

JEFFREY LABORDE '95

November 6, 1996

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Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the sixth of November, 1996. I'm in McLean, Virginia, with Jeff Laborde, who's actually a legendary figure at Washington & Lee at this point. I want to just cut right to the chase and get the story about why you are infamous, maybe not by name, but—

Laborde: Sure. Certainly. Not by name nor by looks.

Warren: Not by name, but it's just a story that is well-known at W&L.

Laborde: More well known than I thought, actually, or now I realize.

Warren: Well, tell me what the truth is. Tell me the story. Tell me what happened.

Laborde: Well, I guess it was my sophomore year, the winter of my sophomore year, which was, I guess, when pledgship was supposed to have started in January, so it would have been in 1993. It was towards the end of pledgship, and traditionally we had always had stories passed down to us within the fraternity house and SAE. You may not want to mention that, I'm not sure. It's a story in and of itself, I don't know if it needs fraternity affiliation. We had had stories passed down to us about how towards the end of pledgship, before things wrapped up, the freshmen pledge class usually was encouraged to kidnap a sophomore and—

Warren: Why a sophomore?

Laborde: Because sophomores were the next level and they liked to think that they were still a full part of the house, but the juniors and seniors always, to them they were still freshmen, if you know what I mean. And not only that, but the

sophomores were usually much more involved in pledgship because they were hands-on, it was their first time as actives, and so the freshmen knew them a lot better. So they got to pick different ones that they had certain feelings about.

Let's see. So as the pledgship wore on, we would tell them the same stories that we had heard about people being kidnapped in the past, nothing really outstanding. I think the only one I ever really heard of was like three or four years before myself, where a guy had just gotten a pilot's license, so they kidnapped an active and flew this guy to the middle of nowhere, dropped him off on a tarmac, turned the plane around, and took right back off. They were told, you know, I think the unsaid rule was that if the pledges drop you off and they come back and they beat you back from wherever they take you, back to the campus, then you can't really get back at them. They've accomplished their challenge, and so they get off scot-free. Whereas otherwise, then, you know, then they're your pledges again and you get to have all your pledge rights with them as a class, I guess.

Warren: If you get back first?

Laborde: If you get back first. So that was, like I said, really the only story that I could remember. There were a couple of other ones that I'd heard from other fraternities where they had taken guys down to Hollins, I think, was one good one, where they chained a guy to a fence, I mean a tree, in front of the Hollins dorms, and took off all his clothes. Luckily, I didn't have anything quite as embarrassing, but it was still pretty interesting when my year rolled around.

When I was a freshman, we kidnapped a guy. They had frightened us so much by saying, "You'd better leave us alone. You'd better not mess around with us or else we'll get you guys," that we just picked one guy up and then drove him out to the country and made him walk home, you know, nothing too special.

But my year, the pledges were a lot bigger than a lot of the guys in the house, if I remember correctly, or some of the guys in the house, so there was a little more

intimidation. Some of them were pretty renowned for being pretty extreme, like in the martial arts and stuff.

Warren: Now, when you say bigger, you mean physically bigger or more in number?

Laborde: More in number. We only had, I think, fifteen or sixteen guys in the fraternity, and there were twenty-three guys or twenty-four guys in that class. Let's see. So we rolled around and we kind of got a feel. My roommate and I had been warned by a couple of the guys in their class who we were good friends with, that we were going to be targeted, so we were watching out for these guys. Because they only had a week in which to do it, so we were keeping an eye out. We did things, like I think the night before, it actually worked out really well, we went up to the freshmen parking lot and let the air out of the freshmen cars, their tires, so that they wouldn't be able to use their cars to take us anywhere. They actually got around that.

So it came up almost the day where the window of opportunity for them was about to close, and it was a Friday afternoon after a big snowstorm. Everyone was heading out to Windfall, which is one of our big party houses, and it has a big hill. Everyone was going out there sledding. I was in my last class on the Hill that Friday afternoon and I was heading back out there. I was sitting there in the middle of class, I had actually gone to class later than when I usually do, it was Dr. Fletch's [phonetic] class, actually, a history class. One of the freshmen walked in, one of my freshman pledges walked into the class, and stuck his head around and it was like, "Oh, I'm sorry." I was kind of, "What is going on?" Closed the door. Walked back out. Then didn't think anything of it, but I should've thought something of it, because the bell rang, I got up and I was walking out of class, you know, obviously the last place I ever would've thought to have worried about being kidnapped was from the Hill, and obviously they put their finger on that, too.

As I was walking out of class, I walked about twenty feet out of Newcomb Hall, turned out of one of the side doors, turned around, and noticed that there were two of my freshmen pledges coming out of a door right behind me. I turned around and I saw two coming around the corner right towards me, and then all of a sudden, I don't know if I would consider myself paranoid or not, but something clicked and I decided that I'd better get out of there. So I turned rapidly to walk towards the Colonnade when I think about two or three more guys came out.

By that time the two behind me had kind of hustled up and were right on me, and they didn't have smiles on their faces. They were determined. They had this glow in their eye. It was like a lamb going to the wolves. They physically jumped on me, grabbed me. I kind of started swinging around. I didn't yell or anything, because I figured if I could get away quickly, nothing would be made of it. So I struggled. It was right as the classes were letting out, so there were hundreds of people everywhere. I remember some of my friends saying that they were walking out of the library and they saw me being carried like a coach who had just won a football game, except I didn't have the same look of happiness on my face.

Back towards, I think, the registrar's center, they had one of my pledge brothers' car there, which they had borrowed, and he said, "I'll loan it to you, but you have to promise me that you won't use it to kidnap anyone."

They said, "Sure," but they obviously broke his trust on that.

They threw me in the back of the car with a couple of other bigger guys, with the engine running. Then they taped up my hands and my legs and put a blindfold on me and drove me around town for a little bit, having fun, saying all kinds of things that they were going to do to me and stuff. Then they turned around and threw me in the back of the trunk.

Warren: In the trunk?

Laborde: In the trunk. Well, it was a Jeep. It was like one of those Wagoneers. In the back, back behind the middle seat, it's just a big open space. So they threw me back there and there were a bunch of bags and coats and stuff back there and they just kind of covered me up. After about an hour of driving around town, messing around, I think stopping to visit people and pick up people and tell people what the plans were and stuff, we just took off driving. Got on the interstate, drove forever, drove for like six, six and a half hours. I'm sitting there cramped up and getting all kind of—needless to say, the anticipation is building, not knowing where I was going, even with whom at that point, other than that they were freshmen. They were told that they could never do anything to whoever they kidnapped that hadn't been done to them, so I knew I was relatively safe as far as that goes.

So we get somewhere, we stop, they pick up someone else who I had never heard his voice before in my entire life. They took us to someplace, I could tell it was in the middle of nowhere, when they pulled me out of car. One of the guys had a country house, and they had taken me all the way down to Savannah, Georgia, which is where this guy lived. He was a pledge and he had a friend who was an SAE at another school, who he was really good friends with. This guy was even more gung-ho and even more psychotic. Supposedly he's a Navy SEAL or something like that. So they pretty much had their fun with me, messing around, mind games and stuff like that, until probably, I'd say, 4:00, 4:30 in the morning. They had been drinking the whole time.

It was only five guys, too, five pledges. In my mind, they were the five pledges who deserved the least to be able to get their kicks out of this, because they were the five worst pledges, by our book. The rest of the pledges, I came to find out, were supposed to make it down there, but they couldn't because both their cars had multiple flat tires. So I did save myself a little bit of trauma in that sense.

So about 4:30, they pulled me out of this guy's house and put me back in the back of the Jeep, and at this point they really hadn't told me anything about what was going on. I knew they only had, like I said, that window was the weekend. They had to be somewhere, I think. They had their last study hall Sunday night and this was Saturday morning, early. So I knew they couldn't mess around with me for too long.

Let's see. So they had said that they were going to take me by boat to an island. I had guessed by that point who they were and where we were.

Warren: Were you still blindfolded?

Laborde: I was still blindfolded the entire time and my hands were bound, my feet were still bound. I had guessed where we were, just purely based on, I don't really know, I guess because the guy who was the "ring leader" was the guy who was—I figured he was the ring leader and realized where he lived, and this guy that they had brought in was his friend.

And so we went on and they proceeded to tell me how they were going to make sure that they beat me back and how they weren't going to have to worry about it. They were going to drop me off on this island. They said, you know, "We're going to take you off the coast by boat and it's a big cemetery. It's not too far off coast and they have a boat that comes out there once every two days, and there's a caretaker and he comes and cleans things up and stuff. So he'll either be out there later on today or tomorrow, so don't worry about. You'll be safe. We'll give you enough clothes, don't worry about it."

In the meantime, I think, I forgot to say earlier on, they had taken my wallet, my checkbook. I think they had given me back my ID, identification card, just to make sure, if anything happened. I think they gave me back—no, they had taken my checkbook and really I was left with almost no means, if that was the case. So they take me over to the marina, put me on the front of a boat and we just kind of go.

We're driving along, I can feel the wind, obviously tell that I'm on a boat and we just keep on going, still blindfolded the whole time. They had unbound my hands and my feet, so just in case anything happened, I would only be blindfolded, so they said. They put a life preserver on me or something like that.

So we're driving and they're gunning the motor and going slower and faster, talking about how the tide's coming in, so they wanted to be careful not to get stuck. Again, all for psychological value. We finally come to a stop, I can tell, and they're like, "Okay. Stand up. You're going to jump and there's only going to be about two or three feet of water." At this point I was like, "Forget it. I don't care. Just get me out of here, let me off the boat." So I kind of took that leap of faith and landed in water that was about up to my knees. And they were like, "Just walk forward," because the blindfold was such that it was taped, so I could either stand there in water up to here for about thirty seconds to a minute, for as long as it would take to get the blindfold off, or walk on up to the beach.

So I jumped in the water, and as I was unraveling, I was walking up to the beach, I think I fell and it was into the sand and kind of mud on my way up, because I tripped over a rock or a tree. It wasn't that cold, though, luckily, down there. So I got the blindfold off, turned around and looked, it was still dark, the sun was barely coming up, and I saw their boat heading away. It looked like a river, it didn't really look like an island. If it was an island, it looked like there was only about a hundred yards separating the land.

I walked up, after I got the blindfold off, and I walked up onto the beach and saw them. This was really kind of where I guess I started getting, I guess. One of the things the entire night that was a source of comfort for me, was the fact that while I had been in the trunk of this guy's car, or in the back of this guy's car, I had realized that they had taken my wallet and all that stuff, so I knew that I was going to have no way to get back and that no one up at the house is going to wire me anything. So

in the six and a half hours that I had hid back there, I had started messing around in the bags looking for some means of sustenance just in case such a situation should present itself, which it obviously did. So I had smuggled some financial means from one of their wallets into my shoe, obviously with the full intent of reimbursing them once I was—it was just a loan, in my mind, just to make sure that I could get back, since they had actually taken my wallet and whatever was in there, I wanted a little collateral.

So I got off the boat and dug around in my shoe, which is where I had hidden it, and pulled it out and actually walked through this cemetery. It was a big cemetery. I walked up off the beach, the cemetery, it took me about a half an hour to figure out it was really just a river and that they had just dropped me off on a bank south of town, I think it was, in the cemetery.

So I walked through the cemetery, out to a road, and hitched a ride with a guy who had been selling pipes or something like that. He was really upset, because I had just fallen. It was cool, but it wasn't very cold out that morning, and I mean, needless to say, I probably didn't look too good after being up for the past twenty-four hours. He was just kind of like—once I told him we were just doing a fraternity thing, it was a big mistake, he was just, "Those damn fraternity pranks. We should go report this to the police," going on and on about all this stuff. So I finally calmed him down, got him to drop me off at a hotel in town. So when I was there, I walked into the hotel, checked in and got my clothes washed because they were all muddy and whatnot and wet, and took a nap, got some food. Called and found out there was a flight from Savannah to Atlanta and that I could get a connection from Atlanta back to Roanoke. I figured that these guys wouldn't be able to turn right back around and head out, because they were pretty inebriated, I think, from the previous evening and, needless to say, very tired.

So I called a cab, and the flight was at twelve, and flew back on the flight, and then had some of my fraternity brothers pick me up, and we drove back up. They were like, "Tell us the whole story, what's going on." But all of this was done based on the financial means that I secured previously. So that was pretty gratifying in the sense that if this race was going to be done and I had been embarrassed by being caught, which is half the battle anyway, I mean, how was I going to save face, which is always the concern, especially when you have two classes above you willing to make fun of you for one thing and one class below you willing to make fun of you because they caught you. So this was, for me, kind of a big salvation.

So I got back and we had, actually, out of coincidence, had planned to have a big fraternity party that night at the house. So I took a nap, cleaned up, and the party was in the fraternity house. I went downstairs and sat right by the door of the party, and people started filing in, and I have never seen so many faces that you could tell that they were just happy to see me. I guess my sarcasm may not be picked up on the tape. But the looks of amazement that I got from these faces, the double-takes that I got as they were walking in the door, was unbelievable. Needless to say, the word had—from these freshmen that had not been able to go, but the freshmen who had been down there hadn't even made it back yet, and I was back, looking good as new, sitting right there with a big grin on my face, knowing that I had won the bragging rights, got back in time, and, as they were all soon to find out, gotten back on their own means, essentially.

So it was a night of just telling stories over and over again, and word got around, I'm sure, like wildfire. Then the other guys got back the next day and they were just—you know, what could they say, really? I talked to the guy who had kind of been the ring leader for the whole thing many, many times, and we're good friends to this day, and he still to this day, he says, "I'm just so bitter, upset with you," in a good way, of course, but that, "I thought we were going to cap things off. I

thought we were going to be the ones that would have the bragging rights just forever, and you topped us."

So everything was said and done, and we all had a pretty good time. We all had a pretty good story to tell and we all got something out of it. In the end, he actually, I think—we took house funds and reimbursed them all for the expenses of my getting back. So it was no hair off anyone's chest. Like I said, it was definitely a story that we kind of knew that would kind of expand on itself, as I'm sure it has.

Warren: No, actually the story I heard is the story you just told.

Laborde: Well, good.

Warren: That is amazing. I was fully prepared for it to be quite a different story.

Laborde: Oh, really? Okay.

Warren: But isn't that interesting that you're telling me—

Laborde: That is, amazingly enough.

Warren: Pretty much true to fact.

Laborde: Well, there's not too much more to exaggerate on, because it's pretty ridiculous in and of itself.

Warren: That's pretty good. Although I had heard that it was an island. So I'm a little reassured to know that it wasn't an island.

Laborde: Right. I had heard that it was an island, too. [Laughter]

Warren: So did this story keep coming back to you, or did everybody know that you were the star?

Laborde: Most people knew at least that year and the year to come, most people knew. When I started finding out from people that didn't know, or that, "You're that guy," was maybe I was like a senior, which was two years later, and freshmen might have heard that story and been like, "Oh, my God, I can't believe it," blah, blah, blah, going on. Then I also heard it from a couple of alumni who came back for Alumni Weekend and they were like, "We heard this great story about this

happening," and stuff like that. It did come back, but it came back in ways I guess I really didn't see it coming back. Most people pretty much knew then and there and would say something about it at a party or on the Hill or something to that effect.

Warren: That's a wonderful story. Does something like this stay at the student level or did the administration get wind of it?

Laborde: We actually had some talk from some of the IFC members and the faculty who were on IFC saying that fraternity activities should have been kept on the fraternity level, in the sense that they didn't want to hear anything more than they had heard, which is obviously the rest—anything else that might have happened within fraternity bounds, since we usually don't share that many things, details and whatnot, but they had said that they usually like to keep things off the Hill, and the fact that they got me from the Hill, obviously I'm sure some teachers and stuff saw it, thinking, "Why would they want to kidnap someone? What's going on there? What are they doing? What are they going to do to that poor boy?" and stuff like that. I think they had cause for concern in that sense.

But other than that, like I said, it's something that had been done, it's been done very innocently, and there aren't hazards to your health and whatnot there, and things going on in that sense. Although being blindfolded and I think that was the whole purpose of that, you say there are going to be mind twists that they can do which makes you think that there's a lot more danger there than there is. So essentially they really didn't—it's something that other fraternities are going to do as well, and it's not something that's seen as abusive of the freshmen, which I know fraternities have been accused of and had problems with in the past. So there really wasn't that big of a turmoil made about that. I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if they knew about it, but I also wouldn't be surprised if, from both angles, "Why would they want to do something like that?" and the other one, "Oh, it's just tradition."

Warren: So one thing they keep mumbling about, talking about, talking about seriously, is the idea of hazing. Would something like this be considered by them to be hazing?

Laborde: I could see it very easily, but I could see them approaching it from this angle, not that it was hazing by the upperclassmen, but that the freshmen were doing this as a result, if you will, of the hazing that they had received. Like this is their chance to kind of get back, and why would they want to get back if they had never been hazed in the first place? But like I said, the traditional aspect is much closer to the truth of it than anything else, just because it's that challenge that everyone kind of builds them up for from early on. So can you guys top what's been done in previous years? What do you got? Although if they had pulled it off, they generally would have been lauded as, "Wow, man, you guys did a great job," blah, blah, blah. But since they didn't, it turned around and that much more on them and so it was just like, "Oh, you guys can't do anything right. You had the makings for an incredible story and it turned out to be an even more incredible story, but not in your favor."

Warren: This isn't just an SAE tradition. This goes on—

Laborde: No not at all.

Warren: Is this going on at other schools, or is this a W&L thing?

Laborde: I have heard it rumored in other schools, but not as much as I have at W&L. I don't know whether that's just because of my contact with W&L. I have definitely heard of it happening at W&L, especially in some of the larger fraternities that, I guess, have more of a tradition of being some of the stronger fraternities in the sense of numbers and tradition and whatnot, some of the older ones. But like I said, outside my own fraternity, there were stories separate from that. The playing one and some of the other ones were things that I just heard within, but then the one about the guy being taken down to Hollins and stuff like that were from other

houses and whatnot. I'd heard stories about Phi Kap and Phi Delta and K, I think, as well. I'm not sure if Beta did any, but I definitely heard about stories from those other houses. And a lot of attempts, as well, I might add. Most guys were a little bit more fortunate than me as far as eluding kidnapping.

Warren: I think that's amazing, with the audience you had for the whole thing.

Laborde: That just added to it, as far as people showing up that night for the party, kind of like wanting to know what was the result of the whole scenario, the whole scene on the Hill.

Warren: Well, Jeff, I want to thank you. That's getting it from the source. You don't often get to the horse's mouth.

Laborde: No, you're right, you're right.

Warren: All right. Now I'm going to back up. That was the unique story that only you could tell. Now I'm going to back up and do some of my usual questions.

Laborde: Oh, sure, sure.

Warren: Which is, first of all, what made you go to Washington & Lee? Why did you choose W&L?

Laborde: The first exposure I had to at all, coming from New Orleans, was one of my sister's friends. My sister's about three years older than I am. A girlfriend of hers who actually had known very well from when we were younger had gone to a place called W&L. I knew she was pretty intelligent and that she had nothing but good things to say about it. So I did a little more talking about it and research and found out that there were a lot of my parents' friends, and that kind of lead me to realize that there was rather a large W&L community from New Orleans, alumni community from New Orleans, and went up to visit a bunch of schools. I applied to like ten different schools, all pretty much in this area, from Boston on down to, I guess the most Southern place was, I guess, Vanderbilt in Tennessee.

Got invited up for one of the Scholar Weekends, or something to that effect, which is a whole other story. But had by far and away the best time. It was a St. Patrick's Day weekend that just happen to coincide. I had been by far and away the best time at W&L. I went to three different other schools. I went to Georgetown, Tufts, and, I think, Boston College, and checked out their whole weekends and what they had to offer. None of them could compare. A lot of people questioned my going to a small college in a small town, and I had absolutely no hesitation coming from such a big city with so many big city problems and being exposed to those in a relatively large high school. So having so many good experiences there and knowing that they had a pretty good commerce school as well, which was what I was interested in, and knowing that they had a lot of tradition was really a big draw for me.

Warren: St. Patrick's Day didn't hurt at all, I'm sure.

Laborde: It did not. It did not. It happened to be a very mellow weekend. It was actually the first weekend I ever had grain alcohol, and it didn't take much, but I had a really good time. It was fun.

Warren: So you mentioned you came for Scholars Weekend?

Laborde: It was actually the people who had just missed the Scholars, I think. So the Scholars came the weekend before us, or we might have all come and then they let us know what the results were. They had said I think we had just missed it or something to that effect. Do they still have the University Scholar Program, where they give away the scholarships to freshmen coming in, and if they maintain a certain GPA, I think they—yeah. I didn't receive it, but that was just what the weekend was for.

Warren: But you said there's another whole story there.

Laborde: It was just with getting—I got pretty inebriated, and we were staying with a host, as a freshman, who is a freshman in the freshmen dorms. I went there and he

actually went out of town for the weekend, so he wasn't too much of a host. I got rather sick that evening after I'd gone to bed. I tried to clean everything up, but I had a flight that I had to catch, I had to leave about 6:30 to catch. So I didn't realize that I had made a mess until about 5:00, so I had only about ten minutes to clean up. Cleaned up, turned on the fan, opened up all the doors and windows, and his next-door neighbor, who I'd actually become really good friends with, he played on the soccer team and I was interested, I had met the soccer coach and stuff that weekend, because that was another reason why I was going to W&L, was to play soccer, which ended up being just a couple of years. But he and the other guy had kind of a rib going on, and so he laughed at me.

It seemed that the guy's room still probably didn't smell very well and hadn't been thoroughly 100 percent cleaned, so he closed the door, turned off the fan, and turned up the heat. So that by the time the guy got back two days later, his room was just a mess. I didn't see this guy again until I was coming through rush, the freshman whose room it was. So I was coming through rush my freshman year, and it was such a conversation piece at that fraternity. He was actually a Pi Phi and I knew a bunch of them from soccer as well, and they all found that out real quickly as well. He started off by saying, "I can't believe you'd think about coming back here after what you did to my room," and whatnot. But it ended up being, like I said, a great conversation piece. I actually got along with those guys really well.

Warren: That was another whole story.

Laborde: Yeah. And there were actually even guys who were tied into it. It's getting pretty disgusting now, but I've started, so I guess I can't stop. But guys in his fraternity who came back to check on him that night, as far as saying, "Come on with us. We're going to get some food," or something like that, I'm sure, just to mess around with him and wake him up. They came in, and actually one of them slid around and fell in what I had left, and he was one of the guys on the soccer

team. So when he found out that this new goalie of his was a part to this, it was pretty embarrassing. One of the few times actually that I've ever gotten sick from such a thing.

But surprisingly enough, I recovered and put all that aside and realized at the time I'd had before any of the alcohol was involved was definitely one of the more enjoyable weekends that I had.

Warren: So you were a C School major?

Laborde: Yes, I sure was.

Warren: Were there any teachers who made a real difference for you?

Laborde: One teacher, I guess, was Goldsmith, who was a really charismatic guy. I'm not sure if he's still there. He might have left. He was a really incredible teacher, very, very energetic, very unique for a C School teacher because of his energy about the whole thing and his unorthodox styles of teaching. He was really a good first-year guy to have as a freshman. I came back my freshman year and he's still my advisor. He said, "So how'd your summer go?" I told him I worked in an accounting department and that the business aspect, the whole business aspect of a company appealed to me, more than just economics with theory behind that. So he did a pretty big thing, right then and there, he was like, "All right. Well, let's go find you an accounting or a business advisor."

So he took me next door. He's like, "Let me introduce you to my good buddy Bill King." Dr. King kind of pretty much molded me and pushed me in the direction I've taken. He was a big influence by identifying and kind of taking me under his wing early on. I give a lot of my credit to my success to his really kind of watching out for me and giving me a lot of credit, which sometimes I felt I wasn't always necessarily due. But he also made some very good suggestions when it came down to my senior year in choosing places to work. He gave me some very good advice about that, whether or not to go into public accounting, which is what I'm in

now, and if so, with whom, and if so, also in what areas to focus in. So definitely a unique experience. I'll never forget him. And it's very different from what I hear from my other friends and family, even, my siblings and whatnot and their experiences with their faculty. If they got lucky to see them once a semester, they considered themselves fortunate. I'd stop by to see Dr. King at least once a week, if not more, in addition to the fact that I had him pretty much for a class almost every semester for my last three years.

Warren: The personal touch?

Laborde: Yes, the personal touch.

Warren: How about those experiences that are uniquely Washington & Lee? Did you get involved in Mock Convention?

Laborde: Well, no, because I was a freshman when Mock Convention rolled around. The only way you got involved in it was as pledges and building a bunch of floats for the seniors and juniors who became delegation heads. I think we built Alaska, which was really funny. I was on Kentucky, because one of the seniors needed a bunch of bodies on his group to help make calls, on his delegation to help make calls to make money. Then another senior said, "We need you to help come build my float," and another senior said, "Come help build mine and help drive it and ride on it with me. We need more bodies to ride on it."

So I ended up riding on the Alaska float. We had a Jeep with a big stuffed moose head on the front of it. We had pretty much just done it the night before and put cotton over the entire float. It was a bed, a trailer bed that we were towing behind the Jeep. It was probably like fifteen feet by ten feet, and there was a big old barbershop kind of candy cane going right in the middle. There was a sign on it saying "North Pole" and pointing that way, and "New York" pointing that way, and they put a sled on it with a bunch of Christmas presents wrapped up, and then they had put a couple of the fraternity dogs leashed onto the sled, just sitting there

surrounded by all this cotton. The dogs, one of them was like a little hot dog, a tiny one, but the other one was a basset hound, so really good comic—

Warren: Your basic sled dog, right?

Laborde: Exactly. Then on top of that, they dressed up in earmuffs, mittens, and coats. They had three or four of the more definitely I'd say more renowned for their looks, women who were renowned for their looks from W&L student body, who they all happen to be pretty good friends with and they were wearing bikinis with snow boots and earmuffs and mittens and stuff like that, and throwing the candy off and playing music and driving along. It was pretty fun. It was.

But other than that, I stayed pretty involved my freshman year encompassed by soccer, which took a lot of time. I kind of used it as an excuse, I guess, in a sense that because it did take up so much time. I realized that, so I stopped playing soccer my junior year and started getting involved in other aspects. Elected to House office and then became president of SAE my senior year and just joined a bunch of different clubs on campus and stuff.

Warren: What kind of clubs?

Laborde: I was on a couple of Commerce School clubs. One was like the Commerce Student Body of Consultants, which really didn't take that off that much. We were supposed to volunteer what little classroom knowledge we had for local merchants. Then I was on the Student Board of Advisors for the Commerce School, where we would meet with the board members who, I guess, dealt with the Commerce School, I think once a quarter.

Warren: The board of trustees?

Laborde: The board of trustees, and they would ask us questions and we would ask them questions. One of them was really interesting because they critiqued our résumés for it. We all brought résumés, and they just passed them around, got up

front and said, "All right, look at this one. This should be better, this should be better. Don't ever do this. Try to do this."

Warren: That's valuable.

Laborde: Yeah, it was. It was definitely pretty valuable. I enjoyed that. I tried to stay really involved in IFC, especially as president, and it was tough my senior year to see things change, see some really huge change be pushed through, kind of like I had known had been pushed through the year before my freshman year. We had moved four years before. I was the first year that had the winter pledgship, where you're going to have fall rush, which was the compromise that the faculty on the student—I can't remember, the Student Affairs Committee, I can't remember which student board made those decisions. It wasn't the student board, I'm sorry, it was the faculty board that had two or three students on it and they made those decisions. So that was a huge change we were told when we came in.

Then my senior year, they pushed through a change to take effect this year in '96, where they were pushing fall rush back to the winter. So they had winter rush and then winter pledgship, and in the process they had restricted the time restraints and pretty much restricted—rush was cut down to two weeks, I think, from five or six weeks and pledgship was cut down, I think to ten weeks from twelve weeks, to prior to that like twenty weeks or something like that. It was just frustrating. I kind of left with at least having such a good feeling about the student government meeting that went on there with the Honor Council and the fact that we were able to uphold that on our own. You were being judged by a group of your peers. It got pretty frustrating to see all of a sudden, no matter how strongly we—there wasn't a single fraternity that was in favor of this and we made some really good arguments about in favor of this and how we could change it, but they kind of had their own mind-set, so we had to change it for what we all felt was the worse.

One of their main arguments was that the freshmen didn't have time to get to know the fraternities on their own, through rush, the first semester, that they needed a whole semester of open contact prior to that. They were afraid that the freshmen's grades suffered too much the first semester because of rush, and if rush only lasted six weeks and this open contact lasted the whole semester, and you felt a lot more pressure to get out and get to know people, and we failed to see the difference that it would have on the grades that much.

But that and also the sophomores having to live on campus now, that's a big change. I mean, in fraternities, especially, I know it happened in a lot of sororities, too. Your sophomore classes were all usually the same size and you'd have seven, seven, seven and two mixed up groups from that house that would kind of take over houses from other upperclassmen that had been in the fraternity, you know, that people had stayed in and had parties at and whatnot and had traditions of their own for years and years and years. I think we've had Windfall for over twenty-five, thirty years. if not more. That's been hurt by this whole process, for girls especially, I think. Guys aren't hurt by it because most of them have to live in fraternities anyway, I think, because it's considered university housing. But all the girls' houses, they all have to live in Gaines, of all places, which, when I was there, it's such a stigma, it's pretty funny.

Warren: What kind of stigma?

Laborde: Just as being the place to live when you didn't have anywhere else to live. Because, number one, and this is, you have to keep in mind, coming from someone who is very in favor and very pro fraternity and whatnot, but if you didn't belong to a fraternity, nine times out of ten your sophomore and your junior and senior year, you would live there. That wasn't always the case, but a lot of people there usually didn't live in fraternities. There were so many open rooms and you still had the, I guess, constraints of living in university housing. So it wasn't the freedom, I guess,

that you had and needed and the sense of responsibility that you had of living on your own and paying all the bills on time and whatnot, stuff like that.

Warren: Where is Windfall?

Laborde: It is—I'm not even sure if it's in Rockbridge or in the city. I think it's right pass the county line. If you're heading over the Maurais [phonetic] River and East Lex is on your right, you take a left on that road, right there that heads out along the Maurais River and it's right up by Shaner's Greenhouse, in that area, right back behind where the prison is, Rockbridge County Prison, I think. It's an old farmhouse that's on a big plot of land that Shaner actually ropes off and has cattle grazing all around. Like I said, it's been our house for a very long time. It's really beat-up. I was president, so I didn't get the opportunity to live there, you know. It definitely had the reputation of being one of the "in" places to live for guys within our house.

Warren: And so convenient to East Lex.

Laborde: Quite convenient to East Lex.

Warren: I've got to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: You mentioned how Washington & Lee students govern themselves. Tell me how you learned about the Honor System.

Laborde: I think when I was a freshman, although a lot of people complained that it wasn't a good-enough process. I thought they kind of threw it at us early. We had a big presentation by students about what the Honor System meant and what it was, and pretty much the rules of the game, if you will, and repercussions if you failed to abide by the rules, in front of us as freshmen, during freshmen orientation. A lot of people say that that wasn't enough, because you're so new and you're having so much thrown at you, it didn't sink in enough. Being in that form of a presentation, I think they've developed a couple of videos since then to kind of break it in differently in a different manner. However, really, just the fact that you had it—at

least I had it stuck in my head that any infraction, no matter how small, is considered stealing and that we had such incredible freedoms, I mean, it's not considered stealing, it's considered an infraction, period, punishable by the most serious of punishments, which was expulsion. And the fact that we had such incredible freedoms was, for me, in and of itself so unique. No one else I knew, none of my other friends in my class of two hundred and fifty high school students had anything remote to that, that I've gathered, based on discussions when we'd get back during the early holidays and talk about things. They couldn't believe that we had unsupervised test-taking and we could schedule our own exams and we had all kinds of different assignments that, in their instances, people, plagiarism, stuff like that, which you could get away with at most other schools, just wasn't done, things like that. Yet we didn't have—not that I remember, at least, we didn't have too many instances of people getting kicked out for cheating as a freshman, that I remember.

I remember towards the end of my freshman year, a girl got kicked out a couple of days before graduation, and a lot of people questioned whether or not what she had done was truly cheating. I didn't know her very well. I figured, you know, they wouldn't have found her guilty if she hadn't been cheating. As a senior, I talked to one of my friends who was president or on the EC. He pretty much told me, he's like, you know—we're not supposed to talk about anything, but I can tell you this much, that there are representatives from every class and he said that pretty much 100 percent of the time, it's not just a majority that rules based on all the evidence and what's there, that you either bring them up on trial or after trial. I guess a jury actually decides a trial, if I remember correctly, but that you bring them up on trial and accuse them of cheating based on the evidence that the witnesses have presented. He says that by far and away the majority of the time, it is a high majority of people who do believe that the person was guilty based on what they

have been told and that it is indeed beyond reasonable doubt. The guy who told me this is really straight up, and I didn't see there being too much of a problem with the Honor Code, as far as everyone respecting it.

But really on two, I guess, broad instances, one was when I was a senior, several freshmen in our pledge class actually got expelled for cheating and a lot of the other freshmen throughout the university said that the system was unfair, that the two girls in this case who had accused this one student of cheating had said this because they actually just didn't like the guy, and that although he may not have been cheating and it may have just looked like it, that they stood by their story and were convinced that he was cheating and they had other witnesses saying that he hadn't been cheating and whatnot. When he was expelled, other freshmen started taking the letterheads from the EC and typing out real slanderous and derogatory letters saying the EC was false. It was really kind of bothersome and, needless to say, disturbing to see people who had been a part of the system for so short amount of time having such a disrespect for it, because that could only lead to negative things. These are the people who were supposed to hand it down and these are the people who are supposed to respect it. It only works as well as we're willing to support it, I guess.

Then another instance that I had heard, actually had a freshman guy who I knew on the soccer team when I was a sophomore. He actually came up to me one day when we were walking back from practice, saying, "What's up with this Honor Code stuff anyway? Because this guy, who's my big brother, said it's just kind of a joke. Nobody really pays attention to it anyway, and said that he doesn't hesitate using other people's stuff on his homework and stuff like that all the time." That was really the only instance I ever had of having grounds for drawing attention to someone, but I had only hearsay that he had actually cheated. Most times I'd ever heard of it was people who have actually seen people or teachers who actually had

physical proof and whatnot. I turned around and—"Who is this? What are you talking about?" This freshman refused to tell me his name, realizing that he'd actually confided in probably the wrong person to say such a thing, in a sense that I wanted to kind of act on it. But we talked about it a little bit more and I reassured him that, in my mind, it definitely wasn't anything to take too lightly.

So I had very good experiences with it, and if you live by it, then you can die by it. It's an obviously hard thing for freshmen, at least, I guess, to understand, even for seniors to understand. We had a guy, I think who was a couple of semesters away from graduating, and he actually cheated on some stuff, but he had been cheating often. They'd actually proven, once they went back, he had an open trial, it was the only one I got to see, and it was quite interesting. By the end of it pretty much every one was convinced that he had actually cheated. So it's there and this is, I think, a pretty good way to deal with it.

But along the same lines, I think that there are certain people who deal with it better. I don't know if within the recruiting process if there is any way to help identify students, other than looking at their high school records. I believe that it's been said that if you have any indication that you ever cheated whatsoever in high school, that forget it, you're not welcome here, for the most part, and I think that's something that throws you right out the door. I'd like to believe that's the case, but I'm curious about whether there are additional ways that you could find people who would potentially be more supportive of this. I think it is definitely something that makes it by far one of the more unique places in the country.

Warren: It sure seems that way.

Laborde: It does.

Warren: One of the other unique things at W&L, Fancy Dress.

Laborde: Of course.

Warren: Do you have any Fancy Dress stories to share?

Laborde: Shoot, so many things—so many stories that always come out of that. But I never worked on any of the crews, which has kind of surprised people, just because it seems like everyone at one time or another did a bunch of work to help build or construct actual stuff, because you got free tickets, I think, is what the deal was. But the only thing that I ever had happen to me that was even, I guess, that memorable, because most the times they were just really fun, really good weekends. A lot of stories, like I said, came from them, but I don't always remember all of them, because there was so many, was that a date that I had taken my junior year had actually had one of the biggest, largest individuals in my fraternity, who she was friends with, dancing next to us with his girlfriend and he was swinging all around and getting really into it and whooping it up. As I was spinning my date out, he was spinning his out and stepped back and landed on her ankle. It just swelled up, turned purple almost immediately. So I had to—we couldn't find a cab, we couldn't find anything. No one was fit to drive, for the most part. We couldn't find any sober drivers, so I had to carry for the most part, half on my shoulder and then actually pick her up at one point because she said it hurt so badly, back to my apartment. Then by that time, I was so exhausted that I couldn't go out and do anything else. So that's about it. I'm sure there are many other.

Warren: That's memorable, but I don't think anybody —

Laborde: In a very good way, no, not at all.

Warren: Sounds like that would dampen the whole evening.

Laborde: Yeah, it had that effect, and it dampened the rest of the weekend, as well, as you know, because it's on Friday and there were plenty of parties on Saturdays.

Warren: So, how about Lexington? Was the setting of Washington & Lee important to you?

Laborde: Oh, very, very much so. Having the Blue Ridge Valley sprawling out all around. Having national forests almost circumscribing the area and being able to get

out with your friends away from school and going camping and fishing, even hunting sometimes before class. So many unique things that you wouldn't find anywhere else. Canoeing. Going inner tubing down the rivers. Going out to the country houses. You drive ten minutes away and you're at these sprawling houses by the rivers in time to watch the sun go down or shoot some skeet and barbecue and throw a little party. Having bands play out in the country and whatnot, and just the fact that it was such a small town, at least for my freshman and sophomore years. I never really had to worry about locking things up and it just played so well into, I think, the Honor Code system, the Honor System period.

We had a couple—we had increasing problems, I think, with the town and having people getting robbed and whatnot. I think my senior year, one guy actually got shot at, which was a first for Lexington, if I remember correctly. And its proximity to Washington, D.C., which is nice. Its location, being able to attract so many people from the Georgia area, Nashville, the big circumference, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia. So, yeah, I definitely think that played a huge role in that you were—I've heard it said many times that within two hundred, two hundred fifty miles radius of that area were some of the greatest political thinkers of our time, you know, found themselves and found inspiration in that area.

So I love the area. Don't necessarily like the Lexington Police at all, and don't know if I'd want to raise a family there because I know how hard it is to actually grow up in a small town, from stories that my mother told me and also stories that the actual Lexingtonians in my fraternity and in my classes at W&L had, and some of the quirks that they themselves actually had. It's a beautiful place and I'll always think of it home, definitely.

Warren: So you come back pretty frequently?

Laborde: Pretty frequently. I guess more frequently now that I see myself, in a couple years, because I have a brother who's a junior there this year. So I still know him

and his pledge class rather well, so I do have more of a reason to go back. I see myself finding a gap [unclear] weekends when I know other friends of mine are going to be going back, because I think when you go back and you don't know that many people, it's more depressing and alienating than anything else, until you get to the point where you don't necessarily have to go back for just friends. You can go back for the environment. You can go back with your family, kids and whatnot, things like that.

Warren: What year did you graduate?

Laborde: '95. I've been out about a year and a half.

Warren: So Fraternity Renaissance was complete by the time you arrived.

Laborde: Exactly.

Warren: So you didn't live through any of that transition?

Laborde: Thank God, no. We got the beautiful product of it. We were the second class of rush to go through the fraternity house, and it was very difficult in the sense that the upperclassmen still were not accustomed to a house that they had to respect. So we found ourselves in trouble with the university management plenty of times because of broken windows and broken furniture and holes in walls and whatnot. We actually had a guy who got suspended for breaking a window, and from what I understand, it was the only time that President Wilson was ever booed. Because there was a meeting, there was such an uproar that this guy was suspended for breaking a window, that the president, I believe—or it may have been for another reason that they had this meeting, but it was addressed that the student was suspended for breaking the window.

Had a meeting in Lee Chapel, and from what I understand, he was not very warmly received, because people just didn't agree that breaking a window was worth being suspended for a couple of weeks or the rest of the semester, or however long it was.

Warren: You were not there for the meeting?

Laborde: I wasn't there for that. That was the year before I got to W&L. It definitely made for some interesting late night calls from guys in the house panicking because they needed help to help repair something, which you hoped to be able to hide from the House Inspection Committee which would come around once every week to make sure that everything was in order. But I think things have settled down a lot, from what I understand, for better or for worse.

Warren: So as those guys graduated, people from your class—

Laborde: Gradually—

Warren: —were more likely who'd always seen the house this way were more—

Laborde: —to respect it, sure. Have you heard that story about—I'm sure you have, you have to have, but I'll ask you anyway just because it's such a classic—about the train? About the train kidnapping or highjacking.

Warren: Do you know that story?

Laborde: Well, there's a pledge brother of mine, Wen Hutchinson, who's from West Virginia, whose, I think, grandfather was actually one of the ATOs who, I believe, was—

Warren: I've been trying to track that story down.

Laborde: I'm pretty sure that his grandfather was—

Warren: Is his grandfather still around?

Laborde: I believe so. I'm not 100 percent sure on that.

Warren: What's this guy's name?

Laborde: Hutchinson, the guy's name is Wen, W-E-N.

Warren: The guy in your class?

Laborde: He's a year below me. He's actually still in Lexington right now, Wen is. It's W-E-N, I believe, for Wendall. But he's a law student. He's a first-year law student.

Warren: And his grandfather—

Laborde: I believe his grandfather. So you have heard it, though?

Warren: Yeah, but just like this, but nobody can tell the story. In fact, some people that it isn't really true. See, that's what they're going to say about you someday.

[Laughter]

Laborde: Well, sure, sure, exactly. Well, from what I understand, it's true. He didn't talk about it that much. It's either his grandfather or his father. If I remember correctly, his parents are rather old, so his grandfather may not be alive, but I'm sure his father would be able to tell it, because I think he's a third legacy, if I remember correctly. So I hope that helps.

Warren: All right. Well, I've have to track that one.

Laborde: I've thought about it, but it's usually when you try and think about things the hardest is when they usually don't come to you.

Warren: Well, I've asked my standard questions. Is there anything more you'd like to talk about?

Laborde: Not really that I can think of. And I wouldn't be offended at all if you didn't use SAE's name in particular in this, just so that—if you use my name, that doesn't bother me at all. People can go from there for their own purposes.

Warren: I think it's stronger if it's used as a generic story rather than [unclear].

Laborde: Sure, sure.

Warren: Thank you, Jeff.

Laborde: Sure thing. It was my pleasure.

Warren: It's been a lot of fun to meet the man himself.

[End of interview]