

# PAT LOPES

February 15, 1996

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Mame Warren,  
interviewer

**Warren:** This is Mame Warren. Today is February 15, 1996. I'm in Washington, D.C., with Pat Lopes. I'm real interested in talking with you for a number of reasons, one of which, I've done a little bit of homework on you, and you are not your average Washington and Lee student, because you come from a long way away.

**Lopes:** That's true.

**Warren:** You're not your average Southern belle coming to Washington and Lee. So tell me how you came to the decision to come all the way from Hawaii to Washington and Lee.

**Lopes:** When I was in high school, I was planning to major in journalism, and I went through the books and found the top schools. W&L was one of them at that time. So I got an application and I applied, and at some point W&L invited me to come over and take a look at the school, which I did. I think I spent a weekend in March or April, and I remember calling my sister, who was living in Philadelphia at the time, after the first night there, and I told her, "This is it. I haven't seen anywhere else, but this is where I want to go." It was so beautiful and everybody was so nice, I felt so comfortable. The decision was made. I was just awaiting the acceptance letter at that point, or the rejection letter.

**Warren:** Can you take me on that weekend with you? I remember the weekend I went to visit my college, and it's still very clear to me. Can you tell me what you

were shown and not necessarily who took you around, but what did Washington and Lee want to show you?

**Lopes:** What did we see? Well, to tell you the truth, the thing I remember the most vividly is who I was with.

**Warren:** Tell me about that.

**Lopes:** Which left a lasting impression. I can't remember her name off the top of my head, but it ended up that she was good friends with a woman who became one of my best friends. They were very accepting and open and made me feel very comfortable in a place that was very strange to me. That was really important.

I guess they wanted us to see something of student life, so we stayed in the freshman dorms. It was my first experience with cold weather and sweaters and coats and all that stuff, and I didn't know what I was doing, so to look around this girl's room and see all that stuff was just an eye-opener for me in itself.

I think they wanted us to see something of student night life. I think we went to some fraternity parties. I think we had a series of interviews. I think this was an honors interview weekend or something, and there was student interviews and faculty interviews and then we met the dean. I remember meeting Dean [Kenneth Patrick] Ruscio, who was in his first year at that time as dean of students or assistant dean of students for freshman affairs. And met John DeCourcy, who scared the pants off me.

**Warren:** Why?

**Lopes:** Because he's very—I'm sure I won't insult him by saying this. He's very well known for being rather coarse on your first meeting 'til you get to know him. He just scared me, because I had very little financial resources, and I thought that somehow I was going to be able to pull it off, if not at W&L, somewhere else, and he woke me to the truth of exactly what I was getting into.

**Warren:** What does that mean, what you were getting yourself into?

**Lopes:** Well, I guess I was coming from a nontraditional background, as you say. I wasn't coming from a prep school, I wasn't coming from a high school that put out a lot of college graduates. In fact, in my graduating class of four hundred, at this point in time maybe fifty people have graduated from college, and most of those not within the first four years. There wasn't a lot of knowledge about what to do, where to do on the mainland, how much it was going to cost, especially not where I grew up. Maybe amongst other families, but not in my neighborhood.

I had no idea what I was doing. Basically everybody I knew, if they went to college, went to the University of Hawaii. I didn't know anything about the South, I didn't know anything about how I was going to take care of myself, how much it was going to cost, how I was going to budget it, how much I was going to have to work. I kind of just felt that if I worked really hard and I was a good student that somebody would take care of me, and I didn't realize what I was getting into, how much change was about to come my way.

**Warren:** So you arrive on campus as a student. What's your experience?

**Lopes:** The first day?

**Warren:** Yes.

**Lopes:** [Laughter] The first day I arrived on campus, the parents were still around, and I was shocked. I always thought that when you went to college, you were independent and you took care of yourself, you got yourself there, you got yourself set up, and you had to deal with everything. Maybe your parents helped out with tuition, but other than that, you had to take care of yourself. And I was shocked by all the parents that were around, setting up people's rooms and taking them shopping. I, of course, arrived alone, and I didn't have any problems, but I was just very surprised by the amount of parental support.

I had a lot of bags, and I remember somebody helped me upstairs. I was in Gilliam Dorm. I met my roommate, and the room was already set up, because she

was one of those with all the parents. I think I was just overwhelmed. I had grown up—there were a lot of things that were overwhelming. Number one, I was shocked to realize that people were not as independent as I thought they would be.

Number two, this is something probably particular to me, but I had grown up in an area where most people were not Caucasian, and the people that I respected and loved were, in fact, not Caucasian, the older people, the authorities. It was a real switch for me to be only, or one of maybe ten, people who were not Caucasian, and that was a real switch. I, of course, coming from Hawaii, didn't know a lot about black people either. So this whole thing was just—I was shocked by the people, I was shocked by the students. I wasn't shocked, but it was just a very different world, and I felt very much not a part of it, I think, in the beginning.

**Warren:** But obviously you assimilated yourself somehow.

**Lopes:** I don't know how. [Laughter]

**Warren:** Do you feel that people reached out to you, or did you make yourself fit in, or something else?

**Lopes:** I think that I just minded my own business and I did what it was that I wanted to do. In the first year at W&L, I studied very hard. I think I worked very hard in high school to get into a college and get a scholarship, and when I got to W&L, I was very tired and I didn't want to work that hard academically, and I didn't want to do everything that I was doing when I was in high school, what everyone else does, [unclear] different activities. So I had some priorities, and one was to run cross country, one was to work hard but not to kill myself academically, and one was to be a dorm counselor. I wanted to be a dorm counselor. I just sort of concentrated on those things and minded my own business.

I met people gradually and through these activities, which is, I guess, a good way to meet people, rather than going out and trying to meet people. It's not something I've ever been very good at. I guess W&L made it easy for me to fit in in

this way, because it's very easy in a small school where there's a lot of encouragement to do a lot of things. Before I knew it, I was a dorm counselor and I was running cross country and I was enjoying my classes. I was work studying, and you meet a lot of people doing that.

**Warren:** What was your work study job?

**Lopes:** I had a lot of them. I started shelving books in the library and then I moved up to doing the front desk in the library. I think that's the reason why I actually know a lot. My best friends coming out of W&L for some reason tend to be the faculty members and the staff members at W&L more so than other students, because I was working and I was there all the time and I never left, never went home on vacations. So I knew a lot of them.

But anyway, I worked in the library. I also worked in the dining hall [unclear] waitressing experience, catering. I worked in the language lab.

**Warren:** Tell me about working in the dining hall. What kind of events would you waitress for?

**Lopes:** Well, I'm sure they still do it. W&L caters. Everything that ever happens in Lexington, they'll attempt to cater. All the W&L events, the Alumni Weekends in the spring, the trustees' dinners, weddings. I think we did some weddings. All kinds of miscellaneous dinners that occur that require the president and the dean and whoever else to have a nice place to eat. We worked on, I guess, handing out plates, talking to them. That was another reason why I guess I got to know people.

**Warren:** I would think you would get a sort of different perspective. Probably most students don't have any idea who the trustees are or what a trustee meeting is. So you had a glimpse of that, anyway.

**Lopes:** I had a glimpse. Yeah, I never thought of it as something other students—I always thought of it as something other people knew about that I didn't know about, because I just hadn't grown up in this setting. I didn't understand how a

private school is run. I think that a lot of the prep schools must be run this way, where they have a board of trustees or something, and I always thought it was me catching up more than me knowing something other people didn't know.

**Warren:** Was your sense that most of your fellow students did come from prep schools?

**Lopes:** No, I think some of them did. A lot of them came from good public schools. A fair number of them came from prep schools, but probably more from public schools. That would be my guess. But their public school experience was very different from mine, probably.

**Warren:** You said you didn't know anything about the South. Does Lexington, does Washington and Lee, strike you as being southern?

**Lopes:** Well, I think whenever you try to generalize and apply a general term to any large geographic area, you're not going to be able to do it when you look at it in a detailed way, and that happens anywhere in the world. That definitely applies to the South. You could say the South in general, but every part of the South is certainly different, and W&L has its own sort of South, I would say.

**Warren:** What do you mean by that? I agree with you, but I'm interested in what you mean.

**Lopes:** I'm not going to pretend to be any expert on the South, but W&L's got a little bit of the wealthy Virginia sort of feel to it, maybe the Charlottesville kind of feel to it, Warrenton sort of feel to it. Of course it's got students from Alabama and the Carolinas and Texas and that adds certain a different sort of flavor to what's going on.

When I was there, the last men were still coming out, and there was still a lot of reverence for R.E. Lee that I didn't understand. To me, I came from a sort of, I guess you'd say, typically northern sort of education where the South was wrong and bad. I did not understand this whole thing about R.E. Lee could have been good

and the South was fighting for something meaningful. I guess I went through school before that kind of revisionism, or whatever you want to call it, started to change the way students were taught. So that was kind of a new experience. I think it's a new experience even to people who were taught to more fairly evaluate the Civil War. The whole flying of the Southern flag, it's all new. It's very different. People don't realize it's very different down there.

**Warren:** One of the things that I'm really struck by, now that I'm spending every day on campus, is the speaking tradition. I've never been a student there. How do you become aware of the speaking tradition?

**Lopes:** They tell you.

**Warren:** The first day there?

**Lopes:** Yeah. The first couple of days when I was around, they had a series of seminars in Lee Chapel, and one of the professors, one of the older professors, explained to us about the speaking tradition. And you saw it when you visited. I think people probably told us then. And you could see it on campus. You could see people at least nodding to each other, at least looking each other in the eyes, if not saying something. And you saw the kind of atmosphere created. I think it's a good thing. I think it should be maintained. It's a habit that's hard to break, definitely.

**Warren:** I found myself walking down the streets and Washington people looking at me, I'm smiling or nodding. "What's wrong with her?"

**Lopes:** Yeah, it takes a while to work that out.

**Warren:** It's too bad we have to.

**Lopes:** Well, I think what you end up doing is just applying it to a smaller universe. I think I'm much more likely to say hello to everybody in the office when I see them here, and not a lot of other people here want to—not to any detriment of their character, but it's a funny thing that happened to me.

**Warren:** You mentioned that you ran cross country. How did you get involved in that? Had you been doing it in high school?

**Lopes:** Yeah, I ran cross country in high school. My family wasn't particularly athletically inclined, but I was always very interested and enjoyed it, so I did it. I wanted to find out what it was like to have a uniform, and I found out. When I got to W&L, they were just starting women's sports, and I believe I was dripping wet in the pool line after doing my swim test, and Coach [James M.] Phemister came around and was looking for a girl that I was with, because he knew that she was a prize-winning championship runner from the Carolinas, and along the way realized that I was a runner as well. The next thing we knew, we were running cross country. [Laughter]

**Warren:** Tell me more about that. What's the sport of cross country? How does that take up your time?

**Lopes:** Well, cross country is long-distance running. In the United States, it's a 5K race, generally, for women. Because it's such a long distance, you spend a lot of time working out, running. In college, it takes a good hour and a half, two hours of every day just getting there and getting dressed and doing it and getting out of there. I think for me, my cross country experience was maybe one of the experiences that pulled me into W&L. It gave me long periods of time with women and with Coach Phemister, jogging down some country road, to talk about what was going on in my life, what was going on in their lives, and what in the world was going on in Lexington. Coach Phemister really helped me out a lot and so did the other girls, how to take care of myself mentally, physically, all these things. They helped out a lot. Cross country was very important.

**Warren:** Do you train, going down back roads?

**Lopes:** Yes, we'd be training. When we first started, I think it was a lot less rigorous than it is now. We spent a lot of time just fitness training, which means basically



running five or six miles a day at a comfortable pace. It was very easy to talk to each other. Not very easy, but it was possible. And it was, of course, possible in the locker room and it was possible on the road trips you go on to race.

**Warren:** Did you run that course that goes down to the river?

**Lopes:** That course they don't run anymore.

**Warren:** I never see anybody back there. I walk that a lot, and I never see anybody running, but it looks like a place that running would happen.

**Lopes:** I think they used to race there. We used to race there. I think they may have stopped that, because it's sort of dangerous for running, really, coming down that hill. But I do it. When I go to W&L on the weekends once in a while from Washington, I go specifically to run certain trails in Lexington, and I do, I run that trail.

**Warren:** It's such a beautiful place.

**Lopes:** Absolutely.

**Warren:** Describe it for me.

**Lopes:** The trail?

**Warren:** Yes.

**Lopes:** On Washington and Lee property, what do they call it? It goes down to the Maury River, and there's a steep decline. In the fall, it is absolutely beautiful because there's so many trees and they're all changing and they're yellow, and the leaves are all over the ground. It's unbelievably beautiful. In the spring, the portion along the river is unbelievably beautiful because you get a lot of—I don't remember what they're called—bluebells or something that come up along the river and also yellow daisies, or whatever, later on when it gets a little warmer. And then in the fall it's very beautiful because you get columbine and goldenrod, which makes a lot of people sick, but doesn't affect me. So, yes, absolutely beautiful stretch of—

**Warren:** It's one of the most remarkable wildflower areas anywhere.

**Lopes:** It is. It is.

**Warren:** The plethora of wildflowers on that path is just mind-boggling.

**Lopes:** Yeah. Yes, it is. I actually had a course with Professor [Thomas G.] Nye, and had to learn about all these wildflowers, so it was a big deal for me after that class to go running down there to know all these things, you know. It was very pretty.

**Warren:** Things that are supposedly rare, according to the guidebooks, there's a whole hillside of them there.

**Lopes:** Yes. There are ladyslippers down there. I've seen them. There's a lot of stuff down there.

**Warren:** It's a pretty remarkable place. You used a term that was unusual to me. You said that when you first arrived, there were the "last men out." What does that mean?

**Lopes:** I was the third class with women, and the senior class was still all male, I think. And even the first couple of [coed] classes were predominantly male, overwhelmingly male, if I remember correctly. So there were a lot of men around and the culture still pervaded, I think encouraged by the fraternity system. There was a lot of animosity, and we were still dealing with a lot of anger that was almost completely gone by the time I graduated, but there was still a lot of anger, not necessarily—maybe I was too new to notice it in the professors, because I think some of the professors probably weren't happy, but more so amongst the male students.

**Warren:** How did they manifest that?

**Lopes:** The teeshirts.

**Warren:** Tell me about them.

**Lopes:** I can't remember what they said now. Oh. "The Beginning of an Error," E-R-R-O-R. "Women at W&L is the beginning of an error." Because I think the women had printed one that said "Beginning of an Era." And then there was one—

there were a lot of very lewd teeshirts, as well, which I don't want to recall. So it manifested itself, I guess, in that sort of communication, but also just the attitude in the fraternity houses. Girls were not welcome there. W&L girls were not always welcome there. I don't know, I can't remember exactly now, but the campus was much more tense than I think it was later.

**Warren:** How about in the classroom?

**Lopes:** In the classroom. I'm trying to think about my classes freshman year. I think when we were freshmen, yeah, we felt there was a lot of tension and it was hard, but we didn't realize how much there was, because we were still sort of lost in space, and there were enough people there who were very nice to make us feel like everything was okay. By the time you're a sophomore, you start to realize, "Oh, my God. This place is crazy." And then it started to get, you know, a little better. I don't know what it's like now, but I think the fraternity system perpetuates a lot of that behavior, a lot of disrespect.

**Warren:** Can you tell me more about that, what you mean by that?

**Lopes:** Well, I think there was a general disrespect for W&L women because of whatever crazy behavioral things, but also because they were smarter, supposedly. It was much harder for the women to get in, so they had to be smarter. They were certainly supposedly brighter than the women, their alternative women, other women's colleges. I don't think it's true, actually, because I had friends in women's colleges and they were just as equally bright. But the reputation was that W&L girls were brighter, and, of course, that would scare the men or anger the men or whatever. And who knows? When you get twenty men together every night between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three. I think it's better now. I think it was a lot crazier before. A lot of things have changed. The whole renaissance has changed things.

**Warren:** Were you there during renaissance?

**Lopes:** Yes.

**Warren:** Describe that for me. I was totally unaware of the renaissance program going on, so I missed that. Tell me about that.

**Lopes:** Well, structurally it meant that they poured a lot of money into the fraternity houses, of course. You know that. You've seen them. They did that in an attempt to change the—more importantly, they wanted to change the function and behavior of the fraternities. I can't say that I know whether that worked or not, because I haven't really been there for a good period of time after, but maybe it's more just when the women came. It was insurance, that's right. The whole insurance thing. They couldn't have people drinking in the fraternities because of all kinds of insurance liability. So it was the end of the key party, it was the end of the non-guest-listed party. Things settled down somewhat. I think that's good, that's very good. That's the direction I think things should go in at W&L. I don't know whether the fraternities do less partying and more whatever, intellectual conversation, than they used to, but I think I would believe that there's a lot less focus on drinking than there used to be.

**Warren:** Looks that way to me.

**Lopes:** Looks that way. Seems that way. I think the fraternity mothers keep things in control a little better.

**Warren:** Were there fraternity mothers when you arrived?

**Lopes:** No, no. I think Phi Gamma Delta had one. I don't know if anybody else did. But you could see it at the Fiji house. It resulted in people having more respect for their property and for other people, I think, than at other houses, just because this woman was there. The physical setting does a lot to your demeanor.

**Warren:** Did you know any of those house mothers?

**Lopes:** No, I didn't know any of them. I don't know if I could even recognize them. I knew they were there. I knew where they lived, and I always thought they must be

kind of crazy. I know that the boys liked them and respected them generally. At least they said that.

**Warren:** Did you belong to a sorority? Were sororities there when you arrived?

**Lopes:** No. When I started, there were no sororities. None of the women that I started with would have encouraged it. Certainly the two classes ahead of us thought it was a bad idea, and my class was split. Then the classes after mine were pretty supportive. But from our perspective, the whole sorority scene was a thing that we were wanting to get away from, and that was why we were at W&L. We didn't want to deal with all whatever we perceived sororities to be like. Most importantly, we didn't want it to split apart the women, because there were so few women there at the time, and having this sort of division, we thought was bad.

Well, there were two things. We didn't want to divide the women, and also a lot of us didn't want to perpetuate a tradition that we didn't see necessarily a good one for W&L in the future. That's far from the party line. I don't know, I did not want to encourage the Greek system. I didn't think it was a good thing for the students at all.

**Warren:** So where did you live through your four years?

**Lopes:** I lived in the dorms all four years. I lived in Gilliam the first year as a freshman, the second year I was a dorm counselor and I lived in—I can't remember what it was called now, Baker or Davis, one of those two. Third year, I was in the infamous—what's that called now? The dormitories across the street from Gilliam.

**Warren:** Graham-Lees?

**Lopes:** Graham-Lees. Then I was an R.A. in Gaines the last year. I lived on campus all four years.

**Warren:** So what does it mean to be a resident assistant?

**Lopes:** Resident assistant is a much easier job, because all you have to do is—well, I don't know, maybe not. It just means—I think that what it really meant was W&L

didn't want to have the local police on campus and they didn't want to have the students out of control, and this was a means of keeping things in control without actually having an older person inside of student housing, which understandably makes students feel uncomfortable. At W&L, I think it was also meant to foster a sense of community, the R.A.s and the dorm counselors trying to talk to everybody and make sure everybody gets along, planning, all this stuff. I think that was important to some extent more for the students who weren't getting along than for those who were. It would be very easy to slip through the cracks.

**Warren:** It's a different job being a dorm counselor.

**Lopes:** Right.

**Warren:** What's that about?

**Lopes:** Dorm counselor is freshmen only, so you deal with all the first-year freshmen problems. You also deal with all the chaos. You get to be the first person to tell them what W&L is like, and you get to spread the good word.

**Warren:** What was your spiel? What did you tell the freshmen?

**Lopes:** What did I tell them? I think I told them that the Honor Code was a good thing and that they should support it and they should respect it. I told them the speaking tradition was a good thing and they should support it and respect it. I had girls, of course, because the floors were, at that point, segregated. I don't know if they still are. I had women. I think I told them to be careful in the fraternities. I have a lot of wonderful friends who are fraternity members, but you still have to be careful, as you would in any party in any state in the country. I think I told them that they were allowed to do anything they wanted. The only problem was if they ever messed up the dorm, everybody would be woken at seven o'clock the next morning or something to clean it up, and that was to prevent me from ever having to clean up anybody's mistakes. That worked really well. And that was it. I kind of

wanted to let them discover things themselves. I thought that's what college was about.

**Warren:** How did you present the Honor Code? Was that something that people found comfortable right away, or was this foreign to people?

**Lopes:** I think it's foreign to most people. That's always their first question, "What is this Honor Code?"

**Warren:** And what is it to you? What does the Honor Code mean?

**Lopes:** It means creating a community of trust. It's not simply following the rule of the law, following the rule, don't lie, steal, or cheat. You're not supposed to do those things, but the Honor Code is all about teaching people why it's good to have an atmosphere of trust. It's all about showing how much more can be done when people are working together rather than competing with each other or conflicting with each other and working in underhanded ways. That is what I think the Honor Code is all about. It's about teaching people how it works, why it's good.

**Warren:** Is that presented to a student as coming from Robert E. Lee?

**Lopes:** Yeah. Well, they say Robert E. Lee supposedly was walking around campus one day and said, "We're going to have a new rule." And I guess he did.

**Warren:** My research, reading the primary sources, that is the way it happened.

**Lopes:** I can believe that.

**Warren:** He just overnight turned the place around.

**Lopes:** Supposedly there was something that happened, there was some kind of huge infraction, and that was his reaction or something. Yeah, I could see it happening. I don't know much about R.E. Lee, and it's a tragedy and I should know more about him. I feel very bad about that. But I don't know whether he knew what he was doing when he did it. I don't know whether he had thought about all the implications. Probably he did. After all, he was a Civil War general.

But I think the one thing that it doesn't teach you is that although you're going to be this way, a lot of the world isn't, and you have to watch out for yourself. You do learn that at W&L, but you sort of learn it in a back-door way. Maybe your junior or senior year, you start to realize that people are getting away with things. You start to realize that certain people are getting off and certain people are being allowed to stay and certain people are being asked to leave based on who they knew in the Honor Council. So you start to realize that things aren't working ideally, but, overall, you've got to fight the good fight.

**Warren:** Were there any faculty members who were particularly important to you?

**Lopes:** Yes, a lot of them. A lot of them.

**Warren:** You want to tell me about them?

**Lopes:** I can tell you a story to show you how different W&L is from other campuses, at least other people's experiences. When I graduated, my brother and my sister-in-law came to my graduation, and I thought it was very normal to talk to you and to touch my professors and shake their hands and get hugs, and my coaches and whoever else. After graduation, I made a special effort to run over to Reid Hall to meet—I had made arrangements to meet all the professors, to take a group picture with all the Reid Hall professors, and also with some other people, Brian Shaw and whoever else, and some of the politics professors. I have these pictures of all these men and me, and I didn't really think anything about it. I was very happy, but I didn't think it was anything special. My brother was flabbergasted. He went to the University of Hawaii, 40,000 students. He had just never seen anything like it. He was practically crying. He couldn't believe it. And I didn't realize how good I had it. I realize it now. I think I realized how good I had it; I didn't realize how other people didn't have that as good as it was.



**Warren:** I read in the homework I did that you were on the *Ring-tum Phi*. I haven't talked to anybody else who was on the *Ring-tum Phi*. Tell me about that experience.

**Lopes:** That was another very defining experience. Cross country was very defining. My work, my study was very defining. And *Ring-tum Phi* was very defining. I came on board at a time when it was becoming more activist. The newspaper was taking itself more seriously. It was attempting to report what was going on in the student community, and that meant focusing on the Honor Code, focusing on the fraternity system, focusing on the issues surrounding the sorority system, in a more professional manner than I think had been applied before, at least in the previous five years or so.

My first big story was covering—and this was one of my big-eye-opening experiences. I didn't even really understand the tension between blacks and whites that well at W&L or anywhere in the United States. My first story was covering an incident where the president-elect of the new year's Honor Committee was asked to leave because of an honor infraction, and what would happen next. They only had two weeks or something 'til the end of school, and would the vice president-elect become the president or should we have another election?

The only reason why it was an issue probably—well, maybe there were a couple of reasons—but the biggest reason was that the vice president-elect was black, and I think a lot of people were uncomfortable with that, not only just because he was black, but because they thought that he was independent and he wasn't going to buy into the fraternity system and he wasn't going to buy into the "protect your buddy" atmosphere. So it was very interesting for me to sit in these student meetings and hear people come up with all these crazy reasons why there should be another election, all the time skirting their real concerns. Of course they were; they couldn't talk about them. We covered that closely.

Also there was a committee that was set up, it was sort of the P.C. [politically correct] committee that was going to monitor speech on campus and whatever, and it was a faculty/student thing. That was a big deal for us.

So the year before I was editor, things started to heat up a lot. The people on the staff took the paper very seriously in every respect, on every page, and I think we tried to continue that in my year. That resulted, for me, in a very tough senior year. On the *Ring-tum Phi*, there's always not enough people and always too many things to do, and it meant that you were up all night at least once a week, and I had no idea how I did my schoolwork. Many, many, many hours in the *Ring-tum Phi* office or walking around. I think being editor means you're a campus leader of sorts, and you have to get out there and talk to a lot of people. For me, I guess the most draining thing as time went on was that we tried to cover stories, we thought in a pretty normal way for—you know, looking at the *Washington Post* was our—I don't know, people would say that was about our indicator. But just reporting the facts, the names, what happened. And, of course, people would get very upset.

We had a Student Conduct Committee president who was arrested for his, I think, third time in a drunken driving infraction, and that's a really big deal, because those guys are supposed to be monitoring the other students. We cover it. I got threats that I'm going to get my ass kicked, on my answering machine. People were trying to beat me up in bars, or I see them more likely they were to yell at me because I was female. It was always more likely it was going to occur while they were drunk or over the phone.

And while I knew that, you know, whatever, I shouldn't worry about it, it was still very jarring for me and it was a very tough experience, and actually scared me away from journalism, because I thought that—well, I don't know if it's true, but I thought that if you were to do your job well, it would be very tough to have a lot of friends, and it's very tough on your friends because they need to support you

and they want to support you, and they're having a hard time. In fact, by the time I graduated, somebody told me that I didn't have a lot of friends left, and that really hurt me.

But that was my *Ring-tum Phi* experience. I think we did a good job, and I don't regret anything that I did. I don't think I always did the right thing at that time, but I did the best thing that I could do with what I knew.

**Warren:** Boy, that's a tough story. What happened with the—was there a second election?

**Lopes:** There was not a second election. The vice president-elect became president, and he was president the next year. He was only a junior at that time, which is also unusual. And how did things go? I think for at least a year, he tried to make things—my impression was that a lot of times things got swayed by fraternities. Fraternities try really hard to get their members on the Honor Committee so that things will go their way, and I think fraternities, whether they mean to or not, form alliances. If there's a bunch of friends from some other fraternities, they're going to try to support this guy who's in their house or I think the sororities join in on the same sort of setup. And I bet they'll deny it to the end, but you know, even if they don't admit to it, I think they do it. And I think for at least a couple of years in there, they tried to stay away from that, maybe for the next years, but who knows what happened after that.

**Warren:** So have you abandoned journalism?

**Lopes:** I don't know. It's something I wrestle with every day. All I've wanted to do ever since I was a little kid was to become a journalist. And coming out of W&L, I still wanted to do it. And what happened to me was I got this Rhodes Scholarship and I went to England, and my fellow Rhodes Scholars had a lot of disrespect for journalists and they thought it was a crazy, stupid profession, and these people never know what they're talking about, and all they do is screw things up. It really

caused me to reexamine what I had intended to do with my life, and also I think that they were an extremely ambitious group of people who intended on doing something great in their lifetime, and I had never thought that way. I always thought I just wanted to do something I enjoyed and go back home.

So suddenly I felt like I had to get out of journalism and I had to do something important. And also I think I was interested in economics and business, so I ended up here. I was also interested in development because that was something that weighed heavily from my upbringing in Hawaii. So I ended up here, and I still wonder every day whether I should go back. It's a very, very tough profession for many, many reasons.

**Warren:** Which is a tough profession?

**Lopes:** Journalism. Very tough.

**Warren:** So you were a journalism major?

**Lopes:** Yes.

**Warren:** Were there any particular people in the journalism department?

**Lopes:** Ham [Hampden H.] Smith. Probably Ham Smith was the most influential. I was also there when Clark Mollenhoff was there, and he was influential, too. He was a crazy guy. I don't know how I could say that he was influential. I think he was influential in just showing us that there was a larger world out there. Professor Mollenhoff was always on the phone with somebody important, and it was always a shock to be in his office and see all his photos. He had all these photos of him with the Kennedys and Nixon, whoever.

But Ham, we hated Ham because he made it his job to be really mean to us, and I think he continues to do that to all the students. He's very mean and very coarse, and I think it's because he's trying to show them what it's going to be like out there in the real world. So I hated Ham to begin with, and I had my share of crying fits in the classroom with him. He was very coarse, but as much as I

continued to hate him, even when I left, I realize now that he was doing the right thing. By the end of my senior year, I realized that he had done the right thing, that one of the most important things you have to have as a journalist is a very thick skin. So he was probably in line.

**Warren:** So if you're a journalism major, are you automatically involved with *Ring-tum Phi*?

**Lopes:** No. They're completely separate. *Ring-tum Phi* is in no way supported by W&L except by giving them a facility. Hopefully, *Ring-tum Phi* will be completely independent of student fees and run as its own entity like a lot of other student newspapers. That's going to be a while coming.

**Warren:** Let me turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Warren:** So tell me about this Rhodes Scholarship. How did that come to be?

**Lopes:** Well, it was sort of an accident. Well, I guess I had lined up all the credentials that you needed. I didn't even know what a Rhodes Scholarship was. Two months before I had it in my hand, I didn't know what it was. What happened was, Dean Ruscio thought I should apply, and he gave me a call and had me come in, and he talked to me. I said, "Oh, I don't know. Look at this application. There's no way I'm going to get this thing. I don't have time," whatever. And he just kept pushing me. One day I just happened to mention to one of my friends—this is Willard Dumas, who was the guy who became president when the president was dismissed, he became a very good friend of mine in the end, and he said, "What? They want you to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship? What? Are you crazy? Of course you're going to apply." And he was the one that drilled it into my brain, along with another guy, his roommate John Fiankowitz [phonetic], that I was absolutely—you know, this was huge and I had to apply. I just didn't understand. It didn't sink into my head.

So I also at the time happened to be very sick, and I wasn't able to do my schoolwork, and I figured, "Okay, if I can't do my classwork and I can't work, I might as well fill out this application." So I filled the thing out and I thought, in all honesty, that at least I'd get a trip home, because I knew that W&L knew I didn't have the cash to fly home, and I thought, "Okay, at least I'm going to get an interview in Hawaii out of this." And it was at Christmastime. And sure enough, I did. I still was kind of surprised, but I was happy. I had to take my exams. This was evidence of the Honor Code. All the professors gave me my exams and I took them at home in Hawaii.

But I flew home and I had my interview, and all I took home was a dress and shoes and whatever, some books, and that was it. I figured that was all I was going to need. I got there and I had my interview, and I met some people that I hadn't seen in a long time, actually, who were also interviewing. They told me that I was going to get to go to the regional interview, and I was like, "What?" I had nothing. I had no clothes I could wear in the mainland U.S. So I had to go out and buy a suit and get on a plane, I think the next day, and fly to L.A.

I was still really ill, and I was actually eating cough drops. There's a series of—what do they call it? There's a breakfast and a drink session, then you're interviewed, and the whole time I'm on the cough drops. Especially at the breakfast and the drinks, you're supposed to be social. People told me later that I was out of it and I wasn't saying anything to anybody. I was just sitting around waiting for the judges or whatever to come around and talk to me.

I went in for my interview, and I guess—I don't think I told them anything particularly intellectual. I just answered their questions. We actually had a good time. We laughed some. They were very interested in W&L.

I didn't think anything of it. I left, went back to my room, went for a swim, hung out, basically waited to go back home, because what they do is, at the end, they

get everybody together who had interviewed and tell you on the spot who got it and who didn't. So I went back later on in the afternoon, changed out of my suit. I was just wearing a sundress or something, standing around, and the next thing I knew, they were reading the names off. I was so sure that I wasn't going to get it, I wasn't even listening. They said, "Okay, we're going to read them alphabetical," and they read the first guy's name. I remember thinking to myself, "Lu. Now, how do you spell Lu?" Is that going to be after or before my name? So as I was sitting there doing that, they read my name and they went on, and the next thing I knew, people were shaking my hand. I was thinking, "What?" [Laughter] I didn't even hear it. But I was happy. I don't know, I don't think I understood what it was all about until my second year in Oxford, actually, before I understood really what was going on.

**Warren:** And you say they questioned you about Washington and Lee. What do you think their interest in Washington and Lee was?

**Lopes:** Well, they were wondering how a girl from Hawaii would be able to assimilate and settle and do things that I did at W&L, which they knew to be a former male bastion and which they knew to be Southern in some sort of way, which they knew to be very—what do you call it? Far from any other large civilization, very out there. They knew more about W&L than I knew definitely when I started, and they knew enough to ask me all these questions about how in the world I had survived. I told them the truth, that it really wasn't that bad.

**Warren:** So no wonder you're doing such a good job answering my questions. You've already answered these questions. [Laughter]

**Lopes:** Well, I don't know. It's been a while since I've talked about these things.

**Warren:** So was that a really important thing in your life?

**Lopes:** The Rhodes Scholarship?

**Warren:** Yes.

**Lopes:** It was a very important thing. I think I harbor a lot of animosity in some ways, which I don't talk to a lot of people about, and I don't want to sound like a brat, but I had no idea what I was getting myself into, and I don't feel like I had a lot of support while I was there. People weren't explaining things to me. But on the other hand, a lot of folks say, "Now you've learned that folks out there aren't going to explain things to you in life, and you have to figure things out yourself." What it did do was, I had had four good hard years of high school, then four good hard years of college, and I was dog tired. I went there thinking I was taking a vacation for two years, as far as I'm concerned. And now I wish I hadn't. I wish I had worked harder, but at that time I guess I was really tired, and it gave me time to just think about my life and where I was going and what I was doing. It was a very eye-opening experience.

**Warren:** Did you wind up with a degree?

**Lopes:** Yes, I have a bachelor's degree in history from Oxford.

**Warren:** So you get a second bachelor's from them.

**Lopes:** But you can do anything. Some people don't get degrees. Some people get master's. Some people go on to do D.PH.L.s, [phonetic], doctor degrees. Some people get a bachelor's. President Clinton didn't get a degree. A lot of people of his time didn't. Most people now do, I think.

**Warren:** I have seen your picture there in the library.

**Lopes:** Is it still there?

**Warren:** Yes, "the most recent Rhodes Scholar."

**Lopes:** I thought it might come down after President Wilson left.

**Warren:** No. Well, all the previous ones are there, too. Have you ever gotten together with the previous? Is there any attempt? Are you some society within Washington and Lee alumni?



**Lopes:** No, I guess I'm the only woman, too. No, I don't even know that a lot of them are still alive, actually. I've only heard about one other guy, because he was the father of somebody who was in my class. I don't know.

**Warren:** I was actually playing a little dumb there in the previous set of questions. Will Dumas is one of the people I'm going to interview.

**Lopes:** Good.

**Warren:** Are there any particular things I should pursue with him?

**Lopes:** Willard will give you a good interview. He is much more articulate than I am. That's really funny, actually.

**Warren:** I hope to get to see him.

**Lopes:** You really should. You really should. You really should.

**Warren:** Tell me why. He's in a place that nobody else is, and I've got to justify making that trip.

**Lopes:** He's in Chicago now.

**Warren:** I thought he was in Michigan.

**Lopes:** Michigan. You're right. He's in Michigan. Sorry. He's in Michigan.

Anyway, why Willard? Because, number one, because Willard was on the Honor Council for three years at a very tumultuous time with the girls, and, of course, there's a lot of racial tension at W&L, so he dealt with that. He has a really good perspective on the school, what it wants to be and what it really is. He has some good thoughts, now that he's older, on how he felt that experience shaped him in good ways and maybe some not-so-good ways. He knew the campus inside out. Willard knew everybody there—everybody. I think he has some bad memories and he has some good memories. He definitely thinks about W&L a lot. W&L is always on his mind.

**Warren:** What was your perception of these racial tensions?

**Lopes:** I wasn't aware of them. My best friend when I first started, my so-called big sister, was a Filipino American girl who had grown up in West Virginia, and I think the way she conducted her life was to just ignore anything and just pretend that she was white. Not that she ignored her family, but she just never thought any other way, never ever allowed herself to think that somebody didn't like her because of her race. I just followed her and I didn't think anything about it. Again, I didn't realize. There is a lot of problems with the black students at W&L. There is a lot of racism. I didn't feel I was black; I was, for all intents and purposes, white. I didn't really realize until my senior year, when people started to get a lot nastier, that they had, in fact—there had been a lot of questions about where I was from, and I knew that when I sat there in class, especially in the first couple of years, and they read my name off the roll, I was the only Hispanic name, generally, and everybody would turn around and find out who I was. I didn't think much of it. I didn't realize until later on that people thought otherwise, because I guess I just chose to ignore it. I think it was a good thing for me.

**Warren:** It's something I really want to talk to black graduates who have gone through and hear that perspective. I think it's really important to hear people your age's perspective. It's interesting that the list of people that was first put together as people to interview was real topheavy with forties' and fifties' people, and I had to keep pointing out to them that there's a big alumni base out there.

**Lopes:** There's a certain way that they want W&L to get projected, that's for sure. I have no doubt in my mind about that. And that will come from the forties' and fifties' grads, not from the sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties.

**Warren:** When Homecoming Weekend happened, did you get animosity from alumni towards being a woman?

**Lopes:** No, no. I think the older alums, the real old guys, you know, seventy-five-year-olds, whatever, they loved it. I think even the over-fifty-year-old crowd loved

it. A lot of them were really happy because their daughters would now get to go to W&L. They had no problems with it. It was more the younger crowd that had a bigger problem. And even them, I think the first couple of years, yeah, I did hear stuff and see stuff, but especially because I was a waitress, and this was one place where they didn't know I was a student, so I would hear a lot of things in dinner-table conversation, that they didn't realize I was a student.

And it's funny, because I don't think they realized I was a student, some of the persistent leaders amongst the alums and maybe the trustees, they didn't realize I was a student, they didn't realize I was a Rhodes Scholar, and then I became a Rhodes Scholar and suddenly I was sitting there eating with them, and I felt very strange about it. I think they felt very strange about it, as well. It was odd. I eventually just had to quit. I couldn't do that job anymore. It was too weird.

**Warren:** Do you go back now for homecoming?

**Lopes:** No. I don't go back anytime there's huge crowds of people. That's not how I like W&L. I like W&L when it's quieter.

**Warren:** What do you do when you go back now?

**Lopes:** Usually I go running. I usually go by myself. I hang out and have dinner with a couple of friends or faculty still around, go running every day, drive up to the parkway, stuff like that.

**Warren:** Were there places in Rockbridge County that meant a lot to you?

**Lopes:** I didn't have a car, so my circle of reference is going to be smaller. The parkway is always a favorite place. Goshen was a favorite place. Probably the places that I am most sentimentally attached to are the places that I ran. I guess we ran Turkey Hill, we ran the tow path. We ran all the way to Buena Vista one day. Maybe we did that a couple of times; I don't remember. I think we did that a couple of times. I can't remember what the places are called now. Jesus Christ, I can't believe I can't remember. The trail, the cross country trail. I think those are the

places I am most sentimentally attached to, anyplace I could run to. Coach Phemister's house, the route to Coach Phemister's. What is it—there was a battle out somewhere near Coach Phemister's house. I used to run around that site, whatever it was called.

**Warren:** Is there anything else you would like to say about W&L that I haven't brought up, that you'd like to talk about?

**Lopes:** I just think that I was much better talking about these things when I was four years ago. I don't know. Four years later, what do I think about what happened? I don't know. I think it was a good thing. It was a crazy time, lots of things going on.

**Warren:** I'll bet it was a dramatic time.

**Lopes:** W&L, you think it's such a quiet place, but, you know, you can learn a lot about life at W&L, you certainly can. I think I learned a lot more there than I would have learned at a state school, just about being a person, if you try, if you go out there and attempt to do something.

**Warren:** Thank you, Pat. This has been really, really good.

[End of interview]