

Conversations with Theodore C.
 (“Ted”) DeLaney, Jr.

VIII: “Fond Memories and Final
Thoughts”

With David S. Peterson, Interviewer

Recorded September 22, 2018

Transcription: Barbara Muller

Video Production: David Pfaff

Series Editor: David S. Peterson

Peterson: Welcome. I'm David Peterson, professor of Renaissance history at Washington and Lee University. It's September 22, 2018, and I'm here in the Mason Taylor New Room with my good friend and distinguished colleague, Professor Theodore C. DeLaney, for the eighth of our conversations about Ted's remarkable life. In the course of talking about your life, we've covered a lot of ground and we've covered many things by means of narrative. I know that there have not always been opportunities for you to talk as fully as you might have liked to have done about some people and their influence on your life. So today I'd like to ask you to dilate a little bit more on some of the people who've had the greatest influence, the greatest impact, on your life. You offered me a few suggestions. Perhaps we should start with your maternal grandmother, Margaret [Jane] Jones Franklin. She seems to have had a great influence on you.

DeLaney: She was not only my grandmother, she was my first teacher. One of the significant things about her is that she was very, very proud of the fact that she had finished college in 1909. The diploma hung on the dining room wall. Of course, it is fairly unusual that women were finishing college that early, but certainly significant a black woman finishing college that early. One of the things that her life and her self-identification as a college graduate may demonstrate, at least with regard to how other people in her situation probably accommodated the truth of what happened with regard to the institution that she attended, when she finished what is now Virginia State University, which is an historically black college, it was then called Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute. Prior to that it was called Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute.

I was very, very curious about these name changes and had to review a book for *Virginia [Magazine of] History and Biography*. This book was a book written by a historian named Adam Fairclough and the name of the book was *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*. I learned from that book that in the early 1900s the Virginia legislature decided that blacks didn't need a collegiate education, and they tried to restructure the college after the Booker T. Washington model. And so they removed everything collegiate from the school and it became Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute. Technically, it was not a college when she was there, but that was something that she never explained to any of us. As one of my cousins said, "She probably would not be happy that I know this."

She had her own kindergarten when I was a boy and she babysat for me, my younger brother, and my cousin while she taught kindergarten. She used first-grade books for her kindergarten—there was no

such thing as a public kindergarten then—and so when her students would go on to grade school, the principal would let them skip grade one. I was always impressed by not only her dignity but the fact that education really mattered to her, and that education was something that was displayed on the dining room wall, with this beautiful diploma that hung on the wall.

She also was a woman who seemed to be in complete control of everything that needed to happen within her household. She was canning and making jellies and preserves and those things during the summer. Aside from a large vegetable garden, there were strawberry patches, there were grapevines, there was a rhubarb patch. There were peach and apple trees, and cherry trees and pear trees. She was canning and preserving all of these things. There was also a chicken yard because then you could still have chickens in Lexington. A small plot of land that was also productive with regard to producing food that was going to be consumed by the family. An outstanding woman. It seems to me that it's important to remember ancestors like that, particularly ancestors who have a powerful influence.

Peterson: Is she one of the reasons you frequented the library as a boy?

DeLaney: Possibly. She certainly would have been one of the reasons that I would have been a reader as a boy, because she taught me how to read and she taught me how to write, and so my first teacher and my grandmother. Her demise is tragic. My grandfather died in '51 and she wouldn't die until '58, but two or three years after he died, she began to enter into the world of dementia. She spent the last years of her life institutionalized for Alzheimer's. Sort of a tragic way to leave the earth for anybody at any point in history is to lose the ability to have your cognitive functions about you.

Peterson: It must have been hard for you. I'm inferring through all of this that you were very close and very warm toward her.

DeLaney: Yes, she did mean a great deal to me. Unfortunately, my mother and my aunts were unable to take care of her when she had Alzheimer's. She would wander and that was a real problem.

Peterson: Did you have to help look after her?

DeLaney: Actually not. There was one incident where I was taking her from my aunt's house to my mother's house. She had hold of my wrist and I was just a boy. I'm not even sure I was a teenager yet. She led me to what is now the Nelson Street Bridge. The Nelson Street Bridge was built right across in

front of a two-story house that's no longer there that was the house of her parents. Then, when we got there, she was totally confused. Because of the difficulty of taking care of her, the family doctor suggested that she needed to be someplace that they could take care of her. There were no nursing homes and those kinds of options then. There were four state mental hospitals and the only one for blacks was in Petersburg, ironically, which is where she went to college. And so she spent the last four years of her life in Central State Mental Hospital in Petersburg, and died in 1958. By that time I was in high school. But she certainly was a very, very important person with regard to the beginning of my education and also a very, very important person with regard to somebody who really stressed the importance of dignity and the way you appear to the public and to other people. She was very, very conscious of her own image with regard to other people. She always is somebody who's sort of out there, in the back of my mind somewhere, who is worthy of note, and certainly worthy of great note.

Peterson: She invested a lot of time in you and your siblings.

DeLaney: Right.

Peterson: You've mentioned several times the importance of the Catholic Church in your upbringing. Would you like to talk a little bit about Father Carl Rykowski?

DeLaney: Sure. That jumps way away from coming up in the Catholic Church to being an adult man who is sort of challenged by this almost renegade priest. I can't remember exactly the years in the 1960s that he was at St. Patrick's, but it was sort of mid-1960s. For a short time after I left the monastery I was not really active in the church and then I sort of became active again. This guy gets assigned to St. Patrick's and he's so excited about the Second Vatican Council that he's implementing changes in the liturgy before they're officially approved. Students absolutely loved this guy and the old guard in the church pretty much blamed him for the changes that they didn't like.

Peterson: Guitars in the church and this sort of thing?

DeLaney: Even short of guitars, you're going from the Latin mass to English and, of course, that is a switch that jolts some people like crazy. Some of our friends who are in the Episcopal church go to the eight-o'clock service at the Episcopal church because they use the 1928 prayer book and find anything other than King James' English appalling. It's a good analogy to the problem with switching from Latin

to English. But guitars? Yes, and of course guitars predate the organ, but guitars in church ... Also, when the guitars were introduced to the church when he was pastor, a lot of it was contemporary music that students liked, and the students pretty much had free reign to select the music that was going to be at mass.

He confronted me once about what I was doing for other people. At the time I thought I was doing service because I was a Scout leader when I was in my early twenties and I thought that was important. I told him what I was doing and he just repeated the question, "What are you doing for other people?" I think that what he saw there is there were a lot of people in greater need than the boys that I was working with in the Scouts, and he was right. He was sort of pulling my strings with regard to social justice and the idea that there is a dimension of service in this world that is far more important than helping middle-class kids in a Scout troop. He became a really close personal friend.

I saw him do things that if there had been some of the old guard in the church who had witnessed these things, they would have had exactly what they needed to call the bishop and get him removed. I'll give you an example. When he was the pastor, then the pastor still lived next door to the church in the house that's next door to the church that we call the parish house. There would be a coffee there every Sunday morning between the eight-thirty mass and the ten-thirty mass that was for the students. There were a lot of Catholic college students in Lexington even then, particularly at VMI. One morning I was in the rectory and he came over from the church. Cadets were practicing music and there was a lot of conversation; students were in the parish house. Then, all of a sudden, there was quiet, and I heard him say the words, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." He literally absolved all the students that were in the rectory. One student said, "Father, does this mean that we don't have to go to confession?" He said, "Why would you go to confession? I just absolved you from your sins." I thought, I know enough about the Church to know that this would get you in big trouble, but he didn't really care about getting in trouble, and the effect that he was having on students was incredible. The students thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. On the other hand, the parish council was out to get him. He was having a really hard time with them.

Because of my friendship with him, he sort of bestowed on me a real shocker as far as tasks that he wanted me to do. One Sunday he wanted to know what time I had to be at work the next morning. I told him and he said, "Do you mind stopping by here before work?" I stopped by and he was dressed in

civilian clothes. He handed me the keys to his car, to the rectory, to the church, and said, "Give me an hour to get out of town before you tell anybody." And so he left the active priesthood.

Peterson: Like that? With no announcement, no forewarning?

DeLaney: No forewarning. I waited an hour before I called the president of the parish council or whomever I called. I don't even remember at this point. I was very sad about that. I understood that it was something that he had to do. But with regard to my understanding of social justice and my caring about people who are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, it was pretty much inspired by my friendship with him. I don't think he was with St. Patrick's more than two or three years, but there aren't many people at St. Patrick's now who remember him. I'm sure that the people who are old enough to remember him are no more than a handful, but he was an interesting person.

Peterson: Did he push other people as much as he seems to have pushed you?

DeLaney: He surely did. He certainly would have pushed other people although I can't remember specific sermons.

There was so much that was going on in the Church at the time that was really exciting. The monastery that I'd been in, the Graymoor Friars, were pretty much almost in the avant-garde of the Catholic Church. They were very excited about the opening of the Second Vatican Council, but the Second Vatican Council left them behind. It went even further than the Graymoor Friars perhaps would have liked. What the toll is on the people in the parishes is incredible. It's hard to imagine the number of people who probably left the Church, and maybe left the Church for twenty years or more before they came back, but were angry about the changes that were implemented by the Second Vatican Council.

For a lot of priests—and this guy liked for people to call him Father Pete—for a lot of priests like him it's kind of a kill the messenger kind of thing. Everybody could read in the newspapers about the Second Vatican Council. It was an unusual event that John XXIII had called a Vatican Council and that these enormous changes were being implemented. It's national news. It's international news, but the people who sometimes became the whipping boys for these changes were the parish priests who implemented them. This is certainly an example, and certainly an example that I got to witness. I never heard from him again, which was also something that was tragic. The other thing that I did recently,

they've started putting pavers down in places over at the church, and I paid to have a paver with his name on it. I thought that that was something that I needed to do. Certainly he was someone who was very important with me by inspiring me to care about social justice.

Peterson: And his sudden departure didn't disillusion you? He sounds like a complicated man.

DeLaney: Well, the sudden departure didn't bother me so much because I had left Catholic religious life myself. And even though I hadn't been in final vows or anything like he was, I was not ordained, I certainly understood the process of people leaving. It was sad to see him leave and he was a good friend, but then he was moving into the secular world and he probably felt it was inappropriate to continue contact with me. I don't know ...

Peterson: Another priest who I guess was influential is Father John Behen?

DeLaney: Yes, and he's about two priests later. This guy was a real academic. This guy had a PhD in canon law. He used to be the secretary of his religious community, which was the Precious Blood Fathers, and at international meetings he would take the minutes of the meeting in Latin. He was a real versatile intellect and probably ideal for a parish in a college town. Maybe because both Father Pete and Father Behen when they arrived in Lexington, I was somebody who was active in the parish and I was young and unmarried, and so I became very good friends with Father Behen. As my relationship developed with Pat, who had pretty much defied her family, or particularly her mother—she had sort of backed away from the Church—when it looked like we were headed for the altar to be married and I introduced her to Father Behen, her attitude about the Church completely changed. In the first place, he was an exuberant person. He was very happy and he was a charming guy.

He also was courageous with regard to his beliefs that were controversial at the time politically. I remember one weekend, I think this may have been after Nixon mined the harbors of Hai Phong, he preached sermons at all three masses about the immorality of the Vietnam war, and at all three masses VMI people walked out. He certainly wasn't happy with people walking out of the mass, but he was courageous enough to dig his heels in with regard to his understanding of morality. At the time, there were a lot of religious figures who viewed what was going on with Vietnam as totally immoral and totally inappropriate, and so it was really sort of interesting to be a part of watching the courageous stance that he took.

He was the priest who was still here when our child was born. He and another priest who was a friend of ours baptized Damien together. Pat and I had great fun with this guy and he was at St. Patrick's for about seven years. Once again, it just ends up promoting my commitment to social justice. During his pastorship at St. Patrick's, I started doing things also for the diocese. For a while I was on the diocesan social justice commission and even served as the chair of that commission for a while. It was like an extension of what had been started with the pastorate of Father Pete, and so those two people were extremely important for me.

Peterson: And you've mentioned Pat. By this time she's come into your life.

DeLaney: Yes, Pat has always been influential in my life. Well, not always, because she hasn't always been there, but certainly from the very first moment we became friends. Our friendship at first was not a romantic friendship, and it certainly was not a romantic friendship for five years. It was a friendship where we had a lot in common with our appreciation of the same kinds of music, the same kinds of art, the same kinds of literature, that kind of thing.

Peterson: What kind of music, for example?

DeLaney: Both of us have pretty broad tastes in music. We both like classical music as well as contemporary music. In the late '60s, we were all over the place with music. I can't say this for Pat but the only kind of music I don't like is bluegrass. Pat and I both love classical music. I like opera better than she does but we both like jazz. We both like Motown. I still listen to Motown, she doesn't, and I think that she's sort of gone beyond that in her life. At the time we would also listen to heavy metal, and so there was a wide span of music that we listened to. There weren't many young black people in the late '60s , early '70s, who were listening to heavy metal.

Peterson: No, I don't see you with Iron Butterfly.

DeLaney: No, no, and that's not to say that my preference wasn't for Motown. There were a lot of folk singers who were white that I really liked the stuff that they did, so that kind of music. We both liked art. We both appreciated abstract art. We got involved in local politics, and got involved in local politics because we both worked together to help the first black guy elected to city council win. We were doing stuff like that together and in [June 2] 1973, Father Behen married us. We were married at the end of

her junior year in college and that was the year of the Arab oil embargo. She was going to come home on weekends.

Peterson: She was at Emory and Henry College at the time.

DeLaney: And Emory and Henry's three hours away, or I was going to go down there for weekends. Then there was the Arab oil embargo and gas rationing and so it was not necessarily a reality that we got to see each other on every weekend. She had a girlfriend in college who was from Boones Mill, which is just south of Roanoke, and sometimes she would ride up with the girlfriend. One time they ran out of gas and the girlfriend's boyfriend had some gasoline stash that he took to their rescue. After Pat graduated college, there was constant nudging. "You've got to do the same thing." At the time I had no college credits at all. Eventually, I did the college education stuff.

Peterson: She was pretty fundamental in steering you in that direction, wasn't she?

DeLaney: And oftentimes pretty adamant about it. In any case, with regard to that kind of influence, it was very important because without her shoving I probably wouldn't have done it.

The other part of it is the sacrifices that she made because, when I quit my job to become a full-time student, we sold our house. We sold our house at her father's suggestion. Her mother had died and her father worked for the Federal Aviation Administration. He was getting ready to work in New York for two years, and he said, why don't you guys live in my house rent-free for two years and sell your house. So we sold our house, which ended up freeing us tremendously financially but probably creating problems for us on the other end of my educational journey. Getting rid of the house was certainly a sacrifice that she was part of. She also had a professional job that certainly didn't have a great salary.

Peterson: This is as treasurer [of the City of Lexington]?

DeLaney: As treasurer. She was appointed treasurer at first and that was in 1974, as I recall. The old treasurer had retired mid-term. Then she had to run for election every time thereafter. Certainly the job paid better than, say, an administrative assistant would make any place in Lexington at the time, but the job did not pay a fantastic salary. It paid a decent salary, and so she became the breadwinner for me and our son. It was also a real sacrifice because we were living off of very little money during those years that I was not working, and she was willing to do all of that.

Peterson: She kind of put you through, didn't she?

DeLaney: She did, and the graduate school level, she really hadn't bargained for that. The graduate school level started off I was just going to do a master's degree because I thought that you really shouldn't try to teach history at the high school level on only a bachelor's degree. Then I had the bug and wanted to keep going. She had not bargained for this full run toward a doctorate, but she was amenable, and so certainly an important person in my life. We've been married for forty-five years.

Peterson: Meanwhile, you were working in the Biology Department. You have Henry Roberts on your list of key people who influenced you.

DeLaney: He was another person who nudged me with regard to college education, not as significantly as Pat did, but at least the nudge was there. It was a very, very strange atmosphere because the Biology Department was not always a comfortable place. He was a quiet man. He was a man who was responsible for a lot of things that we take for granted at W&L today. For instance, he was the chair of the committee that conceived the Spring Term. It's under his leadership that the Spring Term goes into being. It was never supposed to have been a spring term where people took more than one course and it was to be one course in depth. The Spring Term sort of got subverted by people who thought the students had too much time on their hands, which meant that they weren't really using the Spring Term as it was initially intended anyway.

Peterson: The "Goshen" term.

DeLaney: The "Goshen" term. He was a really wonderful man and one of the things that's really interesting is that his wife was very, very Catholic; he was not, but his children were. He had one son who considered the priesthood and his father talked him into going to Duke Divinity School, so that was sort of the end of priesthood. Duke Divinity School is a Methodist seminary. The son is now a Methodist minister with still strong Catholic beliefs. Since I've been ill, he has been to Lexington to see me twice, and probably one of the holiest people I know. His son Fred, his youngest son who is the Methodist minister, was also one of my Scouts. When I was doing scouting, Fred was one of the kids I worked with. Fred tells me that he's known me ever since he was twelve years old and he's now retired from the ministry, so the Robertses are certainly a part of my past.

Peterson: Also in the Biology Department, Gary Dobbs was very important to you.

DeLaney: Yes, Gary Dobbs was very important. Gary Dobbs represents to me, in one way, how bad the political divide is today, where people who have opposing views can't be friends. Gary and I had completely opposing views, could talk about them, were never angry about it, and were best friends. Plus the fact, I was a new experience for him. I was a black friend. His family was an upwardly mobile family whose grandparents were blue collar. I was his black friend, which would have been something that was unusual for people in his family. Gary used to come to our house and have dinner and we would have a grand time, he and Pat and I. He used to laugh about our parking spaces behind what was then just Parmly Hall. It was before the science center was built. He would have an NRA bumper sticker on and I would have a gun control bumper sticker on, but nonetheless, we were great friends.

Actually, I came to know him first of all when he was a student and a student who was very, very unusual. He used to tell me that his father had said going to school was like putting money in a bank. The more you put in, the more you got out of it. He took this literally. I can remember one year he decided that he was going to do an all-nighter studying every Friday night. He had a sleeping bag in one of the labs that was in the attic in Parmly Hall and he would spend the night studying. When he would get too tired to keep his eyes open, he would get in the sleeping bag and take a nap. He did not see college as a time for fun. He saw college as a time for study and everybody in the biology department worried about him. In fact, there was great fear in the Biology Department that he was going to be the person who, at some point, took his own life. He was competing against himself and you can't compete against yourself. I mean, that's an impossibility. He certainly was an extraordinary student but there was a side of his life that was certainly severely lacking. That was this social side of his life that most college students experience.

When he came back to teach at Washington and Lee, he came back in Roberts' place. Roberts had had a stroke and Roberts, unfortunately, died as a result of the stroke. Gary was a temporary replacement. Then members of the department thought that this was an opportunity that was too grand and they went to the administration; can we please find a way to keep him, and he became a tenure-track professor.

Perhaps one of the interesting differences in Washington and Lee today and Washington and Lee then is that any of us could become generalist and teach other things. You have somebody who's coming out of Scripps Institution of Oceanography, who is trained as a marine biologist, who's going to teach the

courses that Henry S. Roberts taught, which was histology. Right now I'm forgetting the other things that Roberts taught, but Gary pretty much took over his courses.

Gary was also assigned to work very closely with a senior professor, who was beginning to have some forgetfulness, but was being greatly honored. That senior professor, whom the students loved, who was the premedical adviser, was upper-crust Alabama. Gary had great admiration for him. At one point Gary ended up doing all the grading for comparative anatomy, and this guy's course was comparative anatomy. At one point, he was anxious to know when Gary was going to be finished with a set of papers, and there seemed to be some sort of an angst there where something happened. I'm really not quite sure what happened, but this senior professor stopped speaking to Gary. The department occupied two floors of Parmly Hall, which was a completely different configuration then, because that building was gutted in the '90s for the remodeling. It was an area of space that was too small to have two members of the department who weren't speaking to each other, who were also involved with the same class. It became something that was very, very uncomfortable.

I seemed to be the only person who, and this is not a boast, who could oftentimes reason with Gary. Gary would sometimes get very defensive about things if he felt that he was being wronged. He had raised some money for some super-duper microscopes for his histology class and another member of the department, a senior member of the department, had the audacity to borrow them from his lab without asking. He was livid. He was just livid. When he told me about the confrontation with this senior department member I was just aghast. He said to this senior department member, "One of these days I'm going to have power in this department, and you're going to be sorry." I said, "You really should never have said that." This ends up being something that was in the back of his mind for the rest of his life.

One time he called me and he was really angry at a student who was cutting his labs. "I'm going to go out and I'm going to find him and I'm going to give him a piece of my mind." I just said, "No, you're not. Who's he hurting, himself or you?" Then he would say, "I'm really glad I called you." The thing with the senior faculty member was, I wish we had had a chance to talk before there was this indiscreet statement. The other part is that was the year that he was coming up for tenure. Even though he got tenure he somehow, in a very twisted way of thinking, conceived that President Huntley had interceded to save his tenure. How he arrived at that I have no idea. He certainly was a bright enough guy. So that

was there brewing.

The chronology here is a little bit skewed but his parents had been divorced. It was one of these ugly divorces and he particularly favored his mother. My office was right next to his office and he talked really loud. We were both there during a February break. We were sitting in my office, laughing and joking, and the phone rang. He went around the door to this office to answer the phone and I could hear everything that he said on the telephone. I was so troubled I didn't know what to do. I knew that it was going to be a difficult moment when he got off the phone because he had just gotten a telephone call from his mother's employer. She was having problems at work and she was angry with the people at work. She had gone into the office on Sunday night with money earmarked in her purse for an ambulance, money earmarked in her purse for cremation, and a gun. She had committed suicide at work. He's getting this news over the phone and I'm thinking I'm glad I'm here but this is going to be a very difficult morning. He comes around the door and he says, "My mother just committed suicide." I tried to console him. My first temptation was to hug him, but he wouldn't let me hug him. We walked down to the travel agency together and he immediately got a ticket to Birmingham so he could take care of his mother's business.

When he came back there was this long period of brooding. Then I began to learn things that were extremely troubling, like his mother had talked to him about committing suicide and he had made her promise that she would never do it without first consulting him, and that he had told her, "you realize if you do this, I'm going to have to do the same thing." You get this kind of information and then you're thinking there is really something that's really wrong here, which is why I would say this was like a Faulkner novel. The other thing that he revealed to me much later is that he had actually loaded the gun. The gun that his mother used he had loaded the last time he had been at home, but then he was surprised that she had taken the step without first consulting him. At that point, he was living in a faculty apartment that's now the anthropology lab. It's the farmhouse out by the soccer field. The department had a picnic out there and he disappeared from the picnic. I went into his apartment and he was crying his eyes out. It was the first time I ever saw him cry, the only time I ever saw him cry. That was when he told me about having loaded the gun that his mother had used.

Fast forward, the university owned this place called Ben Salem Wayside that it no longer owns, but it's a log cabin out there. It's near Buena Vista and he lived there. The university was getting ready to sell

it. He lived there for three years before his death. That was where he took his own life and he used the same gun his mother had used. That was just sort of a really crazy moment.

Peterson: Oh, really crazy for you.

DeLaney: It was extremely difficult. He was one of my best friends, but I would say he was also a best friend with my wife and he adored our child. It was a really, really odd situation and crazy. He left this videotape in my mailbox where he probates his will. It must have been made the same day that I saw him during the Christmas holidays, because he was in his office in a lab coat, and he had obviously set a tripod up with the video camera on it. One person was getting a high-speed centrifuge for their lab. I mean, it's really expensive stuff. He had a lot of assets, assets that he had actually inherited from his mother.

The most important thing to me with regard to that friendship and its influence on me is that you can be friends with people who are politically very different from you. You can be friends with people who are racially different from you. You can be friends with people who are religiously different from you; he was a professed atheist. We had all of these differences in our lives, but [also] this respect for one another and this deep bond of friendship that was very, very important.

It takes you a long time to get over the suicide of a family member or close friend. Initially you grieve but then, a year or so down the way, you're just angry. You think, this was a really stupid thing, especially when you involve your friends to the level you did. Me and another one of his friends from the Biology Department, about six months before the suicide—neither one of us thought anything about it—it was just going down to a lawyer with him to witness his will. Well, the lawyer's secretary and somebody else could have been the witness to the will, but it was important that we were the witnesses. Even then, both of us didn't see him as being depressed or anything. But, along the way, there were so many of these plans that sort of revealed themselves. Like, hey, my name is on that will, and you start putting these pieces together. You think, why did you make this so personalized that you're involving people at the university that you like in this ritual of your death.

The worst part of the ritual was the will required his ashes to be strewn on the front campus without ceremony. This was the most nightmarish part of it. His father and his sister came to Lexington for this. I don't know how the word got around, but there were a lot of students and alumni along the

Colonnade. Just before five o'clock, President Huntley walks out of the front door of Washington Hall and halfway down the sidewalk to the chapel and starts shaking this urn, and this crazy January wind takes these ashes into the sky. It's just unreal. As the president starts walking back up the sidewalk to Washington Hall where Gary's father and sister were standing, the chapel bell starts tolling five o'clock, which also added an eerie dimension to it. Then the president turns around and says, "We have just fulfilled the final wishes of Dr. Gary Dobbs," and into Washington Hall he disappears with the father and the sister.

More recently, Frank Parsons gave me a part of the story that I did not know, which just seemed to fit perfectly with the goriness of it. Frank Parsons, who was a man for all seasons at Washington and Lee, an alumnus who served many presidents as the assistant, Frank Parsons was the assistant to President Huntley. Huntley didn't want any surprises with this strewing of ashes, and so Huntley had Frank Parsons sift the ashes the day before to get rid of the big bones that might be in the urn, so that there wouldn't be any chunks of bone that were falling out. Frank told me about having to do that and how he took those bones down and put them in Woods Creek, and I thought, "Gee, that is just another part of this gory story." It certainly was one of the most memorable things that ever happened to me at Washington and Lee.

Peterson: Very macabre. Bob McAhren was a great influence on you?

DeLaney: Bob McAhren was a great influence on me because Bob McAhren is the guy who hired me. I will say things that I probably should not say here, but it's important. Bob McAhren was a man who I had an interesting relationship with as a student because I took one of his classes and hated it. It was colonial American history and he had this thing where you had to do units. You had so many books to read and so many tests to take, and the only thing that happened at class time was he gave tests. You went to class when you wanted to take a test. If you took sixteen tests, and did well on sixteen tests, you got an A in the class. I hated this system. You're reading books and he's giving you these prompts, as you're reading of things that you should be getting out of the reading.

When I did the course evaluation, I wrote on the evaluation that in most history classes you get different perspectives on a particular problem in history. This way you got one historian's perspective and it's whatever the book was that you were reading. We didn't benefit from his knowledge of other perspectives because there were no lectures, and that I found it to be a very troubling way to study

history. I remember walking down to Holt's office and saying, "This is my evaluation of Bob McAhren's class and I'm signing my name to this. What do you think?" Holt said, "Are you sure you want to sign your name to it?" I said, "Yes. If I'm going to be critical like this, I want to sign my name to it. I need to own what I've written." Bob was just a wonderful person. He didn't take offense or anything, but I never took another one of his classes.

My relationship with Bob was not the same as my relationship with Holt Merchant or with anybody in the department, for that matter. When I was having a rough patch at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where I'd had my moment with a nasty student, a nasty student who was out to make my life miserable—I began to understand my colleagues up there, why some of them had restraining orders against students—Bob McAhren calls me when I'm going through all of this. He has no idea what my experiences are like. I certainly haven't shared them with anybody at Washington and Lee. Bob says to me on the telephone—this is probably what I shouldn't be saying, but I'm going to—Bob says to me on the telephone, "I was just in Washington Hall"—he had been an associate dean—and he said that they were talking about, they were complaining about, their lack of black faculty and that they needed to get some black faculty.

At the time, the only person who was on the undergraduate faculty who was black was Jarvis Hall, who was the first person who taught black American politics here. Jarvis had a commuter marriage. His wife was in the dean's office at Chapel Hill. There was a black professor in the School of Law, Stephen Hobbs, who's now an endowed professor at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. There were two black faculty members on the campus, and so Bob said he gave them [the administration] a chance to put their money where their mouths were. He said, "I know somebody you could get fairly quickly and all of you know who he is." When asked, "Who?" Bob identified me. Then it was like an "of course" moment. My wife was here as treasurer of the city and Damien and I were in Rochester, and so I had this long-distance commute.

Bob had been authorized to call me and he said, "We don't want you next year but we want you the following year. That would give you a chance to finish writing the dissertation and it would give Damien a chance to finish the high school that he's in. You must have degree in hand, and we want you to develop a two-semester African-American history class." He also explained that we'd be borrowing against his retirement. It would extend the size of the History Department up until the time he retired

and, at the time he retired, he would not be replaced because I would be his replacement. Of course, the problem is that my training overlapped with both his training and Holt's training, but more so with Holt's training perhaps than with McAhren's training. I was so miserable with the situation at Geneseo at that moment I said yes right away. It gave me a lot of incentive to work hard on the dissertation, to get the damn thing finished. It was like a light at the end of the tunnel. I'm glad that his timing was when it was because I would have done anything to have gotten out of Geneseo at that point.

About two or three days later, I got a call from a woman named Mary Ferrari, who I knew from graduate school. She was a few years ahead of me in graduate school, I guess, as assistant professor, because I can't imagine at the time she was any more than assistant professor. She was the head of the History Department at Radford University and she was calling to offer me a job at Radford. Bob had called a few days before and I was sort of glad that he had, because I would have said yes to Mary Ferrari and I don't think I would have been happy at Radford. I think Radford would have been like Geneseo in the South, although Geneseo is a better school than Radford, actually. In any case, it gave me something to work toward and I worked really hard to get the dissertation finished to be able to land here two years later.

When I get here, then I get to know McAhren better than I did as a student. One of the things that I really admire about him is that, number one, he really tried to protect new faculty members from a contentious department. There would be meetings that he would suggest that I not come to. After there was no longer that protection, then I understood why there were meetings that I was not invited to or that "I wish you wouldn't come to this meeting." Of course, you've seen some of those meetings in your tenure here too. There was, number one, that level of protection.

There was also this thing that he did that I had to admire about him, and admired about him tremendously. Bob McAhren had been a very, very private person. As he's nearing retirement, he decides to do something that he's never done before, and that is pretty much to do social justice with regard to sexual orientation. Bob turns his house into a safe place for gay and lesbian students to meet. This is before there is a nondiscrimination policy on the books at W&L with regard to sexual orientation. This is back in the '90s, before any of this openness with regard to sexual orientation that we take for granted in the '20s has occurred. He also decides that he is going to offer a course in gay and lesbian history. Much to my surprise he lectures in this class, and my wife is so intrigued that she

audited the gay and lesbian history class one of those years. Then he becomes very, very concerned about the survival of the course and he asked me about the possibility of taking it over. I audited it a couple of years in preparation for taking it over. Essentially what Bob also does during this period, having been a very private person at a university where people had to be very careful, is he came out. He came out in ways that were not dramatic. He made no official announcement, but if anybody asked him he would say that he had a partner.

It was sort of interesting to see what he was also doing with his students. He was doing exit surveys with the gay and lesbian students to be able to measure the quality of their experience at Washington and Lee. Probably one of the most bizarre things that happens is that he turns over these confidential interviews to me when he no longer knows what to do with them. Well, I don't know what the hell to do with them either. They're confidential. There have been a few students who have wanted copies of those interviews, and I've had to read through to figure out who the students were. So I've got this file of interviews that I really don't go into, but the fact [is] that he cared so much about these students and their experiences.

Most of the students who have taken the gay and lesbian classes are not gay. Oftentimes there would be students who were just interested in the material, but there would also be students who had gay siblings and wanted to learn more because of their siblings. There is some rich scholarship in United States history about gay and lesbian life over the course of United States history. Some of the really impressive scholarship that I've seen in that area has been absolutely amazing. I haven't taught that course in a number of years, but I have also not asked the secretary to remove that from being listed next to my name. I think it's important that things like that are advertised.

As we conclude this I would say, real quickly, there are also students who have been inspirational to me. Some of those students, these are former students, I value their friendship very, very much. One of those students I'll name real quickly before we end the tape. Probably a student whose friendship I value the most and who has been most inspirational to me is Will Coffman, class of 2003, who came to us as a paraplegic, and of course is still a paraplegic, but he came to a school like this where there are hardly any accommodations for people in a wheelchair. He made the most of four years here and his wheelchair's not motorized. I watched this kid develop incredibly large biceps wheeling himself up and down hills, but never once in four years did I hear him complain about anything. He did not have the

ability to drop/add classes like other students. It would have driven the registrar's office crazy because most of the classrooms were not handicapped accessible. Watching a student like him deal with the hardships of being at an institution like this certainly had a powerful effect on me. What do I have to complain about with regard to life at Washington and Lee?

Peterson: You've been a tremendous influence on many of your students. In fact, you've contributed richly to life in Lexington, life at Washington and Lee. You've contributed richly to the education of your students. You've been a wonderful colleague to have here at Washington and Lee. I think we're all glad that Bob McAhren brought you back in. The last twenty years have been very constructive and productive and you have a lot to be proud of, Ted. You've done an awful lot that is going to be gratefully remembered by the university community.

DeLaney: One of the things that I would close on, I'm not at all ashamed of the fact that, given that telephone conversation with Bob McAhren, I am not at all ashamed of the fact that I'm an affirmative action hire.

Peterson: You're an argument in favor of affirmative action.

DeLaney: But the reality is this was not a job search. The university reached out to me and they reached out to me specifically because they needed black faculty.

Peterson: Well, you're one of the most beloved members of the campus. I think probably half of Washington and Lee and half of Lexington consider you to be their best friend or one of their best friends. You have a lot to be proud of.

DeLaney: Thank you. I'm glad I'm back here.

Peterson: We're glad you're back here too.

Ted and I would like to close by thanking a few people who have been instrumental in helping us put together this series of conversations. I would like to thank, first of all, the people at Instructional Technologies: David Pfaff, who is right here on the other side of the camera; Brandon Bucy has helped us record some of these interviews; and Julie Knudson was a driving force in getting this show on the road. We've had a tremendous amount of help from Tom Camden in Special Collections at the library.

Of course, we've had help from members of the History Department. Molly Michelmore chatted with you. Barton Myers chatted with you. Marc Connor is going to be conducting an interview with you. I think the provost's interest in this project has been significant and important. We should also thank our transcriber, the woman who's going to be transcribing these interviews, Barbara Muller in Baltimore, and Mame Warren, who has done many of these interviews of other faculty before.

We thank all of these people and again, Ted, I thank you for your friendship and for these very informative discussions.

[End of interview]

Acknowledgements:

Ted DeLaney and David Peterson would like to thank the following people, whose generous assistance made this project possible: Brandon R. Bucy, Senior Academic Technologist; Tom Camden, Director of Special Collections; Marc Conner, Provost, Jo and James Ballengee Professor of English; Emily Cook, Research and Outreach Librarian; Paula Kiser, Digital Scholarship Librarian; Julie Knudson, Director of Academic Technologies; Seth McCormick-Goodhart, Senior Special Collections Assistant; Lisa McCown, Senior Special Collections Assistant; Molly Michelmore, Professor of History, Department Head; Barbara Muller, Transcriber; Barton Myers, Class of 1960 Professor of Ethics and History; David Pfaff, IQ Center Academic Technologist; Judi Rhodes, ITS Information Desk Supervisor; Dylan Tallman, Technology Integration Specialist; Elizabeth Anne Teaff, Head of Access Services; Mame Warren, Oral Historian; and John White, ITS Shared Services Supervisor.