

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

III. “The Education of Ted DeLaney”

With David S. Peterson, Interviewer

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Peterson: Welcome. I'm David Peterson, professor of history here at Washington and Lee University. It's August 20, 2018. I'm in the Mason Taylor New Room with my distinguished colleague and personal friend Professor Theodore C. DeLaney. This is the third of a series of conversations we've been having about Ted's remarkable life and career. In our previous conversations we talked about growing up in Lexington in the era of segregation. We had a session on the '60s and the desegregation of Lexington and Washington and Lee University. Ted, today what I would like to do is thread your personal development through these larger issues,¹ and I would begin by going all the way back to your childhood. You mentioned that the library was one of your favorite places as a young man. Were you a bookish sort of boy?

DeLaney: Bookish, yes, because there wasn't much left to do in Lexington. When you're a kid growing up, there's not a lot of recreational opportunities available, and so my brother ["Charlie"] and my cousin ["Candy"] and I used to make trips on Saturday morning to the public library to check out books that would at least get us through the weekend, even during the school year. It was something that provided us entertainment. Now what those books might have been, it's over sixty years and I certainly don't remember what I was reading sixty years ago, but yes, I was bookish to that extent that this was a pastime, for sure, when I was growing up.

Peterson: And did you enjoy school? Did you have any favorite teachers or subjects?

DeLaney: My feeling about school, like perhaps most school children, was mixed. I did have favorite teachers and, even though I doubt that she was largely my favorite at the time and I had her both for sixth and seventh grade, there was an interesting woman whose name was Laura Etta Gilmore. Shortly before I got married she remarried, after having been a widow for probably fifty years, and so she's Laura Etta Gilmore Rucker. She was very influential. She was one of these teachers who had no favorites and she really worked very, very hard to make sure that everybody did their best.

Probably the thing that she did that annoyed me at the time, and I realize that what she was doing was futile, but she was one of these people who was concerned that I was going to smear my work because I turn my hand like this to write [left handed]. The whole class was punished

¹ For this conversation and the following one see also Ted's interview with Mame Warren of July 31, 1996 in Leyburn Library's Special Collections, Manuscript 0239, Warren, Mame.

because I turn my hand. When we had spelling, we had to fill in from the bottom because she figured that would make my hand turn. Well, of course, it didn't. I filled in from the bottom just like that. It was sort of humiliating that everybody was having to fill in their spelling words from the bottom because she was trying to get me to turn my hand. She was hard as nails. She was always one of these people who also had this idea that you had to be the very best student that you could possibly be if you were going to be successful in the future. I had her for both sixth and seventh grade, so if you thought you were going to escape a teacher like this by passing to the next grade, you had no idea that she was going to pass to the next grade with you. But she was certainly a favorite.

With regard to high school teachers, probably my favorite high school teacher was not on the regular high school staff but was a teacher named Louise Johnson. One summer I took United States history in summer school just as way of taking a course in the summertime and getting credit for it. She was an excellent teacher and I worked very hard during that summer school course to do a required course, for sure in Virginia schools, and I guess throughout the United States, United States history. And so Louise Johnson and Laura Etta Gilmore were my favorite teachers for sure.

Peterson: And it sounds like U.S. history was one of your favorite subjects.

DeLaney: U.S. certainly quickly became a favorite subject, yes.

Peterson: You were obviously an excellent student. We've talked about the Morehouse scholarship and we've talked about the reasons for your deciding not to accept it, rather to stay in Lexington. What at that juncture did you do?

DeLaney: Well, first of all, let me clarify that it was a United Negro College Fund scholarship, not a Morehouse scholarship because I never applied to Morehouse but it could only be used at Morehouse.

There were a lot of moments where there was sort of frustration as to what I was going to do, and a frustration that was shared with my mother. Two years before there had been a conversation about me going to minor seminary. I had researched a lot of religious communities in the Catholic Church trying to decide about what community I wanted to go into. At that time, my

local pastor had taken all of that stuff away from me and replaced it with the material from his religious order. He was keen on me going to Ohio to minor seminary and both of my parents—one of the rare times that my parents seem to both register in on my life—both of my parents were opposed to it. They said no. Minor seminary and seminary in the Catholic Church would have cost them zero. And so I didn't do that and over the course of time I really lost interest in doing that.

At this point of my real disappointment that things weren't working out, my mother suggested “well, you were interested in Catholic religious life, why don't you now give it a try?” I kind of halfheartedly did it, in a way, because I did not have the fervor that I'd had two years prior to that. Once again I started researching, and researching these communities was not as easy because there was no internet. It's writing letters to communities and they would send their brochures to you just the same way that you would write to a college and you'd get their catalogue. One of these communities that was particularly appealing to me was called the Society of the Atonement, and more fully, the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, Third Order of St. Francis.

But one of the things I want to do is connect that a little bit to the jobs that I had here in Lexington. I had these gardening jobs out on Liberty Hall Road where, for a teenager, I was making pretty good money. I was working for this guy whose name was Juan Barsena and he was paying me a dollar an hour. Then, suddenly, I found myself with this car stopping in front of me one day when I was working near the edge of his property, and the driver rolls her window down and says, “What's Juan Barsena paying you?” I said, “A dollar an hour.” She said, “I'll give \$1.25.” Her name was Winifred Tyree and her granddaughter, for instance, is Scotty Ashworth, who works in admissions. Mrs. Tyree was quite a colorful lady to say the very least.

The first week that I worked for Mrs. Tyree she used to come out on her front porch and whistle for me to come at lunch. She would stick these two fingers in her mouth and whistle, and it's a long way from the front of her property up to Mulberry Hill, which is now where KA national is. I'd never seen a woman do that before. One day I go up there and she says to me, “It's disgraceful that a young man like you doesn't have a watch,”—this is a colorful story—“and she says, “I'm going to do something about that.” She goes to the telephone and she makes a call and I heard her say on the phone “What's the most expensive watch you have in your store?” This is

the Hess's Jeweler. "Well, I'm sending my maid's husband down to pick it up." She gave me an Omega automatic. My mother was horrified when she saw that I had this expensive watch when I came home.

Mrs. Tyree was a forceful personality, to say the very least, and she was very opposed to me going to the monastery. So was Juan Barsena. She said she was all for love and marriage and all of this sort of thing. She wasn't really dissuading me and after a certain point she said, "Well, since you're insistent on going there, I'm going to write a letter of introduction to these friends that I have that are up there." And I thought "how does this Protestant lady in Lexington, Virginia, have anybody at an obscure Catholic religious order in the Catskill Mountains? [How does she] know anybody that's up there?" I can't remember the man's first name but their last name was Lacy, a Mr. and Mrs. Lacy. Mrs. Lacy had been her childhood friend or acquaintance and she said, "After you meet her, you will learn that she wasn't very much my cup of tea." Sure enough, the Lacys existed. He taught Latin and Greek at the seminary there at the monastery. I rarely saw the Lacys but I had permission to go to their house one time with this letter of introduction. This sort of Lexington connection to the place was something that was almost too good to be true.

Peterson: These are the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement?

DeLaney: Right. There's this layman, he looked as old as Methuselah, whose wife looked equally as old, who lived on the edge of the monastic property in a little cottage and he taught Latin and Greek there at the seminary. I may have seen the Lacys once or twice while I was there but I thought it was an interesting connection.

The experience at the monastery was also interesting historically and for lots of other reasons. The community was sort of an avant-garde community when I went there. Their work was ecumenism and they had been founded as part of the Oxford Movement, which began in the Anglican Church in the 1830s. The people in the Oxford Movement were sort of radicals who believed that the very worst thing—and this will hurt your ears because of what you teach—the very worst thing that had ever happened to Christianity was the Reformation because the Reformation had divided the body of Christ. These people in the Oxford Movement believed that the Church needed to be reunited under the See of Rome. That was the work of the Franciscan

Friars of the Atonement, sort of a progressive thing, but interestingly enough, they had been founded in the Episcopal Church.

There is this very, very courageous young Episcopal priest named Lewis Wattson, who becomes Father Paul of Graymoor. He is convinced at one time, I think by the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, that he's not going to be able to bring the entire Episcopal Church back into the fold of Rome, but he should at least bring his followers, the brothers, the priests, and the nuns who are a part of the Graymoor community, into the Catholic Church, and he does. For two years he has to train as a seminarian so he can be re-ordained as a Catholic priest. This is before John XXIII, a long time before John XXIII. The community's founded around the turn of the century. When I am there, all of the squabble between the Episcopal Church about whether this property of the monastery had been theirs legally or not, all of that was in the past.

It was a beautiful place across the Hudson from West Point in, technically the town is Garrison, New York, but a whole mountain. The convent of the Graymoor Sisters was at the bottom of the mountain. They're called the Graymoor Friars or the Graymoor Sisters even though the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement is the more official name. Being in that community, they were way out in front of most of the religious communities in the Catholic Church because they were working for Christian unity. That was their mission. So when the Second Vatican Council opens, and John XXIII is big on ecumenism, it's their heyday.

I had a great experience there but it was also an important part of my educational experience. One of the things that happened to me there was that there was, first of all, an intensification of my faith. Then for some strange reason, but I guess it's because it happens to all young people, then I had these profound doubts, these profound doubts as to whether God existed to the point that I was completely reduced to a state of disbelief. When you think of the sacrifices that monastic life entails, a life in any kind of pastoral ministry entails, having a crisis of faith is something that just doesn't work. The French Saint Therese, "The Little Flower," apparently had this same kind of crisis of faith and her prayer became, "Dear God, help my unbelief." Well, that didn't work for me and so I left. When I left I was really troubled by the fact that suddenly I had reached a point in my life where that thing that was so important to me just wasn't there anymore. It was doubt-based.

When I came home one of the first things I did was I decided that I would read Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. When I left after seven months there I was still only nineteen years old. I read Darwin's *Origin of Species*, certainly the first book of that kind of intensity that I can remember reading, although reading that book in early 1963 is something that does not render me able to discuss Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* intelligibly at this point in my life.

Peterson: This was as a counterpart to the Christian Book of Genesis?

DeLaney: Right, and one of the things that occurs to me when I'm reading is that I don't really see a theological problem. I don't see a theological problem because theologically God is all-knowing; God is all-able. Why should God not create the way He wants to? Why do you have to take the Bible or the Book of Genesis literally? Then I discover Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit geologist, who has no problem with the theory of evolution. De Chardin is certainly important to me with regard to understanding that there's no real conflict between the theory of evolution and believing in God. The important thing is that ultimately that's where the Catholic Church is. The Catholic Church doesn't really teach these stories as literal truth. I soon discover that Catholics really don't have the kind of hang-up about evolution that fundamentalists do.

And so my faith is restored, but I'm also a young man and I'm growing in many, many different ways. For a while there I'm not really that eager to be reunited with the Church in the way that I had previously been, but that happens too. Finally I am able to make a confession and sort of go forward with my own journey. And so I see the period in monasticism, followed by delving into some of the things that led to my doubting the existence of God, as a part of my educational growth as well as part of my spiritual growth.

Peterson: But of course you did withdraw from the monastery and return to Lexington.

DeLaney: I withdrew from the monastery and I returned to Lexington and I must say that I always—not always, always is wrong—but I did have regrets. There were times that I considered maybe I should go back. I never did. I can remember even on my wedding day it occurred to me “now you can't go back.” But nonetheless, the option of going back was certainly tempting. I couldn't have gone back to the same community because things didn't work that way. I would have had to have gone to another community.

So I come home. I come home and I need a job. Lexington being what Lexington is, jobs don't come easily for a nineteen-year-old guy in Lexington and Rockbridge County, whether you're black or white, but jobs don't come easily especially if you're black. For a while I don't have employment and not having employment is difficult because my mother's poor and there are children. My mother's always been in a situation where she had to live independently of the expectation of child support payments from either my father or my step-father because oftentimes they didn't come. And so I felt an obligation to be working so that I could at least help my mother.

The opportunities for jobs came very, very slowly. Finally I had the opportunity, as I mentioned in the interview with Professor Michelmore, I had the opportunity to work as a waiter. Working as a waiter was not a very lucrative opportunity. The law was written in such a way that eating establishments didn't have to pay minimum wage. What restaurants would do is they would pay a very, very token salary. I think the salary at the time was something like \$1.50 for waiting the evening meal because then there was the expectation that the waiters were going to make a bundle on tips. Oftentimes that didn't happen, particularly if it was a slow evening. A dollar and fifty cents for serving the evening meals certainly didn't leave a person with a lot of money to take home at the end of the day. I needed something to supplement the waiting job or to replace the waiting job, and so by August, I found this job at Washington and Lee.

The job at Washington and Lee is a job that, for me, is in many ways problematic at the beginning, but it's a job that develops in ways that I certainly did not expect. One of the things that was a problem at first is that I was faced with the reality at nineteen years old that suddenly I had a job that was traditionally what black folks in Lexington had always done. It was a menial job that seemed to, at least from my vantage point, be the way people became stuck in the same things generation after generation after generation, and the idea that somebody who had really wanted to go to college was doing the same thing as people who were illiterate. There I was at nineteen years old, needing a job, and so for one year I come here and the job is janitor. One of the men that I knew who was working in the next building was illiterate and was doing the same work, and I certainly was not illiterate. And so there's the reality that this is sort of what I had feared would happen when I was unable to accept the United Negro College Fund scholarship. And there were no federal loans and there were no Pell Grants and those kinds of things when I

came out of high school. The few scholarship opportunities that were available were just not there, plus the fact I got a janitorial job at an all-white male institution.

There was no reason to have any great joy about that, even though I've gotten a great deal of favorable press in the last number of years about having that job and what my job later became at Washington and Lee. People do a lot of stuff when they're teenagers. I mean, white kids do a lot of things like fast-food restaurants or construction work and nobody later makes a big deal about the fact that somebody was a short-order cook and now they are a college president. One of the things that's been so hard to take or where it gets expanded, say, in a news article like *The Washington Post* in 2005,² "from janitor to college professor," like you put a broom down one day and you pick up a piece of chalk, it becomes sort of a ridiculous kind of article, if you will. Certainly I realize that the writer was spinning it the way that it was going to get readership in *The Washington Post*, but nonetheless that is not the way I understood the job and I certainly wanted the job to be as temporary as possible. As I recall, there again, the salary was even for 1963, the salary was pretty bad. I think as I recall the salary was \$36 a week. Even in the early '60s, that's not a great deal of money.

What I had not expected is that somehow this job would turn into something of good fortune. It's because the job description was so bizarre. You've got a job description that seems to be clear enough, that you're cleaning the building. At the time, it was the top two floors of what was called the New Science Building, which is now Parmly Hall, that was completely gutted to make the Parmly Hall that we now know. There was another person who had a janitorial job for the two floors below. Biology was the two top floors, Physics was the two lower floors. It didn't take all day to do the cleaning of two halls, and so after that was finished in the mornings, I found that I was also at the beck and call of the faculty, which really was a kind of weird juxtaposition.

What the faculty had me doing was assisting them in laboratory preparations. At nineteen years old and having not been a bad student in high school, I was able to pick up the stuff quite easily that they wanted me to do. They also were pretty demanding in ways that sometimes were a little bit annoying simply because you would think, "well, you know, there's something wrong with

² Susan Kinzie, "Once Excluded from Virginia College, Black Professor Takes a Top Post." *Washington Post*, March 21, 2005, p. A 1. Likewise Ruth S. Intress, "Man Returns to Teach at University He Once Cleaned: Former W&L Janitor Joins History Faculty," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 11, 1998, p. A1; and Farei Chideya, NPR "News and Notes," July 9, 2007, "From College Janitor to Professor."

this job description.” Actually, the guy who is my supervisor is from the buildings and grounds crew and not the Biology faculty. They taught me how to do everything that they needed me to do in that sort of sharing me with the buildings and grounds people.

What happened during the course of that year is even more interesting. There were only four members of the Biology Department at that time and the university had a mandatory retirement age. The head of the department was a man named Kenneth Porter Stevens, and Dr. Stevens was one of the many confirmed bachelors who seemed to populate the W&L campus in that period of time. Dr. Stevens was a real gentleman, but Dr. Stevens was somebody in retrospect that I would say, as nicely as he treated me, was misogynistic. If you wanted to make Dr. Stevens’ day and get a laugh out of him, say something bad about a woman. It was a different kind of world. Dr. Stevens was being forced to step down as department head because he was sixty-five, which was the mandatory age for not being department head anymore, but you could teach until seventy.

Rather than promote anybody in the department to department head, they brought someone in from outside. They brought this guy in from Duke University. His name was Henry S. Roberts and he certainly had ambitions for the Biology Department. I think he also learned at the time that Washington and Lee was not the wealthy place that it would later become. Whether or not he really wanted to hire somebody who had a college degree to be the laboratory technician for the Biology Department I don’t know. I do know that there were not funds to pay somebody who had a college degree. There was this idea that if they had a bright high school student, so there I was, already doing the job. The job was offered to me and I got a grand salary raise of \$1,000 a year. At the time I was pretty impressed with the \$1,000 a year.

Peterson: You’re now officially a lab technician rather than a janitor.

DeLaney: Yes, there’s somebody else who does the janitorial duties. My boss is the head of the Biology Department. The thing that becomes very, very difficult is that—and I think that for people in the humanities it’s very difficult to understand how different the sciences are—then I became sort of this assistant to everybody in the department. As college professors tend to be, everybody thought what they were doing in the Biology Department was the most important thing, therefore I had a priority to help them first and everybody else came last. I was at the

bottom of the food chain and sometimes telling somebody that I had obligations to another person first was not the easiest thing to do.

Peterson: It's hard to have multiple bosses.

DeLaney: It's hard to have multiple bosses, but it's also hard to have multiple bosses when everybody thinks that what they're doing is the most important thing.

Certainly I learned a lot of classical biology. I learned probably more than I ever could have dreamed that I would learn. One of the things that they did is they taught me everything that needed to be done in the specific labs. For instance, I was doing laboratory preparations in zoology, botany, genetics, comparative anatomy, embryology, and other courses that were taught in the department.

Probably the most challenging laboratory preparations were in general biology. I was on my own doing those, and sometimes had to go out on field trips to collect the materials that we needed to transform for experiments that we were doing on respiration or experiments that we were doing on diffusion or whatever in general biology. The preparations for general biology lab were challenging because usually there would be about a hundred students enrolled in general biology. There would be maybe five laboratory sections and so I had some pretty complicated setups to do for each of those laboratory sections. So I was learning a great deal.

In zoology I was learning a great deal of taxonomy, but I could do things like set up demonstrations where I was finding specific stages of malarial parasites on stained microscopic slides using oil emersion lenses. So I was doing some pretty sophisticated kinds of things for somebody who didn't have a college degree, but I was learning. For the most part, the people that I worked with treated me very, very well, But still, it was a segregated institution. It was a very, very different place than it is now.

The interesting thing was that the students that I became friends with at the time were mostly students who were Jewish. That was a pretty unique experience because there were a lot of pre-medical students who happened to be Jewish. There was a lot of anti-Semitism on the campus at the time and the fraternity charters said white Christians [only]. I used to get invited to Passover Seder at the ZBT house, for instance. I'd become very good friends with these Jewish kids, so a

Roman Catholic at Passover Seder. Some of these people are still friends and friends that go back for a very, very long time. But it was a different world and it was a unique relationship with students too, and some of those students just ended up becoming really dear friends.

There was a certain aspect that was like being a student myself because I was learning so much, and so much that was a part of my job, but I think that oftentimes people were teaching me more stuff because they enjoyed sharing with me. Some of it was really funny. There was this very, very prim and proper biology professor named Jim Starling. Some of the stories with Starling would be hilariously funny, others would not be.

Starling called me down the hall one day and he wanted to show me something. He always had a starched white lab coat on. He was very, very old fashioned and very conservative and every hair was in place. Anyway, he called me into the zoology lab and he said, "I want to show you something." He reaches in his pocket and pulls out this wad of tissue. It's really toilet paper and he carefully unrolls it and whatever is in this toilet paper he dumps on the stage of the dissecting microscope. He focuses and because I work with him in the zoology lab all the time I don't know why he thought I would know what this organism was. And he said, "Take a look at this." I did and I saw that the organism was alive and it looked like a crustacean and it had little pincers on it. I realized at least what the phylum and class of the animal was, but I said, "I have no idea what that is." Actually, it was an insect. And he said, "Are you sure?" And I looked again and I said, "I have no idea what that is." And then he says, "It's a pubic louse." And I said, "Where did you get it?" He said, "Well, this morning a student came into my office and said, 'Dr. Starling, I have a problem.' "

He asked the student what his problem was and he said, "Well, I've got this itch." And so Starling said, "Oh? Where's your itch?" The student said—and these are Starling's words—according to Starling the student said, "Down there." And he said "I took this thing off of myself." Starling is showing me this live pubic louse that had come off of the student, and I could not imagine a student coming in to his professor with this. I mean, it seems very, very bizarre to me. I said to him, "What did you advise this student to do?" He said, "I went to the telephone and I called Nurse Agnor over at the infirmary and I told her that I had a student who had pubic lice." She said, "Just get him to go down to Vera's Pharmacy—that pharmacy was located where Pumpkinseeds is now—and to ask the pharmacist for a ten percent solution of

DDT—now, that says a lot about the timeframe we’re talking about, to imagine anybody applying DDT to their bodies—and that he’ll be okay.” But still there was sort of a different world and to imagine some college student who is distressed because he’s got these strange organisms on him going to his professor ... There were funny stories like that, that happened, but that was a learning situation too. I never dreamed that I would be looking at a live pubic louse on the stage of a microscope in a lab at Washington and Lee. Thankfully, I’ve never seen another pubic louse, but that was the kind of thing that sort of seemed to happen in the W&L Biology Department; people would bring organisms in.

Peterson: Now these are years, the mid-60s, in which Washington and Lee is approaching the issue of African American admissions and so forth. Did you pay much attention to that?

DeLaney: Yes, because there was a lot of that in the student newspapers. The student newspaper had some interesting stories in it. The nice thing about the *Ring-tum Phi* is that it’s searchable now by words so you can go in and find these things.

One of the things that happened in 1964 is that the chaplain at Hampton Institute³ accidentally meets the young pastor at Robert E. Lee Memorial [now, Grace] Episcopal Church⁴ and they started talking about an exchange seminar between students at Hampton Institute, at the time—I hate it when colleges change their name. It’s Hampton University now—and Washington and Lee. There was a weekend seminar—Washington and Lee still had Saturday classes then—where these male students from Hampton come up and they attend classes on Saturday morning and have these discussions, et cetera, with Washington and Lee students. They realized it was going to be difficult to find places for these students to stay, and they found white families who were progressive enough to house these black students from Hampton Institute that weekend. So there was this kind of experimental thing that had, certainly, full faculty support but was really the initiative of the Episcopal priest, who had no official relationship with the college at all.

But that was also about the year that the trustees took the vote [on desegregation] and the vote was on a resolution. The trustees pretty much said that Washington and Lee had never had a bylaw that required segregation and that they were passing a resolution that would give the

³ Rev. Walter D. Dennis

⁴ Rev. J. Thomas Brown.

faculty the power to admit anybody they deemed qualified to Washington and Lee. As Blaine Brownell points out in his new history of Washington and Lee, then they refused to permit President Cole to publish it.⁵ I knew some of that, but much more detail I know because I did, at one point when I was doing research, get to read the trustees' minutes. I know what's in the trustees' minutes and I know what's in the Brownell book. I was partially aware of that when I was working in the Biology Department but not to the extent that I am now.

Peterson: I see. Other things are going on in your life in this period. You mentioned in the last session that you met your future wife Pat I think in 1968. Do you think you could talk a little bit more about how you met Pat?

DeLaney: Sure. Like me, Pat's father was a native of Lexington. He had been a career GI and when he retired from twenty-three years of military, he went to work for the Federal Aviation Administration as a radar technician. That was on Long Island, which is where Pat did four years of high school at East Hampton, Long Island. He inherited his adoptive parents' home in Lexington and moved his family to Lexington in 1968, which was the year Pat finished East Hampton High School.

I'm not really sure in retrospect exactly how we met. The one thing that I would say is there was a church connection because Pat's mother was a cradle Catholic, as was Pat. There was certainly the church connection that was there although, at the time, Pat was sort of the defiant teenager who didn't want that connection with the Church. She was pretty turned off by the Church when we met. But we shared certain things in common. We had parallel appreciation of music and art. Appreciation of music was pretty broad because, almost like most young black people of the time, we certainly liked the Motown stuff, but Pat and I both always liked classical music as well. There was a very, very broad range of our interest in music. There was also a very, very broad range of our interest in art.

I'm not really quite sure how it happened and when I look back, in retrospect, I am often marveled by the fact that even though I was seven years older than she was, that we used to spend long evenings at my house and her parents didn't find anything wrong with that. Those

⁵ See Conversation II, p. 17.

conversations usually were about art and music and certainly politics because there were a lot of political developments at that time.

Peterson: You mentioned at your house. Were you still living in your mother's house when you met?

DeLaney: Actually, not. What I was doing was I was living alone in my grandparents' house on Tucker Street and my mother was living in the house that I presently own [on Fuller St.] that she bought in 1963. The house on Tucker Street was not far from Pat's parents' house on Preston Street. That was where we pretty much got to know each other and got to know each other well.

One of the things I discovered at this time is that she was extremely ambitious; that she was bound and determined that she was going to get a degree. She was the third of five children. Her father had not sent any of the older children to college, and she was not necessarily reliant upon the idea that he was going to send her. She decided that she would go the first two years to Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke and then transfer to a four-year college, which she did. She transferred to Emory and Henry College, which is a small Methodist school in southwest Virginia. We were actually married at the end of her junior year.

Peterson: That was '73?

DeLaney: We were married June 2, 1973. Certainly by the time we were engaged she has come to peace with the Catholic Church, and we went through the Pre-Cana stuff that the Church requires. We were married in early June in 1973, thinking that at the end of the summer she would return to Emory and Henry, finish her last year in college, and that we'd see each other on weekends. The one thing that we had not anticipated was the Arab oil embargo. Emory and Henry is three hours away and so we didn't see each other every weekend. I can remember at least once she had a girlfriend who lived in Boones Mill, which is just beyond Roanoke, and they almost got to Boones Mill without running out of gas. You could buy gas on even/odd days depending upon the last number on your license tag. The young woman that she was riding with, her boyfriend was able to get a five-gallon can of gas and go to their rescue. I don't remember how we got her from Roanoke to Lexington. It was sort of a tough situation where you had something like the Arab oil embargo that you had not anticipated, but that was the first year we were married.

One of the things that was certainly part and parcel that's relevant to what happens to me is our conversation, certainly initiated oftentimes by her: "you've got to do this too. You've got to get a college education." That's not to say that the suggestion hadn't been made by people like Henry S. Roberts in the Biology Department.

Peterson: You'd already had some faculty members indicating to you that you were a bright, young man and should try to forge ahead academically.

DeLaney: Right, not all of them but some of them for sure, and so that was there as part of our conversation. Unfortunately, I was becoming more and more comfortable in this job. I still was not making a good salary and I guess I never really made a good salary in that job that I held for nineteen years. The more comfortable I became in the job, the more difficult the idea of somehow giving it up and taking a risk on something like a college education was something that was a bit too radical for me. I'd always been taught by my mother, for instance, that you never quit a job until you have another one in sight and you're pretty certain that the one that's in sight you're going to have. The idea of quitting a job to go to college was something that I had a hard time wrapping my brain around.

It started off in a very, very different way. It started off, much to my surprise, with a community service kind of thing that was done by Virginia Military Institute. VMI had an evening college in the 1970s that was sort of a community service that was directed to adults in the community. My first college-level course was actually in this evening college at VMI in the fall of 1975. It was taught by a historian named John Barrett, who was on the regular history staff at VMI. I never dreamed that when I went into this that I was going to end up with such enormous respect for John Barrett. He was pretty much your classical history professor. He came to class and his notes were on yellowed paper. I mean, you could tell he'd been using these notes for years, but when you're teaching a survey course in American history, there's not a lot to change with regard to your notes. It was the first half of the survey course, the United States through 1877.

None of that, of course, was new to me and it was not new to me because I had certainly memory of my high school experience with United States history. The delightful part was that high school history with a black female teacher certainly was not going to introduce any "Lost Cause" stuff into the coming of the Civil War or the aftermath of the Civil War.

Peterson: “Lost Cause” meaning sort of sympathetic to the Southern cause?

DeLaney: Yes, the mythology that gets added to the Civil War, like the cause of the war was tariffs. Well, that’s ridiculous. There’s not a real tariff issue after 1833. But there are all of these excuses for why the war was caused except for slavery and that ends up being the lost-cause mythology.

This was my first introduction to a history class that was taught by a Southern white man and a Southern white man who was certainly no baby. I suspect John Barrett was at least twenty years older than me. I’m sitting there and I’m just in absolute delight. I am getting a truthful history class. That is my very first academic course from someone who is white, and my very first academic course in history from a white Southerner who is saying—and this is news to me at the time—that this is what all professional historians teach.

Peterson: This is moving slavery to the center.

DeLaney: Yes, and all of the documentary history demonstrates that. If you read the “Declaration of Causes of Secession” for South Carolina, they’re pissed off because of the fugitive slave law not being enforced. All of their people are running away and they cost so much money and they’re not being returned according to federal law. If you read declarations of secession from Southern state to Southern state, you’ll see that slavery is the central issue. Then these heritage people want something else. So this was my introduction to the honesty of people in the history profession and at Virginia Military Institute And so I was pleased. Later, I find that the historians at Washington and Lee are teaching the same way John Barrett does. John Barrett is my inspiration. He is my inspiration; he later becomes the person that I just love running into in town, and certainly a man that I greatly admire.

But I don’t begin taking classes at Washington and Lee until 1979. Washington and Lee can do some screwy things with its own history and this is an example. I discovered at the time that you could take a course a term for credit without pay as long as you had the permission of your work supervisor. A few years ago the dean’s office announced that W&L had this new policy, which was exactly that, and I thought, new policy? I did this thirty years ago.

So I started taking a course a semester for credit. The first three courses that I took were introductory French and I had a ball with the French classes that I took. The thing that's also very personable about W&L is that the Dean of Students office had a way of writing on grade reports compliments for grades you made. They made no exception when I get my grade report although I'm just taking one course. Lew John, who was the Dean of Students, would be very complimentary on how I'd done and in writing on the grade report.

One day in 1982—and I'd racked up about thirty credits; thirty-eight credits, to be more precise—I'm walking along the campus and I run into Bill Watt, who's the Dean of the College. He's a chemist and Bill Watt complimented me on how well I'd done with the courses that I'd taken. He said, "If you ever want a degree from W&L, you will have to quit your job and be full-time for two years." And so I did. It was certainly a risk that I was taking and it was a risk that I was taking that was pretty serious because, number one, I had to finance it. There were people who made suggestions that were erroneous, that those two years were free. They were not free. It was cheaper for me to do it at W&L than any other place primarily because, number one, W&L's tuition wasn't like it is today. W&L had something called the Rockbridge County Scholarship, which meant that if you had gone to high school in Rockbridge County, it was a 50 percent discount. I had to pay 50 percent of the tuition and 50 percent of the tuition was funded through a Virginia state loan. So I had a loan to the tune of 50 percent of what it cost for two years.

The other thing is I had a family. Even though my wife had what seems to be a cushy job, it didn't really pay that well when I quit my job.

Peterson: Which is this?

DeLaney: My wife was the Treasurer of the City of Lexington and she's been the Treasurer since 1975. We figured that she made enough that she could supplement the income of the family, but then her dad made it even easier for us. Pat's mom had died the previous year of brain cancer and her father had decided to go back to Long Island. And he said, "Why don't you guys sell your house and you can live in my house those two years rent free." And so we sold the house. Selling your house is also a major commitment. You realize at the end of the day you've got to live somewhere. My wife was keen with all of these. Her dad is giving us a tremendous gift, to be able to live in his house for two years without rent. We took advantage of that. At the

time her parents had moved to Oak View Drive and so they lived on the edge of Providence Hill. We could only afford one car and so my commute to Washington and Lee was by bicycle.

I was in the best physical shape of my life because of one of the things that I learned only as I was finishing W&L. I'd finished all of my course work actually and I was walking to the post office with Bill McHenry, who was the athletic director, and he said—because there were two other adult male students who were here at the same time as me. I should say older students or nontraditional—and he said, “You guys were such great sports. We waived the PE requirement for you and you took it anyway.” Well, that was the first time I'd heard that. Taking PE courses with people who are twenty years younger than you is a real challenge. At the time I felt intimidated by it and worked really hard to sort of be in a fit shape by the time I started the fall semester. It was a good experience. It was a good experience all the way around with students and faculty and everybody. It ended up being a major change in my life.

The first semester did not go well. The first semester did not go very well because we were still moving and when you're doing stuff with your family, your family's got to come first. It took forever for us to seemingly get moved and settled in, and so that was distracting. I actually ended up with two “C”s of my four courses the first semester, and then worked like the devil to attempt to pull my grade point average up after that. It was certainly tough going to even do that.

Peterson: You, at this point, also have a son.⁶

DeLaney: Yes. I had mentioned that was a part of making the decision very difficult. One of the nice things about that also is my wife viewed me being a student as a good example for him. It seems to me that he was in second grade when I finished. That first full-time year he would have been in first grade.

When I was taking classes part-time, when our childcare arrangements would somehow break down, he went to classes with me. I took four courses in studio sculpture; that was the easiest class for me to have him because I could give him a wad of clay like this and he would be entertained for the whole time I was in sculpture lab. That wasn't true in a history class. I can remember one time a class in Newcomb Hall, he climbed out of the window in the back of the

⁶ Damien Paul DeLaney (1977-).

room and I hadn't noticed him gone until I saw him running down the mall. Students didn't seem to mind that there's this guy coming to class with this little kid, either, so it was kind of neat.

Peterson: Well, we've probably had our time's worth in this session. Why don't we break for today and come back and have another session. We'll talk about your subsequent intellectual development, both as a student at Washington and Lee, going on to graduate school, and eventually returning to Washington and Lee as a faculty member.

DeLaney: I think it's important for us to, probably with the next conversation, begin talking about my experiences in history at Washington and Lee, and go from there.

Peterson: Thank you for this conversation. It's been very interesting and I'll see you again soon.

DeLaney: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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