

# TOM TOUCHTON

January 27, 1997

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**Mame Warren,  
Interviewer**

**Warren:** This is Mame Warren. Today is the 27th of January, 1997. I'm in Tampa, Florida, with Tom Touchton.

I've got to tell you, I've really been looking forward to this, because yours was one of the first names that was brought up to me when I started this job, because Frank Parsons is really, really interested in the whole Fraternity Renaissance and he says you're a key player. So we will get to that. But I'd rather start off by asking you how a Florida boy got to Lexington, Virginia, in the first place.

**Touchton:** I grew up in a small town called Dade City, Florida. Probably when I was a junior or so in high school, and was beginning to think about college, I had always thought I would go to the University of Florida and be a Florida Gator fan, but my parents had the wisdom to suggest that I go farther away from home than Gainesville, Florida, which was a hundred miles away, and, in fact, suggested that I consider various liberal arts colleges around the Southeast. I was a small-town guy, so they probably thought I would be more comfortable at a place like a Washington and Lee, or a Davidson, or a Sewanee.

Since my mother's family had originally come from Virginia a long time ago, she had a special spot in her heart for Virginia, and, of course, Washington and Lee had a top reputation. So she suggested that perhaps I look at Washington and Lee. I sent off for the catalog, and I remember being very impressed with the catalog and the various attributes of Washington and Lee, particularly the Honor System. When it came time to

apply to college, I didn't have any better sense than to send my application in to Washington and Lee, and just wait. That is, today I would probably apply to a dozen schools, hoping one of them might pick me, but then I didn't know any better, so I applied to Washington and Lee. Of course, Dean Gilliam was the dean at that time. That's how I ended up at Washington and Lee.

**Warren:** Well, wait a minute. What do you mean, if Dean Gilliam was the dean, why did that mean you wound up at Washington and Lee?

**Touchton:** Well, I guess I was maybe jumping ahead of myself, because I, of course, didn't know who Dean Gilliam was. But while my application was pending at Washington and Lee, my father, who was in the life insurance business, had a meeting at the Greenbriar. So I went as a senior in high school, in probably March of '56, went to the Greenbriar with them for a meeting, and not having seen Washington and Lee since I was perhaps ten or twelve, or fourteen years old. I didn't visit it in 1956 the way most students would try to do now.

So when the meeting at the Greenbriar was over, we drove over to Lexington and I went to Dean Gilliam's office to try to determine whether or not I had been accepted, or when would I know whether I would be accepted. He not only confirmed that I had been accepted and that perhaps the letter was either en route to Dade City at that moment or would be soon, but he suggested that I go down to the freshman dorm and pick out a room that I liked, and come back and tell him which room that was, and that I could live there my freshman year. That was, I thought, a wonderful touch. He was a very special guy.

**Warren:** So did you form a relationship with him through the years?

**Touchton:** Just a casual, but very friendly one. I remember, in those days, every student, as I recall, would receive once or twice, or three times a year, a note from Dean Gilliam indicating that you were invited to his office at a particular time and date, and "invited" means you were expected to be there, of course. So I would show up for my

appointment. It was Dean Gilliam's way of staying in touch with students, getting to know them and finding out how they were doing, were they happy or unhappy, and what were they involved in. He usually knew more about you than you had any idea, but he was really a very special person.

**Warren:** The place does have a personal touch, doesn't it?

**Touchton:** Yes, it does. Still, of course.

**Warren:** Now, you also mentioned the Honor System.

**Touchton:** Yes.

**Warren:** So you knew about the Honor System before you arrived?

**Touchton:** Oh, yes, absolutely.

**Warren:** What did it mean to you?

**Touchton:** I don't know that I had ever thought of colleges or schools having an Honor System. I went to a public high school in Dade City, but I don't think there was ever any talk of an Honor System. There was no official Honor System. I guess it's easier to say in the fifties there was maybe more honor then; the values were more conservative in a small town in Florida. So while I and the people I knew lived within a boundary of honor, I think having it exist in an institution of people who otherwise would be strangers, who've come together from different backgrounds all over the country, I just thought that was a very nice attribute. I liked what it said about the institution, that it would care about honor.

**Warren:** Do you remember how it was explained to you when you got there?

**Touchton:** No, I really don't. I remember that we had Freshman Camp in those days, down at Natural Bridge, and I have to believe there were one or more speakers who appeared before the freshmen, who would tell us about the Honor System and how it worked, what the process was, what the penalties were, and so forth. But I don't remember any specifics of that.

**Warren:** And as you were there for four years, did you see the Honor System at work? Was it an awareness that was always there?

**Touchton:** Absolutely. I think there was always – part of it was a fear that you would do something wrong inadvertently, and it would be an Honor System, so I think people were very careful not to do anything that might be considered an Honor System. I remember, my roommate and I – he couldn't spell very well, and he would – this is a little thing, but he would ask me how to spell certain words. I would tell him I didn't know if I was supposed to answer questions about a paper he was working on and he would have to look it up in the dictionary. It used to drive him crazy to have to look something up in the dictionary, when I could have spelled the word for him. So we were careful. I remember the notices that might appear on a bulletin board that someone had withdrawn from school because of an honor violation, but I don't remember a lot of conversation about it.

I remember the pledge that we had to sign in our blue books and on exams or papers, but I don't remember a lot of conversation. It seemed to me it almost just happened, just was reinforced constantly. I would say I think that's true today, and I find, in talking with alumni, that the Honor System must be the single attribute that alumni talk to me about the most, have spoken to me about over the years. When I interview prospective students, I always asked them – if they don't volunteer the information, I always asked them if they were familiar with the W&L Honor System, and what did they think about it, what did it mean to them, and sometimes I've even said, "If you think you would have any problem living in a community that had an Honor System, you really better think about going somewhere else." So students think about it today, who are going there, and find it very appealing, and alumni remember it very strongly.

**Warren:** It's a wonderful system to live with, even as a witness to it.

**Touchton:** Yes, it is.

**Warren:** It's very nice. Another thing that I'm very struck by, and I presume was very active at the time you were there, was the speaking tradition. Can you tell me about that?

**Touchton:** We certainly had one, and I rather liked it. It certainly fit me, being from a small town, because small-town people speak rather routinely. I was sorry to see it go by the boards. I still practice it when I visit the campus, and I think everyone in my generation probably does, more or less. So I'm sorry it disappeared, but, you know, some things change.

**Warren:** Oh, it's active, it's active.

**Touchton:** Yes, it is. And the fact that it's voluntary instead of required, because we used to have, if I'm not mistaken – was it the Assimilation Committee that would punish you if you didn't speak, or something? And maybe that's artificial. Maybe it's better for it to be more impromptu or honest, rather than forced or required. But I think, like some other rules, having to do something reinforces the doing of it and carries on a tradition, or a process, and I think the speaking tradition has served them real well.

**Warren:** A couple of times you've mentioned this idea of being from a small town, and you certainly went to a small town when you went to Lexington. What were your impressions of the town?

**Touchton:** I don't know that I had any special impressions. I'm glad I chose a small town instead of a city. I experienced a sense of community there that I would have known in Dade City, in that I was involved in the Presbyterian Church there, right in the center of town, and I would go to a faculty member's home. I gave you the slide of Dr. Wheeler, who at one point was one of my faculty members and advisers. I remember going to his home for dinner. I don't remember anything special about it, except very comfortable.

**Warren:** Were there any particular hangouts in those days where you would go?

**Touchton:** Gosh, I don't remember the names anymore. Movie houses. Don't remember the names.

**Warren:** Movie houses. Movies were a big thing?

**Touchton:** Yes. Flicks, I think we called them. Can't remember any names of places.

**Warren:** Something you mentioned when you first were talking about choosing Washington and Lee, you mentioned being a football fan. Were you there at the height of the Lee McLaughlin era, or did that come just after you?

**Touchton:** I don't remember when he was there. I went in '56. What I remember about going there was the cheating scandal had been about two years before, '54, maybe '53?

**Warren:** Yes, '54.

**Touchton:** So my year was either the first or second year that W&L had a football team again after the cheating scandal, and who the coach was, I don't remember.

**Warren:** Was there much school spirit? Was there much team spirit, then?

**Touchton:** I don't recall a lot of football team spirit, but I recall a lot of intramural team spirit,

**Warren:** Tell me about that.

**Touchton:** Through the fraternities. W&L, of course, has always—always. For, certainly, decades, had through the fraternity system, has had a very strong intramural program, competition among the fraternities, and I remember that competition and spirit being very strong, very competitive. I remember we had a very good basketball team in those years, because for some reason, and I don't remember why, we still had several players on basketball scholarships. So that while the board of trustees had de-emphasized, or had maybe even abolished subsidized athletics, there were still a handful of basketball players who were on scholarships, so the quality of the basketball was really quite good. And so I remember people getting very excited about some of the big basketball games that had been up. I think I remember we played UVA and others, and we'd go to Charlottesville for a UVA basketball game or something.

**Warren:** You mentioned your faculty adviser. I always think it's kind of important that we get around to talking about academics while I do these interviews. [Laughter] Washington and Lee often puts its emphasis on other things, but I think that it's a real important thing to talk about. Were there any teachers who really made a difference for you, any really special?

**Touchton:** Oh, yes. In fact, I have, I guess, a special story to tell on that. My faculty adviser my freshman year was Sid Coulling I think it was his first year. He was an alumnus, of course, but I think it was his first year as a faculty member in the English Department. I did well in his course and always admired him as a person, but the interesting aspect of that is that thirty years later, when our son was going to W&L as a freshman, and I was on the board of trustees at the time, I called Dean of Freshmen Bob Huntley and said, "Bob, I'm a little nervous about bringing this up, but I need a favor."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "I would like for John to have a good faculty adviser, but I don't know who the good ones are." I said, "I have to believe that in the range of good to bad, there are some that are better than others, and I would just like for John to have a good faculty adviser, whoever that is."

And he said, "Well, who would you like for him to have?"

I said, "I don't have a clue. I'll leave that entirely up to you."

He was quiet for a minute, and he said, "Well, who did you have when you were a freshman?"

I said, "Well, I had Sid Coulling."

And he says, "Well, how about Sid Coulling?"

I said, "Well, I know Sid is in the process of retiring, and I can't believe Sid wants to be bothered with freshman advisees anymore."

He said, "Well, why don't I ask him."

And I said, "Well, if that's who you think would be a good faculty adviser for John, then I think that would be terrific."

Well, Bob Huntley did mention it to Sid Coulling, Sid was delighted, and I think John, our son John, and one other freshman, possibly of the same situation, were the only two faculty advisees that Sid Coulling had that year. And I think it was his last year on the faculty, so I had Sid Coulling my freshman year, and my son did thirty years later, and I wouldn't think that happens very often.

And that reminds me to telling you that when John, my son, came, after he had been accepted by W&L, came to me one day and said, "Dad, I have all these housing forms here. Do you have any thoughts about what kind of room I ought to have at W&L in the freshman dorm?"

I said, "Well, the first question would be, do you want to have a roommate? Do you want a single room or a double room, do you want a roommate, or not?"

He said, "I think I'd like a single room."

And I said, "Okay." It happened at that time that I was on the Campus Life Committee of the board's, and I happened to keep a lot of my W&L board material at home, so I reached for a diagram of the freshman dorm, Graham-Lees dorm, and found the room that I had had when I was a freshman. I said, "John, here is a single corner room. It says here that it's room — " I think it was 125. I said, "I have to believe, if you write back to the housing office and say that your father went to W&L and he had Room 125 in 1956, and if that room has not been assigned to anyone, that you would like to have it as a freshman, the kind of place that W&L is, they are more likely than not to give you that room." Well, in fact they did, and so not only did John and I have the same faculty adviser thirty years apart, but we lived in the same dorm room thirty years apart.

**Warren:** That's wonderful.

**Touchton:** Great story.



**Warren:** That is so Washington and Lee.

**Touchton:** Great W&L story.

**Warren:** That is marvelous. Oh, that's very sweet. That's very sweet. I assume it was very flattering to you, to have John choose Washington and Lee.

**Touchton:** Well, I think I played that right by encouraging him to look at Dartmouth and UVA and Georgetown.

**Warren:** And it was clear that he wanted Washington and Lee?

**Touchton:** He did, and I was delighted. [Touchton emotional.]

**Warren:** Is this father's pride, or is this something – okay. I didn't know whether there was something I was touching on that I shouldn't be.

**Touchton:** No, not at all.

**Warren:** Well, that makes it all the more special. Well, we could go about five different directions at this point, we've touched on so many things. So I'm going to pull us back to 1956, and ask you to tell me about Sid Coulling in 1956.

**Touchton:** Well, I don't remember much, except Sid Coulling is, of course, a gentleman and a great teacher. I couldn't possibly have appreciated then how good he was. But he's a wonderful human being, and became, of course, one of the great statesmen on the faculty. It's been a pleasure to see him from time to time, and when I was involved in W&L in different ways, to try to get a perspective that would help me in whatever deliberations might go on. I remember coeducation being one. He's such a high-quality person, thoughtful, gentle. But I must confess, I don't remember anything about the classroom, I just remember him as a person with all the characteristics I just mentioned.

**Warren:** I just think that would have been thrilling, to be there for the beginning of his career. It would have taken a lot of foresight to realize what an important career that was that you were witnessing. He's one of my very favorite people.

**Touchton:** Well, I didn't have a clue, of course, how well he would do, but he was as good as I ever had, and I'm sure others feel that way, too.

**Warren:** What was your major?

**Touchton:** Political science. Why was it political science? I think I started out—I don't remember when one had to declare a major, maybe sophomore year. And I think I started out as an economics major, and had Harvey Wheeler for my sophomore political science class, I think. I think because of Dr. Wheeler, I changed my major to political science. Today, it'd be history, but I didn't know any better then.

**Warren:** I don't know the name Harvey Wheeler at all. He's obviously very important to you, but tell me about him.

**Touchton:** Well, gosh, I don't know much. He was one of the rising stars in the W&L faculty at the time. I don't remember what his academic background had been. He coauthored, maybe with a fellow named Burdick, the novel—I think it was *Failsafe*.

**Warren:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**Touchton:** I think he coauthored that, that maybe was published about that time. I remember how brilliant he was, and how free-form his lectures were. By "free-form," I mean that when—this not only applied to the political science course, but it applied almost to any individual lecture—he would start his lecture and would sort of ramble and ramble and ramble, and you would wonder, where in the world is this man trying to go? He would drop pieces of information all along the way and you were trying to take notes, and by the end of the lecture and then by the end of the course, somehow he would wrap it all together in just almost a miraculous way. I wouldn't call him a spellbinding lecturer; he was really rather dry. But he was so smart, and the way he designed and delivered a lecture, he really brought in politics and philosophy and religion and history, and sort of wrapped it all in one. It was really quite, quite good. So the slide I gave you, I just happened to have that one. Wish I'd had one of Sid Coulling. But Harvey Wheeler then left Washington and Lee before I graduated, I think, and went to a think tank in California, maybe the RAND Corporation. And we never stayed in touch or anything like that. But he was a brilliant professor.

**Warren:** You say he wasn't a spellbinding lecturer.

**Touchton:** Well, I guess he was intellectually, but he wasn't in delivery.

**Warren:** Were there other people who were?

**Touchton:** I remember two. One was Dean Lew Adams in the Commerce School, who I think maybe taught economics or – I've forgotten what he taught, but Lou Adams was a very interesting professor and teacher, and I remember what he – this wasn't exactly in the précis of the course, but he was very involved in a number of things maybe off campus as well as on, and so he would bring anecdotes and stories into the classroom, and we probably spent half the time talking about things that were happening out in the world versus whatever it was we were supposed to be dealing with in the chapter of a particular book. So because he was talking about contemporary things, he was spellbinding.

Dr. Griffith, who had taught comparative economic systems, I think, he was very good. And there's one more I was thinking of. Ross Borden, who was an English teacher, my senior year. I thought he was a very good lecturer and teacher.

Of course, the all-time, award-winning spellbinder was W&L's president.

**Warren:** Francis Pendleton Gaines.

**Touchton:** Francis Pendleton Gaines. He *was* a spellbinder.

**Warren:** Tell me about him.

**Touchton:** Well, he was, as everyone knows, a great orator, in the old-school sense, old-world sense. Freshmen, in those days, were required to attend certain functions in, I guess it was the gymnasium. I guess that's where we had our required attendance, certain convocations, Founders Day, probably, and Dr. Gaines frequently was the speaker for those functions. I think he was inspiring, a great role model relative to encouraging young people (a) to behave in a certain way; and (b) to love Washington and Lee. He did that very well.

**Warren:** I've heard some tapes of his speeches.

**Touchton:** Oh! I'd like to hear some tapes of his speeches.

**Warren:** I'll make a copy of it and send it down to you.

**Touchton:** Oh, I'd love to. And I bet – if there is a way that the alumni magazine could advertise the availability of speeches by Dr. Gaines, or if there's any conversations with Dean Gilliam or something like that, I bet there would be a huge – huge. I think there would be a substantial level of inquiry, especially interest from alumni, about those two men in particular.

**Warren:** My husband says that my job will not be complete until I do an interview with Robert E. Lee. But to tell you the truth, as much as I'd like to talk to Lee, I'd like to talk to Francis Pendleton Gaines and Frank Gilliam just as much. Those names, I feel as though I know them, so many people have talked about them.

**Touchton:** Right. Oh, I'm sure that has to be true.

**Warren:** Especially Gaines. He just seems like such a character. You were there at the transition time, when President Cole came in, is that right?

**Touchton:** Yes, but I don't remember much about that. I was not a very good student. I was not very involved in the life of the school when I was there, and I think that's one of the reasons I was so pleased, later, to have an opportunity to serve on the board of trustees, because it gave me a chance to give back then when I really didn't do much giving back when I was there, because I was spending too much time trying to figure out who I was and where I was going.

**Warren:** That's interesting.

**Touchton:** But I don't remember anything, really, about that transition. I mean, I gave you the slide of Fred Cole. I remember what he looked like, but I didn't know him at all, and I did not have any memories there.

**Warren:** As a political science major, did you get involved with the Mock Convention?

**Touchton:** Not particularly. I remember going to it, but I was not involved in it.

**Warren:** I always think that would have been a particularly interesting one, since you all did nominate [John F.] Kennedy, I think, wasn't it? I think that was one of the years you got it right, and I would think at Washington and Lee that would have been a tough call.

**Touchton:** I don't remember, to be perfectly honest. I don't know.

**Warren:** I'd like to find somebody who was real involved with that Mock Convention, because I know how conservative the student body is, and that that would have been a tough call to make.

**Touchton:** Well, what I would do—I don't know where these records are, but I have to believe there are records readily available about who the student leaders were in Mock Convention in 1960, and you could either ask around campus, or you could call me and I could tell you who would be a couple of wonderful people to talk to from that time period, who are gabbers. I mean, you know, who would really talk to you about that.

**Warren:** Oh, yes, I need gabbers. I definitely need gabbers. So, let's see. How about Dean Leyburn? I guess he wasn't dean by the time you got there. Was he someone you interacted with?

**Touchton:** Unfortunately not, and one of my great regrets from my W&L years was I never had him as a teacher. I think because I changed majors, from economics to political science, I had to play catch-up on some courses, and I didn't have enough elective time to have Dean Leyburn. I remember hearing him play the piano as I walked by his house, or I remember seeing him on campus or in church, but I had no personal relationship with him, I'm sorry to say. But everyone that I have ever known who did have one found it an exceedingly rewarding relationship to have. He was really special. But I regret that I wasn't close enough to him.

**Warren:** I think it's very appropriate that the library is named for him.

**Touchton:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

**Warren:** How about Fancy Dress? Did you attend Fancy Dress?

**Touchton:** Yes. To be honest, I don't remember too much about it. I think one of the slides I gave to you was Louis Armstrong at Fancy Dress. But no special memories, just no parties. Back then we had, what? Fall, Fancy Dress, and spring dances, though no special memories.

**Warren:** Were you still wearing costumes then, renting costumes for Fancy Dress?

**Touchton:** I think so. I think one of the slides I did not bring to you was my girlfriend at that time and me, and we were in Fancy Dress. I remember another slide, I had a slide from a couple of years, and we were in Fancy Dress, yes. I'd forgotten about that. But they still dress – and do they do Fancy Dress, or is it tuxedo and tie?

**Warren:** Well, we call it the Fancy Dress Ball, but it's in tuxedos, but we're hoping in 1999 to do Fancy Dress in costume.

**Touchton:** Well, that would be fun. Good.

**Warren:** To go back to the original idea of it. Of course, I hope that that'll become permanent again. I love costume parties.

**Touchton:** Right.

**Warren:** Okay. How about this fraternity life you were involved in? Was that really important to you when you were a student?

**Touchton:** Yes and no. I think that fraternities at W&L have served, and do serve, a very worthwhile function, being sort of a microcosm of community within the larger W&L community, as small as that larger community is. I think one of the reasons – and I'm sure we'll get to this in time – one of the reasons that I was so interested in the Fraternity Renaissance program is that I am a strong believer in the worthwhileness, if you will, of fraternities. That's the positive side.

The negative side is that I was never very much of a party guy, and there was a real split, if you will, in my fraternity between a more conservative group who maybe – well, they didn't mind partying, but there was – to mention the other group first, when I was there in the late fifties, for some reason that I don't really understand, destroying

things became rather "in," or fun, whether it was burning a piano or punching holes in walls or physically abusing the fraternity house itself. I wasn't comfortable with that. I don't like it today, I didn't like it then.

So there was a lot of friction within my fraternity, the Sigma Nu fraternity, a lot of friction between a particular group of students who really liked to have a good time in what I would call a destructive way, and those who still liked to have a good time, they didn't just want an "animal house" environment, you might say. So there were some what I guess I would say very uncomfortable times and experiences, and that was the bad side to go along with the good.

The good is, I made friends that I still have. I think that the sense of community that can exist is very positive. But there was a bad side that I think was really the beginning of what the Fraternity Renaissance program twenty-five years later tried to correct.

**Warren:** Had toga parties started when you were there?

**Touchton:** Thank goodness, no.

**Warren:** That came right after you.

**Touchton:** I don't remember. I don't remember when they started.

**Warren:** I've got pictures of them, and I think they were right after you. But for your sense, the "animal house" business had already started, had already happened?

**Touchton:** I believe that it started in the late fifties, almost '58, '59, '60. I don't remember now why it started, but even though following World War II and some of the stories I heard of young men who came back after World War II, who were older, I mean, they were wild, and they loved to party and all of that, but there was a kind — and I even heard of things like stealing trains, and doing other things, and somehow I don't — I consider even stealing a train and driving it down the track ten miles, I consider that more of a prank than doing something destructive to the dwelling that you're living in. And I think there was somehow in the late fifties, there must have

been a loss of maturity or something, that change in behavior that resulted, and probably still results, not so much at W&L, but other places, an absence of respect or caring about the physical place where you live. So I had a hard time with that as a student, and I had many friends who did, also. But there were some others, they didn't have a hard time with that at all.

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

[Begin Tape 1, Side 1]

**Warren:** All right, you just said there are a lot more interesting things to talk about. Do they relate to W&L? Let's talk about them.

**Touchton:** Sure. Well, building on what we just talked about, which was fraternities, I think it is a great irony, or maybe something even better than irony, that if I graduated in 1960, I must have gone on the alumni board in about 1973, and by that time, fraternities' house conditions really had deteriorated. Housemothers had been done away with at some point along the way; I don't remember why. We had gone through the Vietnam years, and I and some of my contemporaries and even older alumni end up on the alumni board in the mid-seventies, and we are absolutely appalled at what had happened to the fraternity houses physically.

I remember our going to Bob Huntley and saying, "Either clean them up or shut them down," because it was just awful. I think Bob Huntley, who I believe is a wonderful man and was a great president of Washington and Lee, they were right in the middle of a capital campaign, he had a lot on his plate, he had, if you will, more important things to worry about than fraternities, so I really think that they just couldn't deal with the fraternities in the seventies, at that particular time.

Then I ended up on the board of trustees in about 1982, or so, and in 1984 became chairman of the Campus Life Committee. It was really the first time that the board of trustees had had a Campus Life Committee. I had previously served on the board of trustees at the University of Tampa, which is that building I told you about, across the



river, and had been chairman of their Student Life Committee, so I knew a little something about board committee structures. But when we were studying the coeducation issue in '84-'85, Rector Ballengee, who was a very good rector, had created a Campus Life Committee, and charged it with some oversight over the life of the student body, not that we wanted to run it, but what could the trustees do in understanding and influencing the life of students on campus to make it better.

Well, the very first chairman of that committee was Gordon Leggett from Lynchburg, and in the last few months that he was on the board, and then as he went off the board, Rector Ballengee asked me if I would be the chairman. And in May of 1985, I submitted to the Campus Life Committee of the board two statements which the board adopted, one having to do with campus life, student life, generally, and the other having to do with fraternities, and it was interesting to me that after some of my unpleasant experiences and reactions in the late fifties, here I was twenty-five years later as the chairman of the Campus Life Committee, with oversight over fraternities. And it was the beginning of what really became the Fraternity Renaissance program, and I think it was almost meant to happen.

**Warren:** Well, keep going.

**Touchton:** Well, I brought you some documents which you can take away with you. I found that I have on my desk three file drawers of Washington and Lee material, which would be impossible, and no one would ever want to go through them all, but what I made for you were several of the early documents relating to the Fraternity Renaissance, which is what you expressed an interest in talking about, which is a lot more interesting than my years at W&L. But here is a "Statement of Policy Relating to Campus Life" by the W&L University Board of Trustees, dated May 25, 1985. Here is the "Statement Relating to Fraternities" by the W&L Board of Trustees, of the same date. Here is my sort of background comments about campus life and the fraternity statements, which I don't remember if I read this to the board, or if I did this for myself.

The way I approach problems or tasks, I guess, if I can write down on paper what I think the problem is and a potential solution to the problems, then that tells me I really understand what it is I'm trying to do. So I am a prodigious note-taker and writer. I did the same thing on the coeducation issue, too, by the way. But this is interesting because these documents are the beginning of the Fraternity Renaissance.

**Warren:** Thank you, I'm very happy to have those.

**Touchton:** The last item is – and there's much more than you want, but the last item is a letter I wrote to Paul Murphy in January of '86 because after – let's see what the sequence was. The trustees had dealt from time to time with – and so had the faculty – with fraternities, but it was really sort of a dilemma that nobody quite knew quite how to deal with it, how to deal with the problem of some aspects of fraternities not being as positive as they could be. I think we all recognized the positive aspects of them. The problem was how do we take some of the negative aspects and either tone them down or get rid of those negative aspects and shift that weight more toward the positive side. There had been various statements over the years, but fraternities sort of seemed to get worse and worse, particularly after the housemothers left.

So when the Campus Life Committee was created, I think in '84, that was really the first time the trustees had had a direct pipeline into the student life process. Because of the Honor System, the trustees had really wanted to keep their hands off of student life, and had, in fact, delegated, in the same way the trustees delegates to the Executive Committee in the student body the operation of the Honor System, they had delegated to the faculty the student life aspects, you might say, the non-honor-system part of human life.

Well, but we clearly were not happy with the way that was going. We respected the differing roles of the faculty and the trustees, but the trustees were getting negative feedback from alumni, from parents, from some students themselves about some of the negative aspects of fraternity life, and the trustees felt like we had to deal with that.

So when the Campus Life Committee was formed, the first thing I tried to do was to sort of set the tone for what is the appropriate role for the board of trustees to play relative to student life issues in general, and fraternities in particular. John Wilson, who was very supportive of, you might say, this new emphasis on student life and fraternities, with the coeducation issue out of the way – wasn't it in either '84 or '85? John Wilson went to the alumni board, which already had a Fraternity Committee, and asked them for help. They created the Alumni-Fraternity Council, with Paul Murphy as chair of it. Paul Murphy was really the hardest worker and the person who applied the most energy and thought to the Fraternity Renaissance program toward the following six or eight years.

My role was to get trustee support, to keep the trustees informed about what was going on. Our preference always was for the students themselves to correct the problems as much as they would. After whatever the students would not do themselves, it was appropriate, perhaps, for their house corporations to change. But we had a weak house corporation system. We had a weak faculty adviser system. That meant a lot of issues ended up in the dean's office. The dean can't do everything, and there's always student concern about "the Hill." So then sometimes the president would get involved, in this case, John Wilson, and that meant the trustees became knowledgeable about what was going on. So the trustees finally thought it would help the process if we established policies and issued encouraging instructions to John Wilson to pass down to his deans and to the IFC leaders and to the fraternity members themselves, that there needed to be some changes made.

Paul Murphy's Alumni-Fraternity Council, started by the alumni board, was a key – and the most key – part of that process, because they were the implementers. For the alumni to participate in correcting the fraternity problem was a much more acceptable idea than the board of trustees to be involved in trying to correct the problem.

**Warren:** Why do you think that was?

**Touchton:** Part of it is governance and part of it is politics. That is to say, if the Hill and – first of all, students generally don't know who the trustee are, at all. Secondly, if the Hill comes down too hard on the students, then it creates animosities and divisions which hurt the community in other ways. If the energy for correcting the fraternity problems are coming from alumni of all ages, the fraternity members and leaders understand alumni more than they understand the Hill, or certainly more than they understand the role of the board of trustees, so for the alumni to be involved in the process is a more acceptable and understandable relationship for the average fraternity member. That doesn't mean they like it, but it means they understand it more.

So what Paul Murphy did as chairman of the Alumni-Fraternity Council was to get the house corporations involved, sort of reinvigorated, if you will, to overhaul the faculty adviser process, to get some national fraternity leaders involved. We had a symposium on campus in the fall of '86, with coverage by the alumni magazine, which was a way of signaling to the alumni that we were starting to work on that problem, the problem of fraternity conditions and behavior. I met a couple of times with IFC leaders to try to explain to them that a new day was coming and they needed to work with us and correct some of the problems themselves before the problems got corrected for them.

**Warren:** What kind of reaction did you get?

**Touchton:** Not very good, really. As you can imagine, this was a new concept for them, and part of them intellectually recognized the authority the board had in raising the issues of their behavior, but in another sense, they wondered what right we had to tell them how to live their lives. We tried to respond in terms of, "You are part of a greater community. You are bringing disregard to that greater community because of your actions, and therefore we have a responsibility to that greater community, to try to

correct the problem." Some of the students learned that very quickly, and some of them probably never did quite learn it, until they probably matured a little bit.

I also remember speaking. We had a meeting, I don't remember when this was, it might have been '88, in Lee Chapel, to which we invited freshman and sophomore fraternity members. Anyone was invited, but it was virtually required attendance for freshman and sophomore fraternity members. We said, "There are going to be changes made in the fraternity system, and if you don't like it, there's the door." Coeducation and the sharply higher application numbers permitted us to take a tougher stand than we could have taken before coeducation, because if anybody had chosen to walk out the door, it would have been expensive. Once coeducation occurred, anybody that walked out the door, there were hundreds more that could fill their shoes. So it was easier to be hard-nosed in 1988, versus 1978, let's say.

But we went through – again, under Paul Murphy's leadership and mine from the board, as Campus Life Committee chairman; John Wilson was always very supportive, as president; Lew John and Buddy Atkins, and, later, David Howison, were always very supportive.

One of the early things we did was to bring in an architectural firm from Charlottesville, VMDO – I don't remember what the initials stand for, but an architectural firm, to do a survey of all the fraternity houses, to see how bad the problem was physically. It was easy to determine that many of the houses were dangerous to live in, the wiring hadn't been changed in decades, the plumbing was antiquated, the damage to the houses from parties in some cases was just awful.

So we embarked on a deliberate effort to completely rebuild the fraternity houses. It ended up costing, I think, about thirteen million dollars. While no consideration was ever given to abolishing fraternities, because we really did recognize – the board did, virtually unanimously – recognized that the positive contributions of fraternities were very good, but there were simply negative aspects

that had to be corrected. While it was not considered, if the decision had been made to abolish fraternities, then I suspect the university would have had to spend more than thirteen million dollars to not only refurbish the houses anyway, but probably to build a new dining hall or a new dormitory, or whatever.

So I think one could, at least superficially, make the case that spending thirteen million dollars to renovate all the houses was less expensive than some of the alternatives. Having said that, it wasn't really approached that way, it was really done because we wanted to give the fraternity system an opportunity to show that it served a worthwhile purpose, and I think we have done that. It is not problem-free, but we always felt that the camaraderie and the friendships and the leadership training that occurred within individual fraternities was part of what caused alumni to feel so connected to the university. And we thought, particularly following the coeducation decision, when we really didn't know what all the influences would be and what changes would occur, we were not inclined to change Washington and Lee very much, and where we changed it, to change it only very gradually.

**Warren:** It seems to me that that must have been a really complicated time, to have had coeducation in its birthing stages, and trying to get the Fraternity Renaissance program off the ground. I'm very interested in that happening coincidentally. And it also occurs to me that you had a very special window, having your son there as a student.

**Touchton:** [Laughter]

**Warren:** And I don't know how to ask that question other than that way, to say you had these three really interesting things going on in your life, all related to Washington and Lee.

**Touchton:** Well, I tried to insulate, or protect my son from that, because—I made the comment that students really don't know trustees. Well, what happened through the creation of this Campus Life Committee and with me as the chairman of it, I became the trustee that was meeting with the students on a consistent basis, so I was, in many

cases, the only trustee they had ever known. And then for my son to be there at the same time, which was purely coincidental, it was difficult for him at times, but he seemed to handle it well, and I told him one time that I know it must be hard, and I was sorry if it was hard, but this was just something we had to do. And he sort of laughed. He's six-four, he's a great big guy, and he sort of looked down at me and put his arm around me, and said, "Dad, it's always been hard to be your son, but fortunately, the good outweighs the bad." So that was nice. [Touchton crying.]

**Warren:** Let's pursue the coeducation theme that was there, happening simultaneously. I'm just so interested in so many different angles we've got going here, that I don't know where to go. Why don't you take it? You decide where to go with it.

**Touchton:** Let's talk first about coeducation itself. I really feel good about the fact that I was on the board from—I've forgotten now—maybe '82 to '92, let's say, and the three issues that I was very heavily involved in were coeducation and Fraternity Renaissance and the capital campaign. In the case of coeducation—remember I mentioned how I like to write down, if I can express an issue in writing, it says to me I understand it—well, I did that in the coeducation issue, and my position paper, if you'd call it that, after I delivered to the trustees my feelings and thoughts about coeducation, those were the comments that got printed in the alumni magazine as one trustee's perspective of the coeducation process.

I thought coeducation—I didn't have any feelings, pro or con, about it, when we started the process. I probably thought that, on balance, we shouldn't go coed unless we needed to. I wasn't one who thought that coeducation should happen because half the population is female. I didn't think that. But it became very clear to me as a trustee, as the trustees studied that question of coeducation for a full year, that W&L's academic purpose would be strengthened, and its financial future would be strengthened, and its reputation would be preserved if we went coed. And in the absence of going coed, I think we would have gone down in quality; I think we already had. And I think that

would have continued. So the decision to go coed turned out to be an almost unanimous decision by the board, and, I think, a good one, and one that I'm very proud to have played a role.

Then the women started arriving, I think in '85. They arrive in September of '85. The Campus Life Committee having been formed in '84, the first statements by the board occur in May of '85. So you're right, the women were coming just at the very time that we were taking a look at the fraternity issue. In one sense, they're unrelated, they're just coincidental. In another sense, they were not, because the Campus Life Committee was formed in part because we wanted the experience of the women who came to W&L to be as positive as it generally was for the men. We wanted to make sure whether there were residential housing issues, or organizations on campus, or whatever other non-academic issues there were, we wanted to be sure that the community and the sense of community that existed when it was all male remained positive in a coed environment.

So as the Campus Life Committee, with its fraternity interests, moved forward with other parts of the Campus Life Committee being interested in other issues, they did get discussed together and dealt with in committee meetings together, and at the board level together. We worried about if there are fraternities, will there be sororities, will the women want sororities? And one of our dilemmas early on was that one year, maybe the first year, the women didn't want sororities, and the second year they did want sororities, and the third year they didn't want sororities. Our attitude was, "We will not impose sororities on you. You are entitled to the same accommodations and treatment as the men. So, women, you decide whether or not you want sororities, for example, and if you decide that you do, we feel obligated to help you have them."

We were also concerned about the treatment of women within the fraternities. We were also concerned about social outlets for the women other than at fraternities. We didn't want to make the women's decision for them. To the degree they wanted



fraternities to be their outlet, that's fine. To the degree they wanted avenues other than fraternity houses, to have a social life, we thought the community owed that to them. So when we thought about those issues, it was complex.

Well, I guess I'm rambling now, but in one sense, dealing with fraternities and dealing with coeducation was purely coincidental; they just happened to happen at the same time. In another sense, they were inseparable once we were dealing – once coeducation happened, you did have to deal with it.

**Warren:** I wonder if the young men who came in, believing they were going to an all-male school, and believing they were joining up to these wonderful party houses, how they reacted to having all this change thrust upon them, because it's not what they signed on for when they came to Washington and Lee in, say, 1982 or '83.

**Touchton:** Well, I think we took some comfort – in the coeducation survey, and I think I might have something here, in the coeducation survey that was done obviously prior to the coeducation decision, we asked alumni what factors were the most important to them of the W&L experience. The five that were most important were quality of the faculty; the small student/faculty ratio; the Honor System; academically selective in admissions; relatively small enrollment. Having an all-male in undergraduate enrollment was ninth out of thirteen. That was from the alumni who were surveyed.

When we asked the students whether or not they were for or against coeducation, as I remember, they generally, to the tune of about sixty/forty, were opposed to coeducation. But if you asked them what was best for the institution, what they thought was best for the institution, as I remember, that sixty/forty turned around, and about sixty/forty would have been in favor of coeducation if that's what was best for the institution. I think we took some comfort in that, in the Fraternity Renaissance program, in trying to emphasize that their behavior was endangering the nature of the community, and that that was true whether W&L was coed or not, because we had heard from parents and alumni for years that that was the case.

But it was even more important with W&L being coed. And I think we thought, by having the meetings with the IFC, having the meetings in Lee Chapel with the freshmen and sophomores, involving the house corporations, having the house corporations meet with the individual chapters, I think we thought that by educating them over time, explaining that we weren't trying to abolish fraternities, we weren't even trying to take over fraternities, we were trying to improve the nature of the community, I think we believed they would buy into that. I think they finally did. Some of them went kicking and screaming; others liked the changes.

We thought it was important that the first round of houses that were remodeled – and you may remember we did that over a three- or four-year period of time – we thought it important that the first round of houses be done well, because the other students would be looking to see how we did it that first round. We tried to be honest, we tried to be candid, we tried to be firm. Paul Murphy had designed what was called – I thought I had a copy of that here. Here we are. "Standards for Fraternities."

**Warren:** I'm glad to have a copy of that.

**Touchton:** Well, I will make a copy of that for you. This is my stack, that's your stack, but you can have anything in it, in my stack.

**Warren:** Okay, it's a deal.

**Touchton:** But Paul Murphy had prepared "Standards for Fraternities." We really tried to convey, and we were trying to do it honestly, that it was a partnership, but we had to do what we were doing, and they had to buy into it; but they had to understand that we weren't doing it to be difficult or to be punitive, but because the nature of the community required it. And I think we did that. I think we did. Do you think we did?

**Warren:** I think it's a remarkable change that's happened. I lived in Lexington from 1977 to 1980, and I remember the "animal houses" all too clearly. When I came back, it was, "What happened?" And that's how Frank and I got to talking about the Fraternity

Renaissance so early on, because there was a change at Washington and Lee, I thought more than coeducation. It was Fraternity Renaissance.

**Touchton:** Well, it was. And by the way, I should not have left Frank Parsons out of my list of people that I mentioned earlier, because Frank probably had the most amount of institutional history of anyone there, and he was not only a friend of mine, but was invaluable in providing a perspective and thoughts about how to proceed. He remembered things that either no one else ever knew, or had forgotten, and you know how remarkable he is in that regard.

**Warren:** I do, so well.

**Touchton:** So I guess when you asked about proceeding with coeducation and the Fraternity Renaissance at the same time, the fact that W&L is as small as it is helped; the fact that it is as personal as it is helped; and the fact that everybody was talking to each other helped. That is, the trustees, the alumni board, the John Wilson and his staff, the faculty advisers, the house corporations, the fraternity leaders. It was not easy, and there was a certain level of frustration on the part of the students in responding to so much change, but we just kept saying, "But we just have to do this." And we did.

**Warren:** I think when you're dealing with people in that age group, firmness is very important.

**Touchton:** Couldn't agree more.

**Warren:** My father would be glad to hear me say that. [Laughter]

[End of interview]