

ERNEST WILLIAMS

July 12, 1996

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Mame Warren,
Interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the twelfth of July, 1996. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, with Ernie Williams, and we finally found each other. We've been running all over campus looking for each other, but we're going to make it worth our while here.

Now, you are class of 1938.

Williams: Right.

Warren: Which means you went through Washington and Lee during the Depression.

Williams: Right, I did.

Warren: I'd like to know what it was like here during the Depression.

Williams: Well, I'll start off by telling you the tuition was \$250 and that included a week in the hospital. If you had to stay longer than a week, it was two dollars and a half a day. Pretty good deal.

Warren: Wow! But you didn't have to go to the hospital, did you?

Williams: I did, as a matter of fact.

Warren: You did? What happened? Why did you have to go to the hospital?

Williams: Well, I had a bottle of seltzer water. You remember seltzer water, where you took a tube of gas, and you had a wire-bound bottle. You took this gas—I've forgotten what it was—to make fizz-water. It said, "Fill it up to the red line." Well, I thought, heck, if I filled it up a little further, I'd have more seltzer water to drink with whatever I was going to drink. Booze. So I filled it up, and it blew up in my face. So I went down to the hospital, and they gave me a shot. And they gave me a tetanus shot. At that

time, they could take a – I don't know whether you can do it today or not – an equine or a bovine. The bovine was the one I was supposed to have taken, and I took the equine. That made me have hives all over. So I went to the hospital with hives.

Not too long thereafter, a fraternity brother called on me. I said, "Well, this is a hell of a place. I'm comfortable, but –"

He said, "Well, let's sue the bastard."

I said, "Sure."

So we sued them. They settled out of court. We got a total of \$50 which we split down the middle, \$25 each. That was a lot of money, a lot of money in the view of the fact that my mother sent me \$20 a month which I could live on in princely fashion. An extra \$25 was something special.

So, anyway, it was soon thereafter the lawyer for the seltzer bottle company came over, and I told him I had already settled for \$50. He kissed me on both cheeks and left.

Warren: That's great. [Laughter]

Williams: The hospital was where Stonewall Jackson's house is now.

Warren: That's what I was about to ask you. That was when it was the hospital?

Williams: Right. The college hospital.

Warren: So did you think you were in a historic place to be in Stonewall Jackson's house?

Williams: I don't remember having a thought about. Fact of the matter is, I didn't know then it was Stonewall Jackson's house. I thought it was next door. But I really think where I was was part of Stonewall Jackson's old house. I talk funny, don't I? I say, "owt" and "howse" and "abowt."

Warren: You sound like you grew up in Virginia. My husband grew up in Charlottesville, so he says a lot of the same kinds of things.

So you said that for \$20 you could live in princely fashion.

Williams: Twenty-five dollars.

Warren: What was princely fashion then?

Williams: Oh, I don't know. Like I said, I had an allowance of \$20 a month which my mother sent me. I did all right on that. I supplemented it by playing poker. I played poker whenever I could find a game, which often meant that when I had to turn in an excuse to Mr. Mattingly, he took one quality point away from you if you had an unexcused absence. So I would manage to be sick, and I mean literally sick. More often than not, it was – don't put this in print – but it was a hangover sickness. So I played a lot of poker my senior year and liked it.

Now, where do you want to go from there?

Warren: Well, I want to know what "princely fashion" means. What did you do in Lexington to live in princely fashion?

Williams: Well, I am most famous here in Lexington for having been enamored with a girl named Suzanne Knox. I'm pretty sure that was her name. I'm sure she was from Pittsburgh. She went to Southern Sem. Well, in those days, there was a rental car place. It was right behind the Presbyterian Church. Now there's an insurance agency there. I saw it the other day – Chillum, Clittum, something like that.

So a friend of mine and I were going over to Buena Vista to see this girl, and we didn't have any wheels. So we went down to the car rental place and got a car, which we drove to Buena Vista backwards. Now, it would be quite a feat today, but in those days, the road wasn't what it is now. It was a two-lane road and very curvy. Somewhere between here and there, you went up to the top of the hill and right there you took a right turn. It was weavy road. We wove our way around. Finally, at the bottom of the hill you went through a creek. There wasn't a bridge across the creek. You had to ford the creek in the car.

So when we got to Lexington, we turned around and drove the car forward. We were afraid the police would stop us. We saw Suzanne Knox and some other girl. We came back. Drove the car back up to the edge of town and backed it back to Lexington.

You realize the logic of that, don't you?

Warren: Well, I'd like you to explain it to me.

Williams: Well, when we could have turned the car in, there was no mileage on it. There was just six miles that we had in Buena Vista. So we drove it around a little while, then turned it in. I think the total mileage showed eleven miles. But anyway, that was quite an experience. Now, you can make a story out of that.

Warren: I think so. I think so. Well, did you do a lot of road trips going to the girls' schools?

Williams: Not really. I spent a lot—I very spent a weekend here. I'd go home. My mother was living by herself.

Warren: And that was in Lynchburg?

Williams: Lynchburg. I'd sometimes go to Randolph-Macon and Sweet Briar, more often Randolph-Macon than the other. And all in all, I had a fine time.

Warren: Now, what was the difference between a Sweet Briar girl and a Randolph-Macon girl?

Williams: It all depends on who you know. I don't know why I started going to Randolph-Macon. I met a couple of Randolph-Macon girls over here, I guess. That was real notoriety. Nobody could believe that we did that, because it was hard work. I'm talking about driving that car to Buena Vista. Really hard work, but we got over it. No other notoriety here.

Warren: Nothing at all?

Williams: I can't think of any.

Warren: Now, if I talk to your classmates, they would say, "Ernie who?"

Williams: Yeah, they would. Well, not really since I've been class agent. I've been class agent for a long time.

Warren: Were you in a fraternity?

Williams: I was an ATO. ATO is the house in now a B&B. It's right across from the Mayflower Inn. You know where the Mayflower restaurant or something? The ATOs went belly-up when the worthy chancellor of the exchequer made off with the till. At least it's supposed he did. Fielding Woodward's younger brother, Ernest Woodward, was coming in as president, and his father, a lawyer from Louisville, said, "Now, look, before you take that thing over, get the books audited." And the books were, there was some \$35,000 discretion. Well, that's life and death for a fraternity. He was bonded, and I think the fraternity recovered maybe \$15,000.

Steve Lee came from – you shouldn't put this name in print – Steve Lee. But he came down from wherever he was and said, "It's all in the little black book."

"Well, where's the little black book?"

He said, "Oh, with the rest of the books." And there wasn't any reference in there to having bought anything at the back door which he said he did. So I'm not sure of this. I think Ernie Woodward went ahead as president of the fraternity. Soon thereafter, the fraternity couldn't hack it and went belly-up.

Warren: Was that considered a long way to be away from the campus or were there a lot of fraternities up there then?

Williams: There were two past that. The DUs were past the ATO House and the Kappa Sigs were past it. I would say those three were the furthest away. It was all right if you – quite often you could hitch a ride. There were five or six cars in our fraternity, but most of the time we walked. It wasn't too bad.

Warren: So did you have to run up there for lunch and then run back to classes?

Williams: I can't remember. I don't think I had any afternoon classes. If I did, they were at a reasonable time after lunch. At one time I arranged my schedule, I really

didn't much care what I was taking, but I arranged my schedule so I went to school on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. I couldn't do it so I couldn't not go to school on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. So I was not too particular about what I was taking. It was just so I didn't have to go to school for three days a week.

Mattingly was tough on you. You couldn't miss many classes before it showed up on your quality points.

Warren: I don't know the expression "quality points." What is that?

Williams: Well, my recollection is if you passed the course, you got three quality points. If you passed it with a B average, you got six. An A average, you got nine. I'm not too sure of that, but you worked right hard for three points. If they took one of them away for have an unexcused absence, that was tough to make up.

So I'm not sure — that's about the end of it. I didn't have a very eventful life here. I played on the first lacrosse team that they ever had at Washington and Lee. It wasn't recognized by the college. It was really a lacrosse club. It was coached by Dr. [Larkin Hundley] Farinholt, who was a chemistry professor and had gone to Oxford. It could have been Cambridge, and there he learned to play lacrosse. So we got him to coach us.

My recollection is that we had two games each year. I can only remember one of the four. We played the Maryland B team. I think the score was thirty-three to two. It might have been thirty-two to three, but it was on an island down in the middle of the river. It was rock-strewn and didn't make any difference if it had been like the lawns at Wimbledon; we didn't have much kind of chance against the Maryland B team. They beat the socks off of us.

I don't think the college furnished anything except the net. They might have given us the balls. We had, let me see, I guess they had helmets and gloves. You had your own lacrosse stick. If you didn't have it, you bought it.

Warren: How did you know about lacrosse?

Williams: I went to prep school up in Maryland. I played it. We had a good coach in "Long John" Boucher. So they were desperate to have anybody. They had three or four Maryland boys on the team.

Warren: Were you instrumental in bring lacrosse here?

Williams: No, no, not at all.

Warren: Well, what happened? Did the students ask for it or did Professor Farinholt get it started?

Williams: I can't remember. I remember that somebody knew that I had a lacrosse stick. On that lawn in front of our fraternity house near the street, we pitched baseball out there. Somebody else in the house pitched a lacrosse ball out there, threw it with me. I'm not too sure. It's in that vague, foggy part of the past that I don't remember much about.

But we weren't recognized. It was a lacrosse club. There was no W&L lacrosse team. I've forgotten who persuaded the athletic department to line us up a few games, the two games, I think, each year.

That was just about my athletic career here. I went after baseball, but I wasn't good enough to make the baseball team.

Warren: I understand Washington and Lee got pretty good at lacrosse.

Williams: Yeah, well, they had ringers then. They had a good football team, too. They were ringers.

Warren: So today when you hear Washington and Lee, or certainly in the seventies, Washington and Lee was really well thought of as a lacrosse team.

Williams: Yeah, it was playing then.

Warren: Did you say, "I was there at the beginning"?

Williams: No, I've told two or three people. I've told Norm Lord about that, and he sort of worries me about it, "Come tell me some more about." But I really don't remember too much about it. There wasn't much to remember.

This is a different class of lacrosse now than it was when they were good here. They had good boys, all from Baltimore, I think. I don't know what the scholarship basis was. That was a different class. I've forgotten what they call it. A, B, and C now, I guess?

Warren: I don't know.

Williams: I don't know either.

Warren: I don't know.

Williams: It's a good game.

Warren: Is it true that you never took a single commerce class?

Williams: That's very true.

Warren: Do you find a little irony in that?

Williams: Well, when Larry Peppers first—I didn't want to do this, have this building named for me. As a matter of fact, they wanted to name the library for me. I said, "Look, to hell with that. I don't need anything named for me. I really don't want it done. So please don't do it."

So then after some time, John Elrod—I can't remember whether he was president or about to president—he and Larry Peppers called me up and said they'd like to come down to Florida and talk with me. When they came, out of the briefcase of Larry Peppers, he broke out a document of whereas and whereas and whereas, and that had to with naming the commerce school after me. I would just as soon they not have done that, too. I don't revel in glory.

Actually, I get very sentimental about Washington and Lee, and I get very emotional about it. Many is the time I've tried to talk before a gathering here and been so emotional I couldn't go on with that which I was going to say. When I spoke at the dedication of the commerce school, that's probably about as much conversation I've ever had without breaking up. Right at the end of that which I said, I just about broke up.

John Wilson had said that when he was told about this sum of money that we had given W&L, he said something about a student union building, and that suited me fine. I thought they were going to build where this red brick building is right behind the Episcopal church. I don't mean red brick. I mean red frame building. But for some reason or other, they decided they weren't going to do that. So that's why they were looking for something else to name after me, and I didn't need anything to be named after me. It's very nice of them. When I walk past it and see my name etched in bronze, I like it. But I had visions of that which did happen, happening. I don't seek notoriety.

Warren: So why do you get emotional thinking about Washington and Lee?

Williams: I like this place a lot. I like it really because our son went here. He probably came in the fall of '58. I'm not sure. Then after two years, Frank Gilliam. Do you know he was? He was the dean of men—dean of students, I guess he was. He called our son in and he said, "Look, you're wasting your time and your parents' money. Go in the Navy. Go in the Marines. Go somewhere. Come back in three years, and we'll take you back."

So he did, and when he came back, he was a different person. He didn't reaffiliate with his fraternity. He had no social life. He was really a hermit. We were living in Lynchburg at the time. We'd sometimes see him on the weekends, but more often than not, he just stayed in his room and studied.

When he graduated and went to Cornell Graduate School and got an MBA there, I'm not sure why he chose Cornell. Maybe because even with his good grades, he couldn't get into Harvard or wherever else. I don't remember him even applying to any other place. He met his wife there. She was getting an MBA in textile engineering. That's a hell of a degree for a girl, isn't it? Then he went to New York and worked for Chemical Bank. She worked for Gaylee and Lord, which is a division of Burlington Industries.

After six or seven years in New York, they felt they'd better get out, because they say it's easy to get hooked on New York. So he went to work for C&S Bank in Atlanta. He worked in their investment department – C&S InvestCo. After X length of time – I can't remember what the X is – he saw an advertisement that Vanderbilt was looking for an assistant treasurer. So he called up, went up and had an interview, and got the job.

After having done that for three or four years, he was offered the job as treasurer, and he declined it. He thought he wanted to be out on his own and manage money. So he started a company called Southern Fiduciary Group, against my advice. I thought he'd do better to stay at Vanderbilt where he had made X number of dollars, and he might make 2X or 3X or even more than that. But you have to make up your mind whether you want to eat well or sleep well, and he wanted to eat well, and he doesn't sleep at all. So he's been doing that. The reason I tell you that is part of my affection for Washington and Lee stems for what Washington and Lee did for him.

So why do I get emotional? I don't know. I went into John Wilson's office once, and I saw that he had a *Calyx*, a 1938 *Calyx*, on his desk. I felt sure that he had had it there because he had asked the library to send it up so he could look me up and see what I did when I was in school, which wasn't much. But I had a fine time here. It's a great playground.

So that's about it. You heard my life story.

Warren: I want to know what kind of playing you did.

Williams: Playing?

Warren: Why was it a great playground? I know it's a great playground now, but why was it then?

Williams: It wasn't so much a playground in the middle of the week. By the end of the week, either the girls came to us or we went to the girls. Another thing that I did if I had to do all over again, I'd spend more time here than I spent in Lynchburg. My

mother was lonely. She had had a not happy life with my father. He died in 1938, I think. When I went to Lynchburg, I spent most the time with her. That's not so, either. Sometime I'd go around Randolph-Macon, and I'd have a date, bring the date back to see Mother.

Warren: Did you go to Fancy Dress?

Williams: Oh, yeah. I had a good time at Fancy Dress. I had a good time all the time, too much of a good time. Yes, I did.

Warren: What was Fancy Dress like then? I haven't talked to anybody from your year before.

Williams: It was mighty nice. On Fancy Dress, they had a theme of Metternich, and I guess it was the Congress of Vienna. People couldn't believe what it was like. They rented those uniforms from somewhere. I think it was Philadelphia. When they had them down here, they were pretty authentic uniforms. They looked great.

Warren: Military uniforms?

Williams: I don't know whether they were or not. It was what the Prince Metternich wore and what his enamorata wore, who was Marie Antoinette, maybe? I'm not sure. Anyway, it was a lot of fun.

Warren: Were they still doing the – what was it called? I want to say the form, but that's not it. Where everybody goes in and marches around.

Williams: You know, I don't remember. It was held over in Doremus Gymnasium. They came in and they stepped up several steps because they stepped down several steps when they walked into the court. It's pretty impressive. I never had a part in it. I mean, I did have a costume. If you were going to Fancy Dress, you had to have a costume. I don't remember too much about it.

Warren: I saw some pictures the other day from a fraternity house party, and everybody was in formal dress.

Williams: We all wore, most of the time we wore –

Warren: Did everybody own formal dress?

Williams: I think so. Most everybody wore tails. You didn't have to wear tails. You could wear a tuxedo coat.

Warren: But you owned it?

Williams: I did, and I had a cape, too, which is pretty fancy. And a top hat. Pretty jazzy stuff.

Warren: We're talking the Depression here.

Williams: Well, my recollection is that the cape new cost me \$27. I can't remember what the top hat brought because I can't remember where I bought it. But it wasn't much.

Warren: Did the depression have any effect on Washington and Lee?

Williams: If it did, I didn't know it. You know, we had dinner the other night at the Southern Inn down here on Main Street. I said to the waitress, "You know, when I was in college, if I didn't like the meal at the fraternity house, I'd come down here and get a plate of spaghetti and a bottle of beer, and it was forty-five cents."

She said, "You're kidding me." Well, I wasn't kidding her. That's what it was. And it was a pretty heaping plate of spaghetti.

So, I don't know. I liked everything about the college. I didn't work—I worked too hard. I didn't work at all hard the first two years, but last two years when I could have a lot of electives, I did like it. But the first two years, I made nothing but Cs and an occasional B. The last year, two years, I made As and made the honor roll. I think that's what they called it. It was one step above the Dean's List. But when you're taking things you like, learning is fun.

Warren: What was your major?

Williams: Journalism. I left here and went to work for the *Lynchburg News*. I worked on the morning paper, which I didn't like because I was going to work when all of my friends was getting off. I made seventeen dollars and a half a week, and I gave my

mother five of that. I think she probably gave it back to me or I charged up, charged to her enough gasoline or whatever to make up five dollars. So it was interfering with my courting this same girl that I told you I'd gone to the first grade with. So after probably eight months, plus or minus a little, let me see, I quit the newspaper.

Soon, thereafter, I went into the Navy, which was fun. Marjorie doesn't like me to say that, the best time of my life was when I was in the Navy, but it was. I got scared, but when I was not scared, I was having fun. That was between invasions. I was over in Africa and liked it. Liked everything about it except getting shot at. I didn't like that worth a damn.

Warren: I'll bet you didn't. Now, you were a journalism major. I haven't talked to any journalism majors. Were there any professors in particular who were important to you?

Williams: Yeah, Tom Riegel. I go out to see him. As a matter of fact, he's a penpal of mine now. I write Tom every now and then. I'm told he's sick. He lives on the road to Buena Vista. His address is Glasgow. It's back in there and tough to get to. He was a neat guy.

But journalism school wasn't very big. My recollection is there were twelve, maybe fifteen, of us in the journalism school. Right behind here, hanging over that— where are we now? I guess about right where we are now, there was a journalism lab where they had a flatbed press. You had to learn to set type. It wasn't very hard. Once you learned where the vowels were, the rest of it was pretty easy. Did you ever set type?

Warren: No.

Williams: I did, but I learned just enough of it to get by.

Warren: So they taught you all aspects of the newspaper business?

Williams: Yeah, I think all aspects. I think so. I learned all I needed to learn for what I did when I went to work. I was a proofreader, and it wasn't much of a job, nor did it

pay very much. It was leading to a job as a reporter, but I had visions of working at night, and I didn't want to, so I checked out.

Warren: Can you remember Tom Riegel as a teacher?

Williams: Sure.

Warren: Anything particular?

Williams: No, I can't really. He was good. He was very slow talking. There was another guy. I'm going to have to ask Tom what his name was. He lived right directly behind the ATO house, so I had to be slightly circumspect. I didn't want to make so much noise that he was going to come out there and belabor me. But I can't remember his name.

The journalism school was a good school. I guess Columbia and Missouri were the best journalism schools, but I think Washington and Lee was right up with it.

Robert E. Lee started a journalism school. That didn't influence me taking the journalism.

Warren: Was Robert E. Lee talked about much when you were a student?

Williams: I don't remember him being talked about at all.

Warren: How about the Honor System?

Williams: That was a factor.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Williams: Well, you were immediately aware of it when down by the gatepost, as you came into the campus, the gatepost, the next one west, I guess it's west, of the Episcopal church, there were books and coats strewn around. That was the first physical evidence that you had that something was a little different here.

Warren: Why did that mean something?

Williams: Well, that you'd leave something of value lying on the grass there or leaned up against the post coming in. Yeah, I think the Honor System played a strong part here. There was a very prominent student who just didn't show up one morning. It

wasn't until sometime later we found out that he'd – I'm not sure what he did. I think he took a – you could take an exam home. He took his exam home, and I think he fudged a little bit.

I had lunch with a guy named Futch today. Is that his name? Professor Futch? I remarked to him that Ollie Crenshaw lived directly behind the post office. It's the red brick house there, which at one time was the KA house, but when I went there, Ollie was living there. I don't have any recollection of Ollie being married, but when I got home for lunch, got to the fraternity house for lunch, I had a yellow pad, and in the yellow pad were two pages of a test that Ollie Crenshaw had given me. I don't know how, when I pulled them out of the yellow pad, you should take them in booklets. This wouldn't happen. I left those so nobody would see them. I said, "Look, I've got a problem. I left these two pages in here."

"No, problem at all. Hand them to me." So he took them. I would've been in pretty bad shape had I not been able to include those two pages of that test in my test.

Washington and Lee was an even smaller community then than it is now. I can't help but feel it was a little closer-knit. I lived in a fraternity house all four years I was here. That's not so, I didn't live there my freshman year. My freshman year, I lived in one of these dormitories behind me.

One winter month my freshman year, I think it was February, the law library caught on fire. The law library was where the most northerly building in the Colonnade part was located. It was a grey stone building and quite ugly. They had the fire departments from Buena Vista and Staunton here. It burned to the ground. For a long time, I kept one of the bricks, one of the stones, out of the law library. The big loss was the law school. The big was the law library because it took them some time to replace that. I don't know how they did it. But that was great excitement.

Warren: Did everybody come out?

Williams: Oh, yeah, everybody was there. It was quite a blaze.

Warren: So you were living in the dorms when it happened. Did it happen in the day or in the night?

Williams: Nighttime. My recollection is that it was sometime after midnight.

Warren: Did everybody spill out of the dorms?

Williams: I'm sure so. It was a big excitement.

Warren: I'll bet.

Williams: That's about it. You've heard it.

Warren: Did anybody have any idea how the fire started?

Williams: I never did hear an explanation. You ought to be able to go to the library here and dredge it up.

Warren: Yeah, but I was wondering what people were saying.

Williams: I don't know. No, I never heard there was any foul play connected with it.

Warren: So then you watched the present Tucker Hall being built?

Williams: Yes. I think so. Yes, I did. I don't remember seeing it actually going up, because it started right away. They took those grey stones down and put up this brick building which everybody was excited about, thrilled about.

Warren: Why?

Williams: Well, because it looked so good at the end of the Colonnade, the next building not being incongruous, which it was before.

My father went to Washington and Lee.

Warren: He did?

Williams: I think his class—he didn't do much. I think he really fluffed off. I fluffed off plenty, but not as much as he did. I know he went here two years. I know, because I went to some records upstairs, and I could only find him having been here. He had an incomplete both years.

Warren: How did you pick Washington and Lee?

Williams: How did I get here?

Warren: How did you decided to come here?

Williams: [Chuckles] Well, I was going to Augusta Military Academy, and there was a guy named Frank Jones who was a good friend of mine. But he played the same position on the football team that I did. He played it, and I tried to play it. I thought he was going to VMI. So I thought Frank was going to VMI, I'd go to Washington and Lee. Behold, Frank, when I got to Washington and Lee, Frank was here, too. So I didn't go out for football. But that's really the reason why I came here. I came here because they would have me, and I think they would have me because they wanted that \$250 in tuition. It was really quite a place.

Warren: Do you remember you first impressions when you first came here?

Williams: I had seen a lot of it. I first saw it when my father brought me over here. In one of the rooms just north of Washington Hall, there was a dinosaur in there, and I was pretty impressionable, because I was probably eleven or twelve years old when this dinosaur was in there with names. It was plaster dinosaur with initials carved all over him. But he was probably eighteen, twenty feet long. dinosaurs make a pretty big impression. I don't know whatever happened to him. I've asked what happened to him. I thought maybe something like George Washington being stuck off in the corner of this building, I thought something like that might have happened to him.

I guess the best, the most memorable thing I've done since I got out, I've been a class agent for a long time. And for our fiftieth reunion – we call ourselves the Thirty-eighter Alligators. That stems from when I was a class agent and was living at Hilton Head. And there are alligators all over Hilton Head, even now that it's built up. But I went to see a friend of mine who was really quite an artist. His name was Bal Balentine, and he had drawn the giant for the Jolly Green Giant. To this day he gets a residual. Every time you buy a can of peas at the grocery store, Bal gets some little smittance. So I went to Bal, and I said, "Bal, would you draw me an alligator?"

He said, "Sure, I like to draw alligators. It's fun drawing alligators."

I said, "I want him very lascivious-looking."

He said, "What?"

I said, "Horny-looking." [Laughter]

He said, "Sure, I'll do it."

So he drew me this alligator which we still use. He had a cane with a W&L banner on it. He had a boater hat with a bite having been taken out of it. Now, why did I get started on that?

So I've been a class agent for a long time. For our fiftieth reunion, the vice chairman was Jack Neil from Whispering Pines, North Carolina, somewhere in the Pinehurst area. I said, "Jack, you don't have to do but one thing. I'll do the rest. Find an inflatable alligator." So he found one.

Crocodile Dundee was in town, and under the marquee of the theater, there was an inflatable alligator. So Jack got him and he brought him up here. I said, "Jack, that's just fine. Meet me over behind Washington Hall at seven o'clock on the morning of this reunion morning," which, of course, was held down at Lee Chapel.

So we got some gas from some florist in town, and we blew that alligator up, and we had the maintenance men climb up on top of Washington Hall, and they hitched that alligator, and there he was flopping around in the breeze "38" all over his underside. It was really, it was great. We had a good time with him.

Warren: I've seen the picture.

Williams: Have you?

Warren: Yes. I was going to ask you about that.

Williams: That's how he came into being.

Warren: I was wondering whether you climbed up there yourself.

Williams: No, I didn't. Fact of the matter, just in the last month or two, John Wilson has told me that if he had known we were going to that, he wouldn't have let us do it.

He was worried about the health of George Washington. Have you ever seen him? He's in a room here, and his undersides are all eaten out.

Warren: Was he afraid the alligator was going to bite George?

Williams: I think he was afraid that somebody would lose their balance and grab George and fall off.

VMIs came over while I was in school and painted George red, white, and blue, because somebody, the VMIs thought, from here had come over and painted one of their sacred cannons blue and white. So they were here pretty soon thereafter. I don't know how they did that, how they got up through there and through that building and painted him, but he was.

Warren: Was there a lot of rivalry between the schools?

Williams: Not really. As a matter of fact, no athletic rivalry. There had been some way back, and it had caused some friction so they cut it out. Lacrosse, they have a VMI-Washington and Lee lacrosse game. I've forgotten what they call it. They play every year, but I think maybe even know that's the only athletic relationship they have.

Warren: How often do you come back now?

Williams: Not that often. I came back right much during that campaign for giants because I was involved in raising some money. I was a vice chairman of some sort. I guess we average coming here two or three times a year. We come back here for this Alumni College all the time. We're here for three of them now, but this is the first time we've ever been for three. And we go on the trips, and you get credit. That "17" means I've been here seventeen times. Except it really doesn't, because if you go on a trip, that counts as one, too.

Warren: I need to flip the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Williams: Another thing that happened, I wish they'd get this started. I thought I'd gotten it started. For our fifty-fifth reunion, I, on my own, determined that we should

give a class gift on the occasion of our fifty-fifth reunion, but it didn't work. It was like pulling eye teeth. I had promised them so much. I had said, "Look, if you give a lot to this fiftieth reunion—" We raised \$1,338,000. That "38" was part of the class of '38. I had said, "Bend your pick. Give us a lot of money this time. I'm not going to be back here again inopportuning you for money." So they did. They came across.

When I went back at the fifty-fifth, they just started turning me down flat. So on that occasion, I called up—I can't remember who I talked to. It might have been Brian Shaw. But I said, "We want to have a parade with an elephant in it."

He said, "Elephants cost a lot of money. How much?"

"Four hundred and fifty dollars."

He said, "We can get you an ostrich for free." Ostrich? No, one of those things that grows down in the Andes, lives down in the Andes. What do you call them? They got us one of those things. And we had a great parade. We had a band.

Warren: A llama?

Williams: Llama. Yeah. We had a llama with the "W&L" or maybe it had "38" on its side. We had two or three high school bands. I think they still have one, don't they, for occasions here?

Warren: Parades?

Williams: High school bands.

Warren: High school bands. Oh, yeah.

Williams: I think we might have had more high school bands than ever had been had before. Anyway, it was a good parade. The elephant was too expensive for us. That must have been—I'm not sure. I lose track of these reunions.

Warren: Did you start coming to reunions right away?

Williams: No. My fortieth was the first one I ever went to.

Warren: Is that so. Well, you made up for lost time, didn't you?

Williams: And we had a lot of fun. They've gotten more important with each passing year, I think.

Warren: Tell me what you mean by that.

Williams: I don't know what I mean. I think I mean that more people come back. More people come back with enthusiasm. More people like what they see. More people like what they do. On the occasion of our fifty-fifth, I got somebody in the alumni office to get a parachutist. Were you here then?

Warren: No.

Williams: So a plane left the Valley Airport just a little bit north of Staunton and flew over here, with instructions to have this guy jump forth at half-time at a football game, and he did, and he landed right smack in the middle of the field. I went out to meet him, and I took from him a check which I, in turn, gave to John Wilson. Brian Shaw, or somebody in his office, had made for us one of those cardboard checks about the size of this table – maybe four feet by eight or ten feet – with "\$25,000" written on it. That was our gift to the college. I hoped then and thought then that this was a tradition that would take hold and that over a period of time would mean something, but it never took. It was a vaccination, but it didn't work.

So I have heard something since I've been back here, and I don't know where I heard it, about something being done to generate an interest, a momentary interest other than the fiftieth reunion.

Warren: What did you think when Washington and Lee went co-ed?

Williams: I was against it for a long time. I think I was talking with Parke Rouse, who was a class or maybe two classes ahead of me. We talk from time to time, even now. He told me he had been dead-set against it, and that he'd mellowed, and he was going to change. So I thought about it, and finally I decided it would be all right. Today I get out of the *Ring-tum Phi* a listing of the academic standing of classes of fraternities and sororities, and I've noticed that the girls are always one, two, three, four, and the SAEs

and the Betas and the Phi Deltas and the Phi Kappa Sigs are always eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one. So I make use of that and rub our respective noses in it. I think it's the greatest thing that's ever happened to the college now, but I was against it for a while. I've been disturbed somewhat about it. I've got to talk with Barry. What's Barry's last name? He's the law school dean.

Warren: Barry. I'll think of it. He's not anymore. Bezanson?

Williams: Oh, no, no, no. No, it's a Barry something, succeeded.

Warren: Barry Sullivan.

Williams: Sullivan, yeah. I've got an idea maybe that—I've noticed that speaking on the campus is not as general as it used to be. I think perhaps it's because it's those that I see that don't speak, or seem reluctant to speak, are maybe the law school students. I don't think anybody speaks to them like they used to at Freshman Camp to the incoming classes. So I'm going to have to ask him to talk to them about it.

Warren: Why is that important to you?

Williams: Because I thought it was *the* great tradition. Of course, I always thought coats and ties was a great tradition, but they couldn't carry through the sixties with that. I understand it. I still would like it, but I understand why they don't do it.

Warren: They do once in a while.

Williams: Yeah, I was talking today with Futch. Is that that man's name?

Warren: Yes.

Williams: Somebody had told me that he required students to wear ties to his class. He said it had got so that they were wearing ties on skivvy shirts, and he said, well, that was pretty bad, so I think he might have backed off a little on that.

Warren: I have a picture of some students in shorts with a tie on, and I figured they must have just come out of his class, because he has that reputation.

Williams: Dr. Bean would like that. Dr. Bean was just as tough as nuts. Gee, he was a tough old guy.

Warren: What did he teach?

Williams: He taught history. And you couldn't bluff your way through Dr. Bean's classes. Some of my classes, I could talk my way through, but not Dr. Bean.

Warren: How would you talk your way through a class?

Williams: I don't know. I seemed to get through. Dr. Ewing taught me Spanish, and I couldn't talk my way through that. I just barely got Cs, too. I think he gave the Cs. I don't think I earned them.

Warren: Tell me about Lexington back in those days. Were there any particular places to hang out?

Williams: Yeah, McCrum's. Was McCrum's open when you were here?

Warren: Yes.

Williams: You could buy beer at McCrum's. I don't remember them ever asking you for some sort of an I.D. to prove your age, but you could go in and get a sandwich and a beer and a milkshake. McCrum's was quite an institution. I don't know why it went belly-up. It did.

Warren: So it had a snack bar? I never knew it to have a snack bar.

Williams: Well, I guess you'd call it that. They made sandwiches up there behind the soda fountain. I don't remember anything but sandwiches.

We spent some time across at the Mayflower Inn across from our fraternity house because you could buy a bottle of beer over there, a cold beer, and it was someplace to go. There was a pool room down on the corner of – what's that street right here that goes in front of the Episcopal church? Not Nelson. Nelson's the next one over, I guess, isn't it?

Warren: That's West Washington Street.

Williams: There was a pool room on the corner of Washington and Jefferson, I guess, sort of across the street from the Dutch Inn. Is the Dutch Inn still there?

Warren: It's for sale if you want to buy it.

Williams: No, I don't.

Warren: Maybe you could get Marjorie to move into the Dutch Inn. [Laughter]

Williams: She doesn't want to come to Lexington. She likes where we're living. There was one pool room there, and there was another pool room on the second floor of the building catty-corner from the post office. I think it now does some sort of reproducing, but then it was a place that made sandwiches, milkshakes, and that sort of thing, and a pool room upstairs. I think they only had two pool tables. The law school professors I'd see up there a lot. I guess I'd see them up there because I guess I was up there a lot. I guess we would hang out at our own fraternity house or some friend's fraternity.

I've often wondered whatever happened to the Old Blue. The Old Blue was an old inn. Long, narrow. I feel like it was one room deep. There's a grass plot, a grass triangle, down—I can't tell you where it is. Do you know where the Beta house is? Well, it was just north of the Beta house. There's a filling station across from the Old Blue. I think students hung out there a lot. I don't think I was ever in there but once or twice. There wasn't a lot to do here.

When I was here, the repeal of Prohibition came in just before I got here. I think probably the spring of '34 or the first part of '34 was when Prohibition was repealed. I don't remember—I remember going into the liquor store. I remember buying liquor, but I don't remember ever being challenged as to my age. Maybe I was.

Not much went on. Not like it is now. There was certainly nothing that the college did to make your social life more reasonable, more tenable. Really, I think you probably had to get out of town. I'm not sure of that.

Warren: Did you use to go out to Goshen?

Williams: Yeah, I went out to Goshen. Not a lot. Went down in springtime. There was a place out here called—I can't remember. But it was an old house, we went up to the second floor. It was where you went swimming. I wonder what the name of that place was. I can't remember. I didn't go to it. You just went up to it after a dance, went

there two or three o'clock in the morning to go swimming or maybe play baseball at first light.

Warren: Is it Zollman's?

Williams: I can't remember the name of it. Some person older than I am would have to tell you the name of it.

Warren: Did you have a car?

Williams: My senior year.

Warren: How did you get back and forth to Lynchburg?

Williams: My friend Jack McNeil had a car, and he also was courting a girl in Lynchburg. There was another, he was a fraternity brother, Tommy Martin. He was from Lynchburg. He had a car. But you just had to hustle up a ride. I don't remember ever going over when I didn't have a ride back before I went.

Warren: How was the drive going across the mountains?

Williams: Tougher than it is now, a lot tougher. We were talking at lunch about Jimmy Watts, who was two classes ahead of me. My freshman year, though we were the same age, Jimmy was a junior. Jimmy left to go to Harvard Law School. He was out for football my freshman year when he got the word that his brother had been killed in an automobile accident on his way down to Raleigh, North Carolina. They were taking—he had three kids with him. Maybe there were three in the car, but they were all killed. So Jimmy left the field, and I remember seeing him running across the bridge on his way home. I don't know why I brought that up. Something you asked me. There's no point to the story.

Warren: About driving.

Williams: Oh, yeah, right.

Warren: I look at those roads, and I say I don't know how these kids survive this.

Williams: It's a lot better now than it was then. So really I can't think of anything memorable. You know, when you had a dance or when you had Fancy Dress, of

course, that was the big one. We drove over to Charlottesville for Easter week every year because that was a good dance.

Warren: They had the dance over there?

Williams: Easter week. It was a whole series of dances. They'd have the big-name bands just like we'd had them here for Fancy Dress.

Warren: Can you remember who played at Fancy Dress when you were here?

Williams: I think Al Kemp did. Glen Gray, maybe. I can remember they were both here, as was Kay Kyser, but I can't remember which dance they were at. It was pretty reasonable what they charged to come here. It wasn't a lot of money. Certainly it might have been a lot of money then, but I think the whole orchestra was maybe \$1,000 to \$1,200. I don't know what they pay them now.

Warren: More than that.

Williams: I'm sure. Well, you know for somebody that doesn't have very many memories, you've sure given me a wonderful interview.

Williams: Well, I've got a lot of memories, a lot of which I don't want to tell you about. No, all of mine are reasonably decent. I mean, they are probably not repeatable to you, but we had a good time here. A lot of those times involved dances and house parties and that sort of thing. I really don't remember house parties here. Some fraternities, I think, would have a house party and turn over some floor in the house to the girls or maybe they'd get out of the house. I don't remember how it worked, because we never did that. But a fine place, and I do get emotional about it. I choke up all the time when I talk about it. I don't like to, but I do it. I almost choked up when I was talking with—what's Futch's first name, you know?

Warren: Dave Futch.

Williams: I was talking with him today about something, probably about our son having been here. He's got a friend in economics, in the commerce school. All of a sudden I can't say his name. His wife's name is Fay. But I guess really my great

fondness for Washington and Lee comes from that which they did for our son, which was make him a better person.

Warren: Well, I understand, because I've been choking up doing these interviews. I've had more than one person shed tears doing the interviews. When I talk to some people who were involved in the coeducation decision, that is very emotional, very emotional.

Williams: Well, I was certainly against it for a long time. I do remember that Park Rouse said in so many words, "It's not going to be bad." Of course, I had two daughters that decided they didn't want to come here because they had sororities and fraternities. I don't know what that had to do with their decision. I feel like one of their friends must have been hurt, not having gotten a bid, something like that. I had another daughter who came here and was interviewed and wasn't accepted. She subsequently went to Skidmore, where she made Phi Beta and graduated *magna cum laude* or *summa*, I can't remember which. I think *summa*'s the highest. Graduated *summa cum laude*. So I would like for one of our grandchildren to come here to school, but I've only got probably one more chance. I don't think it looks like her grades are good enough to make it. Maybe. She's working. She goes to a little school up on Long Island – that's not so, Long Island – up on Cape Cod. Well, anyway.

You've about had it.

Warren: I'm having a good time. Anything more you want to say, you can.

Williams: I wish I could think of something to say.

Warren: You know, there's one more thing. I did a little homework just like Wilson did, got the *Calyx* out. You were in the Glee Club.

Williams: Yeah.

Warren: Was that important? Did you have a good time?

Williams: Yeah. John – what was his name, the director of the Glee Club. I can't say his name. He was pretty good, but he was a martinet. He gave me a bad time if I missed practice. But I liked it. I just like singing. I didn't do much. I mean, away from

the fraternity, I mean, away from playing poker wherever the game was. Graham, John Graham. He was a good director because you did have to come there, and you did have to sing, and you did have to sing the right notes. But Glee Club is a lot of fun.

Warren: Did you travel around doing concerts?

Williams: You know, I can't remember. I think maybe we went to Washington once. I can't remember. The trip must have not been too important, or I would have remembered it. I guess we went to Randolph-Macon and Sweet Briar. I know we went to Randolph-Macon once. But it was a lot of fun. But I didn't do anything much, certainly nothing that was memorable.

Warren: Well, you dredged up some wonderful memories here today.

Williams: Well, you're nice to do this.

Warren: I'm having a great time.

Williams: And I'm sorry I got the wrong place, but I was there on time.

Warren: We both were there on time. We just didn't know where each other was.

Williams: Well, I asked Margie, "Marge, where do you think I'm supposed to be?"

She said, "I think you're supposed to do it right here." I don't know where she got that idea. I probably told her that. So anyway.

Warren: We're here, we had a good time, and I sure do thank you.

Williams: Well, you sure are welcome.

[End of interview]