, it seemed to me we were also always playing somebody primarily to get some money – the University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, West Virginia, University of Kentucky. Almost every year there'd be one or two outside pretty big games. That was another way that the athletic association, in addition to the Co-op. In the dining room, the waiters were always athletes. They had jobs waiting tables.

Warren: Were athletes given preference in getting jobs?

Smith: I think so, in the dining room in the Co-op.

Warren: Well, we're getting low on tape here. Are there any other stories that you want to tell?

Smith: I think I've covered everything. Yeah, I've covered everything, that I can think of.

Warren: Well, I've really enjoyed this. I feel so honored to be talking to Captain Dick's son himself. He's just legendary around here.

Smith: Yeah, he is. Yes, ma'am. Well, it's nice to talk to you.

[End of Interview]