

JACK WARNER

October 31, 1996

Mame Warren,
Interviewer

—

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 31st of October, 1996. I'm in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, with Jack Warner.

I want to know how an Alabama guy got all the way to Virginia to go to college. Why Washington and Lee?

Warner: Well, I went to Culver, to prep school, and my roommate at Culver was Billy Buxton from Memphis, Tennessee, and his older brother, Stuart, was a W&L student our senior year at Culver, and he's the one that interested me in Washington and Lee. I think kids oftentimes go where their friend goes, and in this case that's what brought me to W&L. I also wasn't in the top 20 percent of my class. I wasn't going to an Ivy League school. This was during the Depression.

Warren: Well, that intrigues me that you were at Washington and Lee during the Depression.

Warner: Towards the end of it. Yeah, right. Right at there.

Warren: What was Lexington like when you got there?

Warner: Well, it was wonderful. We all stayed in the freshmen dorm, and Billy and myself, of course, roomed together. Lexington, to me, was kind of an Arcadian dream. It really was.

Warren: Tell me what you mean.

Warner: Well, like Thomas Jefferson, you know, "I, too, have been to Arcadia, we should all be plowmen," and all that sort of thing and stick to agriculture. It was kind

of a place out of the mainstream, kind of a—I wouldn't want to say Utopian, it certainly wasn't that, but it was a place that—kind of like a Broadway play, *Finnegan's Rainbow* or something, kind of place, kind of a dream world in a way. It was all male. It was just a very unique college. Different.

Warren: Why do you think that was? What made it different?

Warner: Well, the beauty of it, for one thing. It's the most beautiful little college campus in the world. There's nothing, to me, that can touch it.

Warren: Can you remember your first impressions when you first walked on campus?

Warner: Yes, I was awed with the beauty of the Colonnade. It's awe-inspiring, with Washington perched on top of the middle building. It was a beautiful sight. I still think it is the most beautiful campus. University of Alabama is the greatest, most beautiful state campus, I think, and it really is, but it doesn't compare with just the pristine beauty of Washington and Lee, in the fall especially, when the leaves are falling, beautiful, and House Mountain. The air was always refreshing, no pollution.

Warren: How did you first arrive in Lexington?

Warner: In an automobile.

Warren: You drove?

Warner: Well, somebody drove me. Freshmen couldn't have cars, you know. You couldn't have a car when you were a freshmen, although Billy Buxton and myself did have one at one time. I'll never forget that either.

Warren: Oh, tell me what you mean.

Warner: Well, we bought a robin-egg blue used car for sixty dollars. We weren't supposed to have one. We drove to, I think it was Randolph-Macon, and on the way back we had a wreck. I wasn't driving, Billy was driving. It wasn't his fault, because the car just came out right in front of us, and it was kind of like a circus, a Ringling Brothers circus, when all the clowns get out of the car. Maybe we shouldn't put this on tape. [Laughter]

Warren: Oh, tell me, this is great. This is what I'm after. Tell me.

Warner: They were black people, about ten of them, maybe twelve, maybe fifteen. How they got packed in that car, I don't know. But they all got out and I remember they ran across the corn field, cotton patch, whatever.

And, of course, that revealed the fact that we did have a car because they recorded the wreck. The president, Dr. Gaines, asked us to the house to see him, and we sat on the couch and we were very nervous. He came in and sat down, talked to us and, "Why did you get it?" and all that. When he finished, why, he said, "Well, boys, I'm going to let you go this time." He said, "If you do it again," he said, "Billy, you'll take the slow train back to Memphis, and, Jack, you'll take the slow train back to Tuscaloosa." That was all that was ever said about it. I remember that.

Warren: I'll bet that was memorable. Well, this is the theme I always like to ask people about, and since you've brought it up, let's go right to it. There were a lot of women's colleges around Washington and Lee, still are.

Warner: Yeah, and that was one of my – the downfall, really, because I liked to go to the ladies' schools on weekends especially. Probably frequented those places too much.

Warren: Were they called road trips back then? Did you call that going on a road trip?

Warner: When we were allowed to have a car, I had one. In those days, if you had a car, you were very popular. Nowadays, I got the feeling that the little boys or the gentlemen that have the cars are not so rather envied and maybe put down a little bit. But in those days you were a very popular fellow. We really didn't know the difference between, let's say, a young man from a wealthy background or a young man from a poor one. We really didn't know. It didn't make any difference to anybody and nobody ever bothered about where we came from or whether we were on scholarship.

I remember Tom Christopher, who later became dean of the law school at the University of Alabama, we used to charge. If you had a car, you would charge young gentlemen that wanted to go with you, you'd charge them to help pay for the gas and

everything. It was fifty cents. Poor old Tom, he smoked a pipe, and he didn't have the fifty – he was on scholarship, and he didn't most generally have the fifty cents, and we talk about it to this day. Tom says we didn't know where anybody was. But I remember Tom would reach down and he had to reach down deep to get that fifty cents. He'd clamp down on that old pipe of his and finally come up with it. I wouldn't let him off, I made him pay. [Laughter]

Warren: Tell me what he got for his fifty cents.

Warner: He got a ride to the girls' school when he had a date and he got a ride back. Twenty-five cents each direction.

Warren: So what happened when you went visiting the ladies' schools?

Warner: Well, it would depend on the school. Some of them, you'd just sit in the parlor.

Warren: Take me to each one. What happened at each one?

Warner: Well, Randolph-Macon was kind a little more restrictive than Sweet Briar. Well, there wasn't any way you could get in too much trouble in Sweet Briar. I mean, it was just there and you could go out and have a beer or something sometimes. The little girls' schools in Washington, I remember you'd have to sit in the parlor and you couldn't leave, you couldn't leave the house, so there wasn't much fun going there.

I married a Sweet Briar girl. Bob Abbott, he was a football player, and I was trying to play football at the time when I met Elizabeth. I wasn't on scholarship or anything, and we'd get the devil beat out of us most every Saturday, so I decided that wasn't for me. But anyway, it was a blind date and she was going to Sweet Briar.

I think it was much more exciting then at Fancy Dress. Just like a girl with her dress on is much more exciting than a nude, you know what I mean? I mean, you saw the girls on the weekend, you weren't with them all the time, and it made the Fancy Dress much more exciting and the Spring Dance much more exciting because the girls were much more excited, exciting and excited, because they got invited, and the

costume and everything. They would stay in the houses in Lexington, and it was fun, I think much more fun than going to class with them all the time. Familiarity breeds contempt sometimes.

Warren: Being there during the Depression, do you think there was any sense that that put a damper on anything?

Warner: No, no, made it more fun.

Warren: Tell me about that. Why?

Warner: Well, I think that's true of the Depression all around. I was talking to some employees not too long ago, retired ones, and they said, "Jack, remember," – Mother would send me out to the paper mill that was here, and I'd work on the shipping gang, we'd work twelve hours a day. The man would say, "Remember working on the shipping gang and you came out and everything?" He talked about retiring, and I said, "Well, how is it?" He said, "Well, Jack, back then we didn't have anything, you could get a meal for thirty-five cents at the paper mill cafe with a great big bottle of Nehi pop and all kinds of food stacked high." He said, "We didn't have anything." He said, "Now, I'm retired, I own my own home and we worked hard, twelve hours, and we were all so happy. For five cents, golly, you could buy a great big Milky Way that would choke a horse. Today you get a little tiny one and you pay maybe 70 cents or 75 cents for." He said, "To tell the truth, Jack, in my retirement I own my own home and you're paying my retirement, which is very generous and adequate," he says, "and I'm just miserable as hell." [Laughter]

So during the Depression, I think in colleges and everywhere people were happy. Nobody at W&L envied anybody else. There wasn't any such thing as envy in the way of the students. It was a happy existence. There were fraternities, but anybody could get in a fraternity that wanted to.

Warren: Were you in a fraternity?

Warner: Oh, yeah, I was in one. Most everybody was, if they wanted to. Just the ones that didn't want to be were not. Or maybe, I don't know, couldn't afford it, some of the kids working in the hashery, where they'd give you your food sometimes or wherever, but nobody thought anything about it.

Actually, being in a fraternity at Washington and Lee is different than being in a fraternity at Alabama. It's kind of a status symbol in your big state institutions. You ask anybody that goes to one of those state institutions and it's a strange thing, they all want to know what fraternity you were in. Kind of like India where the class society, oh, you were a such-and-such, well, that was a lowly fraternity. Or you were such-and-such and that was, oh, you were the nicest fraternity in the college.

At W&L, your friends were mostly not even in your own fraternity. I was an SAE and my friends would be Sigma Chis or something like that. You spent more time in other fraternity houses than you did your own. It wasn't a structured sort of thing that it is in the bigger institutions, or was. I don't know what it is today in some of them.

Warren: So tell me what went on in fraternities in those days. What was it like?

Warner: Well, you ate in there.

Warren: Tell me about those meals in the fraternities.

Warner: Well, in SAE they were just great.

Warren: Tell me about it.

Warner: Oh, God, you had spoon-bread and you had hot dinners. Excellent food. At the SAE house, it was a paneled dining room that was given in honor of a kid that got hurt in football, heard he got killed, really, Sample boy from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The family built the dining room. Oh, we thought we were the greatest. I guess you'd say we thought we were the cutest guys in town, but my goodness gracious, there were only about three of us that ever graduated, so I don't think we were quite as cute as we thought we were. [Laughter]

That was one thing that W&L had, I think, was a variety of students, put it that way. Generally, you'd have students from other sections of the country and they weren't all real bright students. This SAT scores and everything, they weren't always up at the top of the SATs, but actually it was kind of like L.K. Johnson told me at the graduation exercises when he was sitting next to me, he knew I was a C student. What'd he say? He said, "Jack, the A students will be working in the laboratories, in corporate laboratories in the research part of the business or society, the B+ students will be university professors." He said, "The C/C students like you, Jack, will be the ones donating to the university." [Laughter]

Warren: He got that right, didn't he?

Warner: So I think it was wonderful that it was that way, because I don't know what it is. I remember Lee Bidgood, a professor here [at Tuscaloosa], I went to summer school one summer, and the business school is named after him, and he talked about the football player that was an All-American – not an All-American, but he was playing at Harvard and his daddy had been the famous Harvard football player. He was talking about how students and everything and how the world turns out, and he said the son was trying to be like his daddy, and so he'd tell the coach, he'd say, "Well, don't I block as good as my daddy did?"

He said, "Yes, you block better than your daddy did."

"Well, don't I tackle better than my daddy did?"

"Yes, you tackle better than your daddy did."

"Well, don't I run better than he did?"

"Yes, you run better than he did."

And he said, "Well, then why am I not considered as good a player as my daddy was? I do all these things better."

He said, "Well, it's just a fact you aren't." [Laughter] I suppose he meant he didn't have the killer instinct, and when the game came, why he could do all these

things better, but he couldn't put it together. He didn't have that killer winning instinct. Well, I think that's true in college, because a lot of the young men I knew at W&L, and, gosh, they were great ones, were not the brightest. I think they overemphasize that. I kept telling them that when I was trustee at W&L, "SAT scores are good, but there's five other factors that are just as important that they don't pay much attention to at all. I'm not so sure what those factors are, but you all better try to figure it out." Because we used to brag about the four years I was at W&L turned out, I think, it was seven college presidents and a Supreme Court guy, and a couple of senators and three or four congressmen and all that, out of that little school. It was perfectly remarkable.

Warren: It is quite a record.

Warner: Yeah, you had Edgar Shannon, he was from Virginia, you had Huntley, well, whatever it was then. Well, you had W&L and you had University of Virginia and you had Auburn with Harry Filpot [phonetic], who was one of my best friends. I used to go to Auburn games with him. He made Auburn. He was a W&L guy and went to school with me. He used to go around all over Lexington and preach. He went to Yale and he and Polly, his wife, both got their Ph.D., or whatever it is, in divinity or preaching. They were preachers. But you had all kinds of people, and that was an experience in itself. You had poor kids and rich kids and extremely bright kids and get-by-the-skin-of-the-teeth kids. I don't know, it was a good environment because you learned what the world was like.

Warren: Well, I guess we should talk a little bit about that is supposedly what people go away to school for, to learn.

Warner: Yeah, learn.

Warren: What about in the classroom? What was Washington and Lee like in the classroom? Were there any teachers who made a big difference to you?

Warner: Well, L.K. Johnson did. I didn't finish my thesis properly, and he made me come back and get it the next year. So when people ask me when I graduated, why, I

always try to think that I was in the class of '40, but I guess really I'd have to say '41, because he made me come back and finish my thesis. Then I came back the next year and graduated. He was a great teacher. Probably the best. He was in the business school. He taught personnel management and factory management and all that sort of thing, the way it was then.

Warren: Well, you learned something, didn't you?

Warner: Yeah, I learned something from him. He taught me a thing or two. He was very good, the best. That was the other thing about the teachers, I mean, the professors. I'm going to say something that's probably unpopular with the teaching profession, but the best professors were not always the ones that had all these degrees. I found that the ones that had all the Ph.D.s sometimes were boring in class and talked over your head, and kind of up in the clouds. Where a guy like L.K. Johnson, I don't think he had all these real fancy degrees, but he could teach, and taught well, which is often the case. Like the football story I told you about, lots of them could do things better than L.K., but they just weren't as good of teachers, that's all.

Warren: Now, one of the things when I was trying to do some homework on you –

Warner: Yeah, well, don't do too much.

Warren: Well, you didn't make it easy because you never sat down and got your portrait taken for the yearbook.

Warner: No, I never –

Warren: I don't even know what your major was. What did you major in?

Warner: Business, B.S. in commerce. I was always that way. It was funny, I was on the board of Culver, too, and we had the best boxing team that ever existed there. We boxed Annapolis plebes and Pittsburgh freshmen and University of Virginia freshmen and all that sort of thing, and we were just prep school kids and we were good. But when it came time to get your picture taken, I was never in it, for some reason. And I

won. I was good in it. I was never in the team pictures. I don't know why. We kind of had a—I don't know what it was.

Warren: I figured you must have been real camera-shy.

Warner: Well, I was usually gone, running over to Sweet Briar or something when picture day was. [Laughter] They didn't even have a picture of me in the yearbook.

Warren: No, they didn't. I heard that there was this thing between class of '40 and '41, but I said, well, he's not in here at all.

Warner: You'd think I'd never attended.

Warren: Well, I did find you in the sports section.

Warner: At Culver they had to go get a picture of me. My mother had one I sent them to prove that I was in school. They knew me, but as far as the yearbook and everything was concerned, I was never much in it.

Warren: Your name did come up in the sports section.

Warner: Yeah, well, golly, we won the Southern Conference Championship in swimming.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Warner: Gil Meem and Harbor and myself won the Southern Conference relay team, medley relay, where one swam breaststroke and one backstroke and one freestyle. It was in the VMI pool. We won the whole conference and we were good in that. Then I wrestled at W&L, never was beaten. There was Henry Brown, Farber, and myself. But I only wrestled my freshmen year because I quit and became enamored with a girlfriend. You know how that is. [Laughter] I remember Archie Mathis, he was really upset with me because I wasn't wrestling. At that time, wrestling was a major sport at W&L. I'd never wrestled. I boxed at Culver and swam, and then I swam and wrestled at W&L and played a little football freshmen year. After being in a military school for four years, which in those days you're scheduled by the numbers, you never really had any freedom. Then to go to a school like W&L was quite a—in other words, it was just

like turning the chickens loose. [Laughter] You scatter. You said, "My God, you mean you're not even going to let me do what I want to do?"

Warren: There's a lot of freedom at Washington and Lee.

Warner: Yeah, an awful lot in those days. I mean, you could do anything. I mean, it was just you, you were on your own. I don't think that those of us that went to a military school like Culver, we weren't acclimated to that, and we went wild, in other words. The kids that had been to public school, it was nothing particularly new to them. Also you had no girls at Culver, whereas at W&L, in spite of the fact that you didn't have the girls who went to school there, there were schools all around you, Mary Baldwin and Hollins and Sweet Briar and Randolph-Macon, they were just all around you.

On weekends, the girls, we'd get together. Even during the week, we'd sometimes go off to the girls' college, which wasn't good for your studies. I think if I'd gone to school after World War II, I'd done much better. Probably gotten a much better education, although I think I got an education, maybe not the best academic one due to my own failings, but otherwise I think there's more to college than that. It's the camaraderie, which we certainly had at Washington and Lee. You had more of it there, I think. They couldn't have that camaraderie that we had today. I don't believe it's possible. You got coed. Still the best little school in the country, but had it remained a single sex, it might have been a little better. It would have been more unique, certainly.

Warren: Well, that fraternity system is still strong.

Warner: Is it?

Warren: It's still strong.

Warner: Well, what about the sorority system, is it going pretty good?

Warren: Well, they have the sororities in place and they're trying now to get sorority houses so that women have the same kind of socialization that the men do.

Warner: Sure. Well, maybe in the long run I was wrong when I thought they shouldn't have coed.

Warren: Let's talk about that.

Warner: Maybe it was inevitable, I don't know, but you know W&L, they could have gone on and on because they're not state supported. Look how long VMI lasted. They fought it every inch of the way, didn't they? I don't understand why a girl would want to go to VMI anyway. They sleep on the floor on a mat. God almighty, why would they want to go there?

Warren: Let's go back to ten, fifteen years ago. Tell me about your opposition to coeducation.

Warner: Well, just what I'm telling you now. I think there's a place in little universities like W&L today where you can have a choice of single-sex education if you so choose. I mean, why not have a place where you've got that? The girls' schools have it. You had plenty of female companionship and interaction, even more so, and it was much more exciting. A school could be different and unique, and with a smaller school like Washington and Lee, being unique and different, I think, would have kept it a couple notches above what it is today.

Now, the Ivy League today, I mean, I think we were just trying to – you know, the alumni and the students were 85 percent my way of thinking. It was just the faculty and the president that felt that we should have coeds. The alumni certainly didn't. It was even until the last minute when they decided to cave in. We had it by one vote, but a couple of them went back on what they indicated they would do. They had pressure from the president and all. I think it could have been a more unique school remaining the way it was. I still do.

Look what happened to the Ivy League schools, especially the women's colleges. Vassar, you don't ever hear about Vassar much anymore. It's kind of sad. Now, Walbash, I think, isn't that college, it's still single sex. There's a couple, two or three of

them left, and you know more about them now than you did when they were lots of single-sex colleges. It would have been unique and different. I think they lost a lot of camaraderie by going coed.

I think they've proven, for instance, that the ladies going to school in ladies' schools of single sex, that they're obviously producing a better product than they do if they let the boys come in or the men. They've proven that. The girls that graduated from women's colleges assume more responsibility, for instance. The same thing could have been with men. The presidents of the classes and everything are women, they get more mixed up in politics. When they graduate, they're more unique and per capita do a better job. I bet you W&L today, I doubt if W&L today will produce per capita. We had less than 1,000 students when I was going to school.

They'll never produce, like in my time at W&L, they'll never produce those seven presidents and four governors. Of course, don't hold me to the numbers, but generally speaking like that, a couple of senators and a guy on the Supreme Court, or at least in the federal positions, occupy high positions per capita, I don't think that they'll ever be able to do that on a per capita basis that they did in those days. I don't think it's possible.

The other thing is, when it comes to donations to the school, I don't care what you say, the girls, the ladies, when you go around and solicit money, I know this is the case at state universities where they have been coed all along, the women are not going to be able to donate or support the college to the basis that men do. Some of them get rich husbands and help, but they'll give pin money. Per capita they're at a disadvantage there. I think they could have remained single sex and been unique and different and smaller schools have to be unique and different to survive.

Now, my great-grandparents both went to Oberlin, and that was the first coed school in the United States, and she was in the first women's class.

Warren: Really.

Warner: He graduated in 1831. You know, the Oberlin movement was an abolitionist movement. Her name was Drake, her last name, and she was the head of one of the underground stations, running black people up to Canada. So really I suppose my background would be coed, that was the first coed college in the United States, and it was a Congregationalist ministers' school, and he was a Congregationalist minister. Rode the circuit. I got his diary. He was converting the drunks and running the devil out of everywhere he went. [Laughter]

Warren: Well, I hope he was successful.

So tell me how you felt when you got the news of how the vote had gone.

Warner: Well, disappointed, but, I mean, after all, it's just something that happened. Maybe it was inevitable. Who am I to say it wasn't? Do you think that the women's colleges are all going to have to have men in them?

Warren: I don't know.

Warner: I hope not, but I guess they will. But it's still a wonderful school. Still the best.

Warren: What do you think now when you go back? What's it like for you to go back to your old alma mater?

Warner: Well, it's not the same with all the girls floating around. It's not the same. I'd be telling you a story if I thought it was the same. It seems rather strange with all the coeds there, too. How many are there of them? Forty percent? Forty to sixty? Sixty men and forty girls. Advocates of that sort of thing say that's healthy. Maybe it is. I don't know. No, I was disappointed, but I got over it. Shoot, I send people to W&L all the time, and the ones I send seem to turn out real good.

Warren: You've got a pretty good record?

Warner: Yeah, I got a real good record on the ones I sent, or at least got interested in it. Those young men are really doing well, and W&L is doing well. I suppose there won't be any coed colleges, there are two or three left, men. So maybe they were right, you know, getting a head start on them.

Warren: Well, let's get back to your student days. Did you participate in Mock Convention?

Warner: Yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that. I haven't talked to anybody who was there for your Mock Convention. Tell me about that.

Warner: For mine?

Warren: Well, that would have been 1940's Mock Convention.

Warner: Well, I wasn't a very active participant, to tell you the truth.

Warren: Were you a delegate?

Warner: Yeah, we were delegates, but that was about all. I wasn't one of the ones that entered into the thing wholeheartedly.

Warren: Was it a big deal?

Warner: Yeah.

Warren: Was it a big event?

Warner: Yeah, yeah. It was.

Warren: What was it like back then? Really, I haven't talked to anybody who did Mock Convention in that time frame.

Warner: Well, I think it was similar to what they're doing now, except probably wasn't hyped up to the degree it is now. You know, with TV and everything, we didn't have that. But we had one.

Warren: Do you remember who you nominated?

Warner: I don't even remember.

Warren: Were you right? Do you remember, were you right?

Warner: I don't even remember whether I was right. I was interested in other things. I went and that's about all. In other words, you had to organize. You get somebody else to tell you about that Mock Convention, because I wasn't active enough in it to really give you a really good idea.

Warren: Okay. All right.

Warner: Then you kind of took – well, some of us, we felt that was maybe wasting our time. It wasn't, of course, but that was kind of an attitude. Like for a while, people wouldn't go to football games, particularly at W&L. Not like Alabama, my goodness, football wasn't that big a deal. You'd rather on a Saturday have a date at Sweet Briar or somewhere like that than be going to a football game. Wilson Field wasn't exactly filled up with howling. [Laughter] University of Virginia was the big game, of course. That was exciting, the bonfire, and interesting. It was the big opponent.

W&L had some good teams. I mean, they had four or five real good players on the teams, they just didn't, like your big colleges, have three good teams and a lot of depth. Where W&L had six kids on it, let's say could make any team in the country, but that was all and they got tired quick. Wrestling was really a bigger sport at W&L than football. W&L had a great wrestling team. Oklahoma was the only one that was in the same league as W&L, and it was a major sport. Probably you admired the wrestlers even more than the football players. I guess lacrosse is a big thing now, isn't it, or something like that?

Warren: It's a real big sport. But you're the first wrestler I've talked to.

Warner: Yeah, well, you ought to talk to Henry Broun [phonetic], he was a Mexican, half Mexican and half German. You'd have to go to Mexico, I guess, to talk to him. Somebody told me that he has a fishing business where he takes tourists out and has a little fleet of fishing ships. Back then his family made porcelain, I guess. They had a factory. Tile it was he made. Barney – he was undefeated. All three of us were undefeated freshmen. I wrestled 165 and Farrier was 175. I think Broun, B-R-O-U-N, kind of a German name, he was half Mexican. Quick as a cat.

The wrestling coach, as I told you before, used to come over and get after me for not coming out for wrestling for varsity, but I didn't.

Warren: Did you get a good crowd at wrestling matches?

Warner: Yeah. And basketball, my God, basketball was bigger than football in my time. They were Southern Conference champions every year or most years. They had Spessard and had a really good basketball team. They were mostly ATOs, I remember that. Had the best basketball teams in the South. I've often wondered why W&L didn't try to get a basketball team now, because it's not as complicated as football as far as giving a few scholarships. You could have a good basketball team. But if they had any kind of a team, I would think to try to compete they could have a basketball team. Might be a good idea. Take that back with you.

Warren: Well, they'll be getting it.

I need to flip my tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warner: Kit Carson was another basketball player.

Warren: Kit Carson?

Warner: Yeah, that's what we called him. His name was Carson, I think the nickname was Kit. They had good basketball teams and they were well-attended. They were fun. Norm Iler was another basketball player, and he was good. All three of those guys were good. Good basketball players. They'd win the conference and the conference then is bigger than it is now. Now they've split it up. The Southern Conference used to have them all in it. It was a big conference.

Well, we've about talked enough, haven't we?

Warren: Well, no, we're not quite done yet. We're not quite done yet.

Now, one thing I'd like to ask you about. You were there at a time that was extremely, not only were you there during the end of the Depression, but you had World War II coming over your shoulder.

Warner: Yeah.

Warren: Was there a sense of that while you were there?

Warner: Oh, yeah, sure.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Warner: Well, I knew I was going to go in the Army. There was no question about it. I went to Fort Bliss and ended up in Burma with a mule. I was with the last cavalry unit and it was nothing glamorous about sending you on a horse. You left your horse behind. We had mules. We'd hang onto their tail going up the hill and they'd carry all our equipment, including their own feed and everything, ammunition, guns and everything else, cannon.

Warren: So before you left, what was the mood on campus as events were unfolding out there in the world? Did you have a sense of what was going on in the world?

Warner: Oh, yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Warner: Well, you certainly knew that we were preparing for war. They really weren't prepared, even in the beginning. I wasn't one of those, but they say they'd have wooden guns and things like that. We weren't prepared for World War II. I sometimes wonder whether we're going to be prepared for World War III. But, no, there was a sense that we knew we was going. We thought maybe, you know, that we'd go, and like most wars, you thought you would go and get out in a year and then you'd be home. Revolutionary War, the same idea. Civil War, the same idea. The kids—

Warren: Never quite works out that way.

Warner: — that fought in them all thought that they would be home within a year, which was an illusion. You got home in four or five years maybe.

Warren: If you were lucky.

Warner: If you study the Revolution, they all thought they were going home. In fact, they'd sign up for just so long and then they thought they'd go home. There was that thought that the war wouldn't last long and maybe we wouldn't even get involved right there after graduating to the degree that we'd have to go overseas. You'd think it

would all go away and you'd go home. But the more you got involved, the more you realized you weren't going home. You were going somewhere else.

Warren: There are certain things about Washington and Lee that aren't necessarily unique, but they're pretty close to unique, and one of the things is the Honor System. Do you remember how you first learned about the Honor System and what it meant to you while you were there?

Warner: Well, you just absorbed it. Now, they had a Freshmen Camp that you would go to, and it was optional, and I didn't go to it. Billy and myself, we were prep school guys, we knew we didn't need any of that stuff and we just went directly in. But you became absorbed in it. In other words, we didn't have that, what was it, two weeks orientation, I think it was, but we got there in the deadline to when you had to be there. You certainly knew about it, not only knew about it, but knew all about it.

Warren: Okay. We were talking about the Honor System.

Warner: Well, golly, I think W&L should exploit that, the Honor System and Washington and Lee. In other words, to me, they've never really taken advantage of their heritage, other than the chapel and the old houses and all that. I feel that they've never emphasized Washington enough at W&L. I mean, the \$50,000 that he gave was a lot of money in those days and the school might have not existed, probably wouldn't without it. Liberty Hall, they were in trouble and he not only gave his name to it, which was terrific, more than the money.

I think with Lee having come to W&L after the war, they became so absorbed in Lee, who was perfect, there wasn't a crack in his – that's what's kind of sad about it, they made him such a hero, he's hardly human. They did the same to Washington, I guess. I think Washington's coming out now as a very human sort of a person, and W&L should exploit that factor. Here was a person, for instance, in the history I have read of Washington, the latest book, they mentioned W&L just one time and it said that he gave his money, the canal stock, to some little inconsequential college up in Virginia.

Well, that made me mad, because that's not true. It's not a little nobody college. It might be a little nobody college because we've never really taken advantage of the fact or exploited the fact of the money that was given to W&L by Washington, and Washington himself.

Washington, to me, in college was a secondary figure, kind of off in the distance, whereas Lee was it. Washington was perched up there, but old George, he was there, but he was almost a myth, whereas Lee was the patron saint of the school, and I think he should continue to be, but I think of the two, Washington's status ought to be even at least equal or even a little more so than Lee, because I think in the future the image of Washington will be more valuable than the image of Lee. Lee was a great guy, the greatest guy of his century in my opinion, but he was a loser. He lost. Washington won. When history is finally written, I think our association with Washington has been underemphasized. Concerning the two, maybe Lee was overemphasized.

Warren: Very interesting point. Very well said, too.

Warner: Yeah, and we ought to get more of Washington in the chapel and in the little museum. Washington was really a more interesting man than Lee. He was something, Washington was. He controlled the extreme right and extreme left all in his Cabinet and took advantage of their abilities, no matter where they were, and about the only guy in the world that could do that. I mean, he could use Jefferson, he could use Hamilton, he could use all in between. He wasn't one side, he was a centrist and was a very, very – he used intellectuals even writing his speeches, but he was in awe of none of them. He was really the kind of a leader that was – he didn't have all the Ph.D., he hardly had a grade school education, but he was country smart and he knew how to handle people and he knew how to lead a nation. He was the glue that held this country together. It might well have just fallen apart, easily fallen apart without him.

Warren: Well, he needed you for a spokesman.

Warner: Yeah, that's right. Well, he's going to get me. He's going to get a lot of the rest of us, too. We should get Washington, really, back into the picture in a big way. After all, it will be – he died in 1799, too.

Warren: Nice coincidence of years there, isn't there?

Warner: Yeah, coincidence of years, and we should emphasize that. He's become an enigma with people. They don't know who he was. They've taken him out of the school books. Washington and Lee should be in the vanguard of getting him back into the school books. You got to be an activist to get in the school books of some kind.

Warren: With you and Jim Whitehead at the head of the charge –

Warner: We'll get him back in here where he belongs.

Warren: George will do just fine.

Warner: He was a very human person, too, very human. Interesting. Very interesting.

Warren: Well, I know we need to wind this up, but there is one time I would really like you to tell me about. What was it like to be at the dedication of the Warner Center?

Warner: It was great. I loved it.

Warren: How did you find out about it? When did they tell you they were going to do it?

Warner: They just hardly told me at all. They really didn't, except the dedication, I really didn't think that Doremus Gym and all that. It was great. Washington and Lee will be here forever, as far as I'm concerned. There will always be those that love it. What's that song that goes, "Whether friendships fail or friends be few, we'll love thee still, our alma mater, our dear old W&L U." I think there's real heart in that. College Friendships, I think they called it. Yeah, people remember that. You remember your friends. Some of them fail, some friendships failed and friends be few, but you still look upon them as friends.

Warren: Now, you're not taking me to that day, though. Tell me about the dedication of the Warner Center.

Warner: Well, really, I don't care about the dedication of the Warner Center much, but what I want to do is to maybe help W&L recognize their heritage more and let's have a dedication of maybe some Washington paintings or something like that that I'd give them. I'd love that much more than the damn gym myself. We got to get some art appreciation there. I think art, by the way, is going to be a big thing in universities. Every school I go to are all extremely interested in—I think it's due to the country becoming more mature and art becomes more important in people's lives. Young people—my grandson is just crazy about art.

Warren: I should think so.

Warner: He's just barely eight and he'll go to this artist, this fellow here in town that paints, just as a hobby, and he sits down there and talks to him. He said, "I'm interested in art. Would you show me some pictures?" The artist was telling me about it. He said Cabe was just like a client coming in there and he said he'd show him some and what he was interested in and what he wasn't. He said, "I've saved my money that my grandfather gave me last Christmas and I'm interested in buying a piece of art." This guy was talking to me and he said, "Well, this picture's real nice, but this one might appreciate in value a little bit more than the other one." He said, Cabe said, "Well, I'm not interested in appreciation and value because I don't intend to sell any of my art."

[Laughter]

Warren: That's marvelous.

[End of interview]