

SHAWN COPELAND

—
September 21, 1996

Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the twenty-first of September, 1996, with Shawn Copeland in Lexington, Virginia, and it hasn't been all that long ago that you left Lexington, Virginia.

Copeland: That's correct.

Warren: Well, what made you come here in the first place?

Copeland: Well, I'm originally from Charleston, West Virginia. My family still lives there, and for whatever reason when I was going through junior high school and high school, my attention, up until about my junior year in high school, was focused primarily west of Charleston to Ohio and Indiana. My dad had gone to University of Michigan and Indiana, and my mother is a hairdresser, and has been, and still is, cutting the hair of a woman named Stuart Smith, who is the wife of a former trustee of Washington and Lee, Ike Smith. She heard that I was looking around at certain schools and thought it would be a good idea if my parents introduced me to Lexington and to Washington and Lee.

The spring of my junior year, my father took a week off from work during my spring break, and we were going to do an abbreviated college visit, and since we

couldn't visit all the schools I was interested in, he thought it'd be best if we looked at some mix of big schools and small schools and private schools and public schools. We started in Lexington with little ol' Washington and Lee. I remember pulling into the parking lot at the foot of the campus next to the Lee Chapel, and walking up through the trees and seeing the Colonnade, and I almost immediately I felt like this was the place. It was just beautiful, it was collegiate-looking, and I had a wonderful visit here.

My dad, while I was being interviewed, I think, in the Admissions Office, joked about walking from one end of town to the next. He thought that the University of Michigan was the place to be, because it was huge, it was cosmopolitan, its campus offered everything you could ever want, it was like a smorgasbord, he used to boast. And so for all proposes, for all intents and proposes, the trip, for me, ended here with our first stop. After that, we went out West and looked at some schools, University of Michigan being one of them. I didn't even apply to the University of Michigan.

But I applied to Washington and Lee, and was fortunate enough to be accepted. It really wasn't much of an issue for me. There were some other schools that some might think were more prestigious, that I either had been admitted to or was on the waiting list. I gave it some pause thinking, well, maybe, maybe other people are right, but in my gut, I felt like this was the right place.

Warren: What other schools?

Copeland: Harvard and Georgetown, the main ones. Then there's the state school down the road, UVA. I should also say that another factor that influenced my decision to come to Washington and Lee was, I was a swimmer in high school, and I wanted to continue to swim, and, if possible, play water polo in college. I'd never played water polo before, but I was kind of on the borderline where I could have competed at a Division II or maybe even a Division I school, but it would have been

a big commitment, and I would not have been a big fish, so to speak, I would have been a small fish in a big pond. I also didn't want to shortchange the kind of education I was getting. I was afraid that would happen at a place that even offered the possibility of an athletic scholarship. At that time, Page Remillard, who's still the swim coach here, was in touch with me when he learned of my interest, and I sent him all my times, and he was very instrumental also in reassuring me that this was the right place to come to. It was a done deal from very early on, and I'd never looked back, I think, after I made that decision.

My father, who for all his boasting about how small and rinky-dink and elitist Washington and Lee was, at the time that I was in high school, now ten years later, I think would be quick to admit that this place was the right place for me, that I made the right decision, and he can see that my relationship with Washington and Lee is continuing even after I'm gone as a student. He has very little contact with his schools that he went to, other than watching them play football on TV, which I can't do exactly with W&L.

Warren: You arrived in 1986?

Copeland: I did. You know, last night as I was driving over here from Richmond, I was reflecting on my time here, and it struck me, the date struck me, that it was ten years ago this fall that I first set foot on campus as a student. Actually, water polo is a fall sport, and, like football, we have a preseason, which means that the athletes are required to come back before the beginning of classes. Significantly, in the case of water polo, we're usually back, I think at that time, was the beginning of the second week of August, or maybe the—I don't want to embellish too much, but maybe it was the middle of August, but it was a good three weeks before classes started, and would have three practices a day, at least. We always used to joke about the football team complaining about their two-a-days, and about how rough it was, and I think we viewed ourselves as the true elite, the Green Berets or the SEALs, maybe is a

more appropriate analogy, of the athletes at W&L, just because we did spend a lot of time at it. We were up early, and either training on land or in the water until late at night on occasions.

Warren: And you all did pretty well.

Copeland: We did, for a small school. You know, off the top of my head, I don't know what our win-loss record was in all of my seasons I played, but we competed against larger schools on the East Coast that some of which were scholarship schools, Division I schools, or schools that were perennially powerhouses, because they drew from a bigger pool of athletes and applicants, like the Naval Academy and Brown. We competed very favorably against them. We had a lot of success against comparably sized Division III schools.

But when I first showed up on campus, I had picked up a water polo ball maybe twice in my life, and here I was, kind of a scrawny, I was a little underweight for my size when I showed up, was in very good condition, because I had a high school swim coach who was of the school of thought that the more the better, so you could swim from dawn 'til dusk. But the first year or two was just a time really for me learning and watching the more experienced players and the upperclassmen and learning from them, sometimes through painful mistakes, but—

Warren: Tell me about water polo.

Copeland: About water polo in general, or water polo at Washington and Lee, or both?

Warren: Yes, both.

Copeland: Water polo, in general—have you ever seen a game?

Warren: No, but you've raised my interest.

Copeland: Well, if you have a chance, you should walk over to the pool one weekend when the team's playing and see it. I like to describe it as hockey, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, and wrestling in a pool. Of course, no pads, other than a

slight headgear, and it's a goal—you know, the lay of the field is much like in soccer or hockey, with two goals and a goalie. It's a very demanding sport. It's not much fun to play if you're not conditioned to play it, and so that's why we spent so much time conditioning in August of every year.

I think Washington and Lee is fortunate to have, and still is fortunate to have, Page Remillard here. He really brought water polo to Washington and Lee. I think it had been played at some level before he came here, but he came from Southern California, the Mecca of water polo in the United States, where people play water polo like a pickup game, like people play pickup basketball or football here in the East Coast, or on any playground on the East Coast, and so he was a great teacher. He had a knack for attracting talented athletes who are also interested in Washington and Lee experience.

My generation, I think, I'm sure all athletes kind of go back as they think back upon their time, romanticize, glorify the time that they spent there, but we had a cluster of, I'd say, ten or fifteen, probably about ten swimmers and water polo players, men who were really pretty tight together. Over time, even before I got here, we came to be known as Sigma Aqua, kind of a mock fraternity. Most of us were independents, we were not members of fraternities, although some of us were fraternity members. But generally we were spending so much time either at practice, or away on weekends at games, or during the swim season at swim meets that it really didn't make much sense to us to be paying dues to fraternities for other people to buy beer for other people.

So naturally we spent so much time together that we grew very close, and we even had a house on Henry Street, one-way at Henry Street, across from a little Pentecostal church with a black congregation. We kind of made strange neighbors, I think. But there, I think five or six of us that would live there every year, and it was called Sigma Aqua, and everyone around campus knew it as Sigma Aqua. I think

we competed pretty favorably, not only in the water, but also on the weekends when we were around, and we saw fit to throw a party. We had a pretty good crowd that we attracted. We had fun with Christmas parties and Homecoming and other times like that. We would have cocktail parties, sometimes invite professors over, and it was a really neat experience.

People often ask me what life was like as an independent at Washington and Lee, given the strength of the fraternity system here, and I really think that had it not been for that group of friends and that association, that loose association of athletes that we had, it would have been a much different experience, because we, in a sense, were more of a fraternity than a lot of so-called fraternities, or Greek organizations, where I mean we really had something deep that we shared, and that we shared in each other's lives pretty closely just because of the amount of time that we spent with one another.

I mean, we're here in the library now, and my memory races back to what a typical day would be like. We would wake up in the morning, and although during the academic year, two practices a day were not sanctioned by the school, I mean, you could not mandate that athletes do that for academic reasons, but nevertheless, an optional practice, not truly optional, in the sense in the morning, could take place, and if it was unsupervised, if there weren't coaches barking and whatnot, and we would, most of us on the water polo team and swim team, would be up in the morning in the weight room before class, and get showered and changed and go to breakfast together in the dining hall, and then we would go to class.

Then at three o'clock, practice would start up, and we'd practice from three o'clock to six o'clock. And then we'd go to dinner together in the dining hall. And then usually around seven, we would wander to the library in a pack, and stay here until probably eleven or twelve or so, and then usually walk back to Sigma Aqua together, or to wherever we were living, if we weren't living at Sigma Aqua. It was

a neat experience. We were often haggard by the end of the day, and we would take breaks, taking naps underneath the study carrels and waking each other up to study, probably less studying and more napping that actually got done here. But it was a real neat time in my life, and there is a real camaraderie with those guys that we still share.

I mean, I'm going in two weeks to the wedding of one of these guys, and was at another's wedding just a month ago. We still keep in touch, and still relive the glory days as much as we can. And you know, we're all now at points in our lives about, a few of us are, I think I might be the only attorney. I think there are two or three that are doctors and one is a CPA, and one is a television broadcaster in Charlotte and is trying to break onto the scene. One's a first lieutenant in the marine corps. So it was a very neat experience. I don't know that my life, my experience at Washington and Lee, would have been as rosy as it was, as an independent on this campus, were it not for that.

Warren: Do you think you would have been an independent if you weren't on the swim team?

Copeland: That's a good question. I think probably I would have joined a fraternity. I would have joined a fraternity. Although we had members of—I guess we were pretty open, we had people on the team, when I say the team, usually I refer to both the water polo team and the swim team, because most people who did one, also did the other. Or I should say most water polo players, almost all of them, also swam, although not all the swimmers played water polo. But we had some that were dual citizens. They were both Sigma Chi or Phi Delt, who were also Sigma Aqua. But I didn't really see the need to be a member of a formal fraternity.

Warren: Did you tell me about when you got into law school, you did join a fraternity?

Copeland: Yeah, that was an interesting experience and turn of events. I took two years in between college and law school, and when I came back to campus, through some contacts that I had from my undergraduate days, there were a few folks at the Sigma Phi Epsilon House, which in my days as an undergraduate was known as the SPE House, and still sometimes is, but I think there's been a campaign initiated it by the house and by the national fraternity to refer to it as Sig Ep, because they thought that SPE was somehow derogatory. I don't see—I'm not exactly clear about that.

But in any event, when I came back, I was approached by a couple of these guys, and they asked me if I'd be interested in being what was called a resident scholar for the house. And that is a position that is—I'm not sure it's unique to SPE, but it's not an office that all of the houses at Washington and Lee have. Those houses have the traditional panoply of student officers, the president and treasurer and vice president, social chairman, and whatnot. Then they have a house advisor, an academic advisor, a member of the faculty or staff, who's their formal liaison to the faculty and to the administration.

I fell someplace in between the two as the resident scholar at Sigma Phi Epsilon. Because of the friendship that I had with some of these folks, I accepted it, and I really didn't fully start in the position until I was a second-year law student, and it was kind of neat. They actually initiated me. I didn't have to go through a pledgship, as if I were a freshman. When the end of my first year of law school came around, it was time that they were initiating their new undergraduate members, they actually initiated me, and it's been a wonderful thing. It's like I've had the best of both worlds, going through the first time as an undergraduate, and not being involved in the Greek system, and then as a law student, being involved with it in the very loose sense. I mean, I didn't spend a lot of time at the fraternity through law school, but there are friends that I made through that position that I imagine I'll have for some time, a couple there that are in Richmond right now,

where I live, that I keep up with and see regularly, and others who have scattered across the country.

Warren: It sounds great to be a resident scholar. Very flattering.

Copeland: Yeah. I carried a pretty heavy load. Actually, I think the job description of the resident scholar was essentially to oversee the academic standing of the brothers, to help advise them, make sure that they were academically squared away. I didn't have to lift a finger, really, in that department, because just year in and year out, that fraternity has been either the top, or among the top, couple of fraternities academically. And really the guys in that house have been self-starters, and so my formal responsibilities there, or the tasks that went along with it, were really pretty light, thanks to the guys. So most of what I did was just hang around every now and again and get to know them.

I did attend house meetings, and at times, I think, because of my experience in having gone through four years here, and spending some time in the working world and coming back, I was able sometimes to temper a response here and there, or to offer a point of view that maybe the house wasn't seeing on a particular issue or something, but by and large, I don't feel like I had to do a whole lot. What I did there was essentially what I chose to do, and it was a great opportunity for me to, again, sort of be a part of the fraternity system, without having to lug along the baggage that goes on along with it. A free ride.

Warren: You did well, Shawn. Another thing that's interesting about the time that you were here, is that you arrived with the second year of women.

Copeland: Yeah. And I'm sure as you talk to other people from my generation, there's probably a couple of schools of thought on this, but I never was one of the Washington and Lee men whose first choice, in terms of dating or social interaction with women, was "down the road" at one of girls' schools where, I guess now that I'm twenty-eight, I should call it women's colleges, but from the time that I showed

up on campus—well, let me back up a step. When I showed up as a freshman, the junior and senior classes were still all male. They were still fighting the coeducation battle. I mean, there are all kinds of teeshirts and bumper stickers that were still being printed anew. Some of them were pretty crass, and some of them were pretty humorous, some of them were good-natured, and some of them were just mean-spirited.

I think, again, a lot of the ways that I looked at the landscape of Washington and Lee was affected by my relationship with the aquatics team. Again, I mean, in a sense that folks on those teams, and my friends there, they had first crack at me. I showed up as a freshman three weeks before any of the other freshmen, or any of the other students showed up, and there was no one else around on campus but those folks.

At that time, that was the second year of the women's swim team. The first of the women's swim team had three women swimmers. I think my year probably added another four or five to that. I don't know what it was, but it wasn't as though I looked at students from the women's colleges as somehow contraband or anything, or less desirable, it's just that I tended to date and spend time with girls that I had met on campus in class or on the swim team.

I did have a few limited experiences going down the road, as they say. I dated a girl at Sweet Briar, I think when I was, let's see, I think it was the spring term of my sophomore year. I'm glad that I had that opportunity because the spring term is always a nice time around Washington and Lee. I got to spend probably as much time at Sweet Briar as I did in Lexington that spring, and it was a neat thing to be able to do. I just tended to spend time on this campus, and I think the aquatics team was generally that way as well. Those members of the team that were in fraternities, I think particularly when they were freshman and sophomores, they would spend a fair amount of time at fraternity functions, or at some of the women's colleges. But

really they kind of grew out of it, too, and it just seemed the more natural thing to do, to spend time with the people that you get to know on a daily basis around campus here.

Warren: Did you find yourselves in the minority doing that? Was your circle of friends, or was that in general you saw that happening?

Copeland: My freshman year, I'd say probably the minority. Then as the years went by, there were more women on campus here, and the classes that were all male and that could drive the road to Sweet Briar or Hollins with their eyes closed, as they graduated and moved on, the school, as you would expect, became much more accustomed to coeducation and it became more a way of life. Gradually, over time, it became the norm, as it is, I expect, right now. I think still it's most heavily in the Greek system where you'll find people dating outside of the Washington and Lee community, and even within those circles, I would imagine it's probably the freshmen and sophomores. I've reached that point now where I'm no longer an expert on that in this era.

Warren: Did you get pressure from the upperclassmen? You particularly, did you see pressure? Did you see behavior that was unwelcoming to the women?

Copeland: Well, yeah, as I mentioned, the teeshirts and bumper stickers. I'm trying to think of all the memorable ones that come to mind are so crass that I'm not comfortable sharing them. But I think I never felt like, at least in terms of pressure directed at me, I never felt like I was under the gun to go down the road, so to speak, and that the fact that I was dating someone here was somehow a strike against me. I never got that impression. Although I can understand how the women in my class, and the class ahead of me, and the class behind me, and maybe for a couple years after, would have felt that they weren't first on the list of a lot of guys to take to

Fancy Dress. But it's funny, because they stuck up for themselves, I mean, pretty effectively.

I remember—what was the name of it—there was some association of W&L women, I don't remember what the acronym was, but they printed up some teeshirts maybe you've come across. I'm talking so much about teeshirts. I think that battles like this, and messages, are still communicated on college campuses through teeshirts. I was just telling a friend of mine that we were out buying replacement teeshirts for the ones that have worn out, but I was telling him that as I've been unpacking from a recent move, I was digging through all these old teeshirts. I used to be of a mind that you could never have too many of them, and now I'm starting to reconsider that view, unpacking teeshirt after teeshirt from you know, Fancy Dress teeshirts from 1986, for the past ten years. I think I have just about every Fancy Dress teeshirt, from Foxfield races and from all kinds of W&L events that are advertised, and issues that were going on around campus, they ended up teeshirts.

In any event, the battle of coeducation was waged in part on the chests of men and women at Washington and Lee. The women, I remember, came up with these teeshirts that sold quite well, not only among women, but I think the bolder men wore them, too. I don't know how many there were, but women—this is probably derogatory, but women who were referred to as "cheese" around campus, and if you were dating someone from a woman's school from off campus, they were referred to as "road cheese," because you'd go down the road. And so I remember these teeshirts they printed up, there was a wedge of Swiss cheese on wheels, traveling down a road, with the big red circle, slash mark over top of it. It was really, really witty. I think the women who showed up on campus really, they sold themselves, in a sense.

Warren: Tell me what you mean by that.

Copeland: I think there was probably some concern amongst the board of trustees, the faculty, and administration about how are we going to communicate to the students that women being here is a good thing. How can we win them over? I think the best way that they could do that, and that they did that, was by admitting the women that they did, because it was, in a sense, a product that spoke for itself. I think a lot of guys who probably thought by golly, they were gonna still go to Hollins and Sweet Briar and Mary Baldwin, and they were going to resist this coeducation to the very end. They found themselves getting to know women around campus and thinking, "Why am I holding on to this silly notion that somehow it's less desirable to spend time with them?" That's just human nature, I think, that barriers like that are broken down once communication is initiated, so they were, particularly, I think, the first couple of classes.

I think about some of the women in those classes, and you know, you've got to wonder what kind of woman wants to be among the first coed classes at a small institution like this. I know this is an issue that VMI and the Citadel is facing now, that the service academies faced back, I guess, in the seventies. But a lot of them were just real firecrackers, I mean just spitfires, and were really remarkable people, and I count it a blessing that I was able to get to know a number of them and can still call them friends. Now they're out in the world doing wonderful things, whether it's in the professions, or raising families, or whatever else. I mean, they're just as effective ambassadors of Washington and Lee as any man who graduated from this place.

Warren: The ones I met from those first couple classes are very impressive people, I can tell you.

Copeland: Am I allowed to ask who?

Warren: Alexa Salzman.

Copeland: Oh, yeah.

Warren: I fell in love with her.

Copeland: She's wonderful. Is she back for the soccer game this weekend?

Warren: No. She was here in June. We had a seminar about the first ten years, and she and Dallas Hagewood.

Copeland: Dallas was in my class.

Warren: Yeah, and I interviewed both of them, and they just knocked me out. Really just knocked me out.

Copeland: There's another woman whose name might have popped up. Mary Alice McMorrow was in my class, who was another remarkable go-getter. She probably, in some senses, was less diplomatic or less given to diplomacy, say, than maybe Dallas or Alexa, but I think played an important role in the coeducation process. She was very adamant about standing up for the women that were on campus here, while still not fully being what you would think of being labeled a feminist in any—

Warren: Do you know where she is now?

Copeland: Let's see, Mary Alice was with Proctor and Gamble in Cincinnati, but she has since moved to the West Coast. I believe she's in Los Angeles. I don't know who she's with. This will give you an idea of what kind of person she is. She went and worked for Proctor and Gamble in Cincinnati, and then went to business school at the Darden School in UVA, got an MBA, and now she's maybe with an investment banking firm or something, I don't know, but I'm sure that Jim Farrar would be able to track her down. They're better than the IRS. [Laughter]

Warren: Nobody escapes this place. But you know, Shawn, there's a real little item here that we haven't talked about at all, and that's academics. I presume you did come here to go to classes.

Copeland: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Warren: Tell me a bit about your academic experiences.

Copeland: Sure. I guess I've only not talked about it, because the questions, the open-ended questions, haven't sort of led me there. I think, also, because I always assume that as a given when I talk about showing up on campus and seeing it, falling in love with it, and knowing it was the right place. Part of that was just seeing the classrooms, seeing how big the classrooms were. I can't say that I knew anybody at that time that had come to Washington and Lee. But academically, I wouldn't have been here in the first place if Washington and Lee had not fit the academic bill for me. I was fortunate to go to probably one of the best public schools in West Virginia. They had challenging courses that prepared me, I think, fairly well for college experience.

I showed up on campus, and I remember my freshman year, thinking that I was going to be able to kind of coast along, that it would be a lot like high school, since I had such what I thought was a rigorous high school experience. The truth was, in high school—and I don't mean to sound like I'm some kind of brain trust, because as part of my colleagues or classmates, I'm not, but I didn't have to take a lot of books home in high school, and it seemed to come fairly easily.

Midway through my first semester at Washington and Lee when we got freshmen midterm grades, I realized that this was not going to be that same kind of experience, that you actually had to read the assignments that were given to you, because you're going to be asked about them, if not in class, where it was embarrassing if you didn't know the answers, on exams and papers. I think I was a fairly good writer when I got to Washington and Lee. I came from a background where a lot of my exams were in essay formats, so I wasn't uncomfortable having to enter essays, but what they were asking you about, the depth of knowledge that you had to have, whether it was philosophy class or history or economics or politics, and you really had to not only know the stuff, not only be able to regurgitate it, but you were expected to draw on conclusions based upon what you knew.

So the first semester was an adjustment. I think I had a 3.0 after the first semester, and for someone who had never had anything through high school less than a 3.9 or so, that was a shock not only to me, but to Mom and Dad. I think my second semester fared a little bit better. But I think by the time I was a sophomore, I sort of got in line, and had gone through the period of adjustment here and realized what was expected of me, and actually felt inspired to learn. I owe that a lot to professors that I had.

I worked a year in the Admissions Office. One of the years that I spent between college and law school, I spent as the admissions counselor working for Bill Hartog in the Admissions Office, which means that among other things, it's my job to advertise the university. Again, Washington and Lee, I think, it's a product that sells itself, and it was easy for me to go around the country and talk about what a great place it was academically as in other respects, because I felt that way about it. One of the things I would really impress, or try to impress, upon high school students that I would talk to was the kind of relationships that I had been fortunate enough to have with faculty members here, I gathered from friends that had gone to larger institutions that weren't able to have with their professors. Either they weren't being taught by professors, being taught by TAs, or primarily because the classes were just so large and there wasn't the same accessibility to the faculty.

Warren: I need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: Were there particular professors that meant a lot to you?

Copeland: Yeah, one who just recently had retired, Delos D. Hughes, who at the time that I'd shown up on campus was the chairman of the Politics Department, and his nickname around campus was "Easy D" Hughes. Everyone knew him as Easy D, because it was very easy to get a D in his class, a little harder to get a C, fairly difficult to get a B, and virtually impossible to get an A. A fantastic, fantastic teacher. He was

my advisor, so I knew him first as an advisor, and I just liked him. He's kind of a shorter man with gray hair and a beard, who was just warm, and would look at you and ask you a question and smile, and make you feel like he was really happy to be spending time with you, even if he was on his way some place, on his way to class. He just always, always made time for you, or would make time for you if he really was busy. That made a real impression upon me. I ended up being a student of his, and I did not get a D in his class. I think I got a B, but he was difficult.

I'm convinced to this day, although I don't believe in reincarnation, if I did, I would think that he is the reincarnation of Socrates. If ever there is a man who has mastered the Socratic Method, it's Professor Hughes. He was just wonderful. He taught the really big gut course in the Politics Department, Politics 265, Political Theory, Plato through Burke. The reading was very dense and very conceptual when we were talking his political philosophy. He just was fantastic, the way he would ask a question of you that was already at least two leaps beyond simply, "Well, what does Plato have to say about this?" or "What is Rousseau's position on this?" He would assume that you already knew that. He was already two exits down the freeway from you on that, and he wanted to already put you to the test.

I was a politics major here. I had started out pre-med, and after a year in the Science Department, I just didn't think that's what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. My father was an attorney and still is, and I had always been interested in politics, and so I sort of changed gears and became a politics major.

Another influential faculty member was also in the politics department, Ken Ruscio, who's now the associate dean of the Commerce School. At the time that I was here, he was the associate dean of students, I think, for freshmen and residents life, but his specialty was in public policy, and he taught some courses. I got to know him not only through being his student, but also I was a dorm counselor my junior and senior years, and he, as the dean of freshman residents life, was the supervisor,

really the boss of all the dorm counselors, and so I got to know him fairly well through that, too.

I'm trying to think of some other men. Jim Warren in the English Department, who, I think, I don't know how many, but quite a number of girls on campus had crushes on him at the time I was here, and probably still do. But my senior year, the beginning of my senior year, I had looked back on what my academic experience had been, and after I'd taken the core requirement classes, I really concentrated largely on either politics or economics or business administration, the C School courses, because I thought if I decided not to go to law school, which wasn't a sure thing then, you know, "Politics degree is kind of soft, I need to firm it up. I need to have some accounting, maybe some business administration. I need to firm it up a little bit."

Well, the beginning of my senior year, I had this epiphany. I thought, "My goodness, I'm in a liberal arts school, and I need to take advantage of it while I can get it," so I spent my senior year, I think, taking a renaissance approach to my academic diet. So I took an introductory literature course from Jim Warren, which was American literature, I think Whitman through Faulkner, and I loved it. I absolutely loved it. I loved the readings. I loved the work that I did in the course, and I did very well in the course.

I liked Professor Warren just because of the way he dealt with the students and the mastery that he had, and the love that he had for the language. I just seemed to hit it off with him. At one point, he and I were talking, or maybe he put a comment on some paper that he was handing back about, "Too bad you weren't an English major," you know. I was thinking the same thing myself.

Let's see, Clark Mollenhoff, legendary journalist and professor of journalism. During my senior year, my renaissance year, I thought, again, "What am I going to be sorry that I didn't do at Washington and Lee when I graduate?" So I thought, "Clark

Mollenhoff, who is just a giant, you know, I need to know this man, I need to take a course from him." And so I walked into his office one day and I introduced myself, and I said, "I'm not a journalism major, I'm a politics major," and I wanted to try and take, I think, what was essentially a capstone course for the Journalism Department, which really amounted to meeting in his office at a table about this size. He had his desk sitting down at one end of it, and then a table just like this emanating out from it. The students, he limited it to five or six students, and we'd sit around, and most of it consisted of him telling war stories from his days as a reporter in the White House press corps. And when we weren't doing that, he was assigning us to cover—most of it was monitoring the federal government. What's the government up to? So we would order inspector general reports and comb through them, keep abreast of current events affecting particular departments.

In any event, at the beginning of the semester, I walked in, I said, "You know, I really would like to take a course from you, and this will be my last opportunity." He was just this big hulk of a man, who, by that time, had lost an eye to cancer, and recently, I believe, had his salivary glands removed due to cancer. But he was this big hulk of a man, tough as nails, who said, "Well, if you want to be here, you're the kind of person I want to have in this class. Where's the drop-add slip? Let me sign it." So he let me in, and it was a wonderful experience. How much do I really remember about what learned in that? Probably very little, but just the impression that this man made on me, I mean, it truly is inspirational.

I'm sorry I never took a class from Sidney Coulling. I've had a chance to get to know him through his daughter, who was working here the year I worked in the Admissions Office, who was married to a guy named Tim McMahon, who used to work in the Admissions Office, and who was dorm counselor when I was a freshman. Through one means or another, I've gotten to know him on some level, but truly, I feel remiss that I didn't take him for a course. I think that was a mistake.

I wish I could take a course from him. Maybe he's got some free time sometime, and I could take a correspondence course from him.

Warren: Well, I never miss a talk when he's giving a talk. He's a joy.

Well, since you were a politics major, I presume you got involved in Mock Convention.

Copeland: I did. I did.

Warren: Tell me about that. Who was their keynoter that year?

Copeland: I believe the keynote—let's see that would have been 1988, and so the keynote—

Warren: That wasn't Cuomo.

Copeland: Maybe it was Cuomo. Perhaps it was.

Warren: Didn't make much of an impression on you.

Copeland: Well, most people will tell you that Mock Convention is kind of blurry for those of who've been through it as a student.

Warren: Tell me what you mean.

Copeland: Well, there's a lot of partying that goes along with it. As a sophomore, I was still cutting my teeth, I think, with the party scene. Sigma Aqua was never accused of being teetotalers, never accused of being sissies when it came to running with the big dogs late at night. But by the same token, we were all law-abiding and pretty mild-mannered within those confines. I'm trying to think. Bill Clinton.

Warren: So you were at Zollman's when he played?

Copeland: I was not. I wish I could say that I was.

Warren: I wish you say that you were, too. [Laughter]

Copeland: You're trying to find someone?

Warren: Well, Dallas was there.

Copeland: Yeah. And of course there's no shortage of rumors that seem to follow the president around now, and apparently also then, about goings-on.

But, you know, Mock Convention, at that time what I did was limited mainly to helping build the West Virginia float, and then riding on the float with Miss West Virginia. We built a still and put it on the float, and there's actually a picture of me in the yearbook from that year wearing overalls and carrying a jug.

Warren: Your moment of glory.

Copeland: My moment of true glory. I had arrived. I had arrived. But it was a neat experience, even if it was all kind of stiff, to see how the convention process worked, the nominating process. It was neat having someone like Bill Clinton here. I believe—this is horrible. Was it Tip O'Neill that spoke also?

Warren: He's been here sometime fairly recently.

Copeland: I'm pretty sure Tip O'Neill was here along with him. It was just a very festive time in the life of the university.

Warren: Did you get involved in doing research?

Copeland: I did, but it was fairly limited. Mainly what I did, was I solicited donations from alums back in West Virginia to help us build a float.

Warren: So do you feel like you learned anything about politics doing that, or did you learn you about a tradition at Washington and Lee?

Copeland: I think a lot of that is politics. About government, maybe not. But about politics, yeah, I mean, probably in the strict sense, whatever I learned about the political process, in the strict sense was pretty marginal. Honestly, I think if really pressed, I think most people involved with it would tell you the same, except perhaps the people who were involved on the steering committee, who were really at the top echelon of the organization. I think for the rank and file—and I think this is probably pretty realistic—I mean, the rank and file are just kind of there for the festivities. I know watching the two conventions recently, the national conventions, I think it's probably the same with them. I mean, they're there for the fanfare. A lot of it's a production. I think our Mock Convention is pretty realistic in that respect. I

think the people who are behind the scenes in really organizing, orchestrating it, they were digging in gold, in terms of learning a lot about the way the thing works.

Warren: One of the things, I went to the convention this year, and went to every minute of it, I loved it.

Copeland: I came back for it.

Warren: Were you here?

Copeland: Uh-huh.

Warren: I just thought it was so exciting. I thought it was great. You were there, so you know what I'm talking about. One of the things that I found so intriguing was, it was probably on the first night or the second day, that it became very apparent how overjoyed Washington and Lee students were that they didn't have to pretend to be something they weren't. They kept saying they were so excited because this was a Republican convention. In 1988, there was a lot of play-acting going on, I presume.

Copeland: You're exactly right. In fact, there were very mixed emotions about the exercises in 1988, and, I can imagine, mixed emotions in 1992. I was just getting ready to come back to campus from Washington at that point. I spent a year working in Washington. So the political science, the politics degree did actually come into play at some point. But, yeah, I got that feeling, too. It's no secret that such a high percentage of the student body here are politically conservative and call themselves Republican.

So I felt a real release this time that I hadn't seen in years past. In the past, when people would announce, "So the great state of South Dakota proudly casts its (however many) votes for Bill Clinton, the next President of the United States." A lot of that was being said tongue-in-cheek, and now I think this past spring a lot of it was coming from the heart, or at least from the gut.

At W&L, there's never a short on parties, whenever there's Fancy Dress or Mock convention, we're good at doing that, we're really good at doing that.

Warren: Any particularly memorable Fancy Dresses for you?

Copeland: There was one, I think it was my first year here, maybe it was the second year, the Dark Continent, and, of course, the motif was Africa. I remember they had elephant, a baby elephant, out in front of Doremus gym as you walked in, with some other small animals. I think the decorations that year, I remember as being fantastic. There were so many fresh green leaves, jungle-like leaves, that really covered up everything, you couldn't tell that you were in an athletic facility. As Fancy Dresses have come and gone, and I've been at more since 1986 than I haven't been at, you know, you get some where they do a good job of decorating and sort of creating an atmosphere, and others where it's borderline to looking like a prom, I mean a very big expensive prom. But the Dark Continent was pretty fantastic.

I think An Evening Excursion on the Orient Express was another really neat one, because they had just a variety of motifs, different locations along the stop of the Orient Express. It seemed the decorations were good that year. I'm trying to think of performers or occurrences at any of these that made them particularly memorable, but none of them really do, besides the year that B.B. King played for—I don't know how familiar you are with the whole sequence, but we have a Thursday night concert at the Pavilion, where usually a contemporary artist of some sort plays, and then the Ball is on Friday night, and B.B. King played Thursday night one year, and that was fantastic.

All the memories of the Fancy Dress, both in law school and as an undergraduate, were very warm. I loved Fancy Dress during law school, because it was my opportunity to be tour guide, or docent, to a lot of my law classmates who went to school elsewhere. I always took a lot of pleasure in introducing friends and classmates in the law school to what I consider to be really the best sides of Washington and Lee, and I had a lot of fun being able to do that. A lot of fun.

Warren: I had the same pleasure with my husband, taking him to Fancy Dress.

Copeland: You went this past year?

Warren: Oh, yeah. I have not missed an event or a party since I got here. I go to everything.

Copeland: That's great. There's so much to take in.

Warren: I'm just trying to get myself educated, and I pretended I was a freshman.

We're running out of time. I don't want to shortchange this question. Tell me what the honor system means to you.

Copeland: The honor system, for me and my house, is the single most defining aspect of this institution. It is, I think, notable for its simplicity and its clarity in a world that is increasingly complex, where lines are increasingly blurred, and there are frequently more shades of gray than blacks and whites that is almost like the Golden Rule, you know, to do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.

You're expected to do your own work here. You're expected to mind your own property, and not to avail yourselves of others' property, and you're expected to be as good as your word. You will not lie, cheat, or steal. And I think, if I can borrow from the parlance of the Supreme Court, there's a penumbra of the honor system that is as important as the technical confines that you'll find in the White Book, and I think every Washington and Lee graduate will agree that the penumbra is that you are to act responsibly as an adult, even when you're playing, and if you don't, you take responsibility for it. That you are to be a gentleman, and that at the very least, you should feel a sense of loss when you're not. It's aspirational in that sense.

I mean, nobody, besides, perhaps, Robert E. Lee, himself, and Sidney Coulling could be perfect gentlemen. But it's a standard for, I think, men and women alike to live up to. Now as I'm practicing law, I really have seen how important the whole character issue is in terms of being able to rely on someone's word and to know that what they're telling you is the truth. So much of the grease in any kind of transaction, the wheels that turn a business deal, or that help make a resolution of a

conflict go smoothly, rather than getting caught up, has to do with personalities of people involved.

I think particularly when you're amongst your own, when you know you're with someone from Washington and Lee, you know that the concept of the honor system is ingrained in them, and it's important. The reputation of the honor system, certainly in professional fields and regionally around Virginia and the Southeast, people that are familiar with Washington and Lee, I think they still recognize that. But I always come back to, I think, what I just said about the penumbra of the honor system. It's not only that you will not lie, cheat, or steal, but that it really calls you to be the best that you can be in treating other people as you would expect to be treated, to be fair, and to think of others before yourself. All this is trying to define what does it mean to be honorable, what does it mean to be a gentleman. I'm sure that's topics of discussions that will continue to go on until the close of time, but that's the basis of what it means to me.

I will say probably the most poignant time of my years at Washington and Lee occurred as a third-year law student, when I was the president of the student body in the law school, where the president, you're the Student Bar Association president, and one of the responsibilities of the Student Bar Association president is that in the event that there is an open honor trial—I don't know how familiar you are with whole procedure.

Warren: No.

Copeland: Well, the way the honor system works here, roughly, is, there are two level of proceedings. Initially if you are accused of an honor violation, you are brought before the Executive Committee in what's known as a closed hearing, and they vote. There's a hearing that's held, and they vote on whether or not they think you're guilty. If you're found guilty, you have two options. You can either withdraw from the university and go about your merry way, or you can essentially

appeal that decision to a jury of your peers, which is open. It's held in Lee Chapel, usually, and it's open to all members of the Washington and Lee community.

The Student Bar Association, the SBA, president is the judge, or the chair, of that open trial. The executive committee shifts from being, in essence, the judge and the jury in the closed hearing, to being the prosecutor in an open hearing. So essentially there's a third party, a supposedly neutral third party, the SBA president.

The long short of it is, my third year, I was called upon to chair an open hearing in Lee Chapel, which was the first one that the university had seen in, I think, two or three years. Usually there are one or two a year. The proceedings had taken place throughout the whole day. I remember that the jury had retired to deliberate, and everyone was scattered around the front lawn here, waiting for them to come back, and we were all just sitting and waiting.

I got the phone call that they had reached a verdict and they'd be coming back. So I called my sergeants-at-arms, and I told them, "Get everybody back in the chapel, and we'll wait on the jury. We'll have them come in through the basement of the chapel, so that they don't have to walk through the crowd and come up."

So the sergeant-at-arms brought them back in. They were all sitting there. I imagine it was about 5:30 or 6:00 o'clock in the early spring, and the sun was coming through the windows at Lee Chapel, illuminating the chapel with almost an eerie orange glow. I was sitting facing everyone at Lee Chapel, and the chapel was packed. Everyone was waiting to hear the verdict. The jury hadn't come back yet, and there was probably a two-minute wait before the jury came in. It seemed to go on for hours. Every single person I looked at out in the crowd, I was making eye contact with. Everything about the honor system and I think just the gravity of what was taking place, to me, that was the defining moment of it.

I'll never forget that moment and the way that the whole experience just kind of was driven home by the look on everyone's face in the crowd that I made eye

contract with, and realizing that, we, as a community, take the honor system serious enough to go through this. I'll never forget it. Very, very sobering and, I think, very poignant.

So I'd do it again if I had to do it all over. When I was just a freshman, knowing everything I know now, or just a junior or senior high school, I'd do it again. If I'm lucky enough to have any kids, first of all, I want them to go wherever they want to go, but I hope wherever they want to go is Washington and Lee.

Warren: That's a wonderful way to end it, John. Thank you.

Copeland: Thank you. It's been a real pleasure.
[End of interview]