

ELIZABETH MILES MITZLAFF

October 27, 1996

—
Mame Warren,
Interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 27th of October, 1996. I'm in Goshen, Kentucky, with Elizabeth Miles Mitzlaff.

You are one of our pioneer women at Washington and Lee, but how did you choose to come to Washington and Lee?

Mitzlaff: Well, during when all the juniors and seniors in high school were making the rounds to all the colleges, we kind of decided, my mom and dad and I, to make the Virginia trip. So we went to the Virginia schools and we looked at Sweet Briar and Hollins and UVA, and I think I was mostly interested in UVA.

As the end of the day was ending up and we were getting ready to make our way to the hotel, Dad said, "Well, why don't we swing by Lexington, Virginia, because we're not very far."

I said, "Oh, Dad, I don't want to look at W&L, I'm just not interested in it. Next year, my year, will be the first class of girls and I'm just not interested in that at all."

So he talked me into it, he said, "Well, just do it for me, for my sake, so I can go back and see my alma mater."

So I said, "Well, all right." We were staying in a hotel right near Lexington, and so we went and it was probably towards the evening, so W&L was all lit up, it looked so pretty at night.

I was swimmer here in Louisville, and W&L was having a swim meet that night, so we could hear all the cheers coming from the gymnasium. So Dad said, "Let me go show you the gymnasium and let's go check it out and see what's going on and you can see what all the team spirit is like." So we went, and W&L won the swim meet, so everybody was all pumped up.

After the swim met was over, my parents and I walked down to the pool deck, because we saw a senior, the team captain, was from Louisville, named Bobby Pearson. So I was familiar with who he was and with his family, and so we talked to him for a little bit. He introduced us to the swim coach, so I started talking to the swim coach and was really interested in it.

It turned out that we spent the night there in Lexington, and the next morning we decided to kind of walk around campus a little, and we ran into my old next-door neighbor who was also a senior there, named Bill Decamp. So Bill and his girlfriend, who I think was at Hollins, and is now his wife, they took us to lunch. So that was pretty much our Virginia weekend.

The whole way home I was firing off questions to Dad and asking him all about it. I got home and started thinking more and more about it, and Dad was funny, because he didn't want to pressure me, but he was so thrilled that I was considering it now. So as he would come into the same room that I was in, he would start singing the W&L alma mater and saying, "No pressure, no pressure whatsoever," and then start singing it on his way back out of the room.

So it was interesting. I mean, I had no interest in it until I got to the campus, and I think I was looking at the Virginia schools, maybe some of the North Carolina schools. My dad had gone there, it was all male, so it just hadn't even come up for discussion. To tell you the truth, I think my dad was kind of leaning against the idea of coeducation just because it was so near and dear to his heart, all his friendships that he had made with his friends there, and the way he remembered W&L was a close-knit group of

gentlemen. I think that as soon as I started looking at it, he started realizing that there was a need for coeducation there, so he switched. He switched his tune pretty quickly.

Warren: That was my next question, was whether you knew what his attitude had been during the whole discussion. Had it been something that he talked about when coeducation was under discussion?

Mitzlaff: Not a whole lot, not to me, anyway, that I know of, that I remember. I don't think he talked about it much, as far as being against it or being for it, and I don't know if that's just because I never mentioned that I was interested in it and never asked him any questions about it. I think that swimming had been such a large part of my life throughout high school, I think from practically as long as I can remember, swimming was just everything to me.

I had gone through some hurdles in high school, a couple of setbacks, and I had to sit down and think my junior year, is this something that I really want to go full steam ahead with and go to a high-powered swimming school, or do I want to get an all-around education and really concentrate on studying, but also be able to play a part in athletics? I think if I had gone to a high-powered swimming school, I probably would have been a little fish in a big pond. I don't know that I could have offered anything to a Division I swimming program. But as my dad put it, at W&L you could be a bigger fish in a little pond and have probably better memories of swimming when it was all said and done, and a great liberal arts education and something to remember always.

Warren: So you applied.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: Did you apply early decision?

Mitzlaff: I didn't apply early decision, I didn't. I was still playing around with the idea of another school—SMU I was looking at seriously. So when I had talked to the swim coach, he said, "As soon as you know that W&L is your first choice, let us know,

because that could make a huge difference." I thought about it and I decided probably soon after Christmas that W&L was definitely my first choice.

It was funny, because in my high school, I went to Collegiate, which was an all-girls' school. Kind of has a funny twist to it, too. Collegiate was getting ready to go coed, so here I am coming from an all-girls' school, going to an all-male school in the first coed class, but yet my alma mater high school was going coed. So I could kind of see where the guys were coming from with their points of view.

The college counselor at Collegiate had us list probably six colleges that we were very interested in and then he would look at those and look at our potential, I guess you would say, or lack thereof in high school, and he would kind of rank them for us and say, "Now, this is a reach for you, I think you better concentrate more of your energy and effort towards this school. Now, I think this would be an appropriate school for you."

Well, when he saw Washington and Lee on my list, he said, "I think this school would be a reach for you, that maybe you should look at some of the others." As soon as he said that, it just made me kind of buckle down and think, "There is no way. I'm going to prove to him he's wrong. I want to get in this school even more so now." I think the fact that he said it was a reach, the fact that Dad was able to enlighten me on a lot of neat traditions about W&L, and having seen the campus and all said and done, I think by January or February of that year I was definite that that was my first choice.

Warren: So you get accepted.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: You arrive on campus.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: There aren't very many of you. Tell me about that.

Mitzlaff: It was intimidating, it was very intimidating, and I felt like I was coming from a very small high school. I graduated with twenty girls, that was it. So twenty girls

and going to what then seemed like a huge college campus. By senior year it had shrunk, but I was really nervous and I kept thinking, "Someday, four years from now, I'm going to probably look at everybody on campus and know 50 percent of them, maybe."

I was just so intimidated not knowing anybody, especially when classes started and I realized I was one of three girls in the classroom, and I wasn't used to boys in the classroom, and I'm sure they weren't used to girls in the classroom, the upperclassmen. But I think my grades probably reflected that first semester, because I was checking everything out and trying to figure out what I was going to make of it all, I think.

Warren: So did you find it tough academically, or you're saying the social stuff was confusing, or what do you mean by that?

Mitzlaff: I think that it was challenging socially, also, because when you get to campus as a freshman, at least when I was there, the boys start right off and Rush. That was kind of confusing, because you would talk to some of the upperclassmen who would said, "No, girls can't take part in Rush," because they would have open houses. Supposedly everybody could come to open house, male and female. But some of the upperclassmen were trying to say, "No, no, it's just for the guys."

I think that made it hard because the girls didn't know where they fit in. There weren't any sororities for them, and I think that as a first-year female there, if you had sports and athletics, then that was an area that you could kind of bond with and become your club of friends, so to speak. So I was fortunate to be on the swim team and feel close to those guys. I definitely felt that when swim season started I had to prove myself to them. Because when lane assignments came about, I was in the lane with a couple upperclassmen and they said, "We don't want any girls in our lane. No way." So you think, well, poor guys, I guess I could kind of understand, but by golly, they've let us in and we're accepted and I've got to prove to them that I can hold my own. So that was kind of challenging.

You would hear all kinds of stories from some of the girls on the hall, on my hall, because they would tell me stories about how, "Well, don't go to such and such fraternity house because some of the guys there are rude to the girls," or they poured a beer on a coed's head. They would start talking to the girls and then realize that the girls went to W&L, and didn't care for it, so they poured a beer on their head. Now, I never had that happen to me, but you'd hear stories like that and that's kind of intimidating and I think it was challenging, especially when I was keeping in touch with my high school friends. My best friend from high school was at IU, Indiana University, and they had sororities there, and she had gone and tried out. I was talking to her one night on the phone and she stopped and she said, "Oh, my gosh, Elizabeth, can you hear this?" and she'd hold the phone out and you hear a bunch of guys chanting something. She came back to the phone and she says, "Those are the Phi Deltas downstairs serenading us." I thought, "Oh, my, that would never happen here, it would just never happen."

I think in the four years that I was there I saw a huge change, huge change. The first year, now, I don't think you would have seen the guys roll out the red carpet, so to speak, for the girls. If some of the true gentlemen there wanted to roll out the red carpet, I bet they were probably a little bit hesitant, because they would be heckled by their friends. That first year was definitely a transition year.

Warren: So you saw a change as the years went on?

Mitzlaff: Definitely.

Warren: Tell me about that.

Mitzlaff: Definitely. Well, I think probably what was happening was, as we came in the first year, the sophomores, juniors and seniors kind of resented it because they feared that tradition was going to be thrown down the tubes, and that girls on campus were going to change so many things that had made W&L what it was, a gentlemen's school. I guess they thought that we were going to change that. They had gone to W&L

knowing that it was all male and probably hoping and counting on the fact it would stay all male. So when the girls came in, that wasn't what they banked on, not what they had gone there for, I think. As each year passed, and as we kind of moved up towards junior and senior year, the whole sentiment had changed. Those upperclassmen that resented it were no longer there and the underclassmen came to W&L knowing it was going to be coed, so it was almost as if it was okay. It was becoming okay.

Warren: How about your classmates, your male classmates? Were they a little protective of you or was there any special relationship there?

Mitzlaff: It's hard to say. I think there were special relationships there. I don't know if you would call it brotherly and sisterly relationships. It's hard to say, because I don't know that it was all that unlike any other coed college campus where the girls and the boys come in all as freshmen and they mingle together and there's a bonding between members of the same class. So I don't know that it was different than any other college campus, but I think it was different than any other year ahead of me. I think there were definitely some bonds made. There were probably were some bonds made in each class after us, as well.

Warren: Let's switch to swimming, because I understand you really did excel at swimming.

Mitzlaff: It was fun, I liked it.

Warren: Tell me about it. I mean, you did really well, from what I understand.

Mitzlaff: My freshmen year, like I told you, I felt like I had to prove myself, so I felt like I was giving 110 percent every practice, not just at the meets, but at every practice. I think it was kind of hard for our swim coach because he had never coached women before, and women are different and they train differently, and when it's time to taper for a big meet, they taper differently. What that means is kind of in the middle of the season you're working on endurance and you're just doing long hours in the pool and sort of basically just working on your endurance for the meets. Then towards the end of

the season, you work more on your speed and you kind of fine-tune it so that you're not putting in so much distance, but you're putting in quality sprints that, like I said, fine-tune it. So when you taper, you're tapering off from a lot of distance down to a little distance, and if you hit your taper just right, then you'll perform just as you had hoped and maybe reach your goals in the meet.

So anyway, long story short, the women tend to taper differently than the men, so I think it was challenging for the coach. I think it was challenging for the guys on the swim team, because now when we would road trip to the schools for swim meets, they had to kind of clean up their language a little bit because there were girls in the vans. It was interesting.

But talking about bonds, I think those were some really strong bonds that were made. I can definitely look back and say I was closest with the swimmers than any other group on campus, and that makes sense, because that's who I spent most of my time with and all of our weekends and traveling and holidays and what have you when we were on campus, and not many other people were. But it was fun.

So I felt like I proved myself, I guess, to some satisfaction freshmen year. I didn't perform any of my best times, but I hadn't even performed any best times since my sophomore year in high school. I was in a car accident my junior year, and my senior year I had mono, so these were some setbacks. So that was my goal each year at W&L was to get back to doing my best times.

So I was pleased that I was qualified for Nationals, but still hadn't done any best times until my senior year at W&L where I felt like I was really concentrating all my energy and effort and really thinking about my races, kind of put my thinking cap on and started getting smart about them. So finally my senior year at W&L I got back to doing my best times and I think it was kind of a good way to end it up, round it all up with best times at your college. It was fun. Hard to let it go.

Warren: I'll bet. I don't really know that much about competitive swimming. What does it mean to be — you were All-American?

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: What does that mean exactly?

Mitzlaff: All-American basically means that when you qualify for Nationals and then you swim in Nationals and you qualify in the top eight. So of all the people in Division III that go to Nationals, then when you compete in the morning, if your time is within the top eight, then you swim again that night in finals. Whether you finish first, second, third, through eighth, no matter what, you're the top eight in Division III in the nation, and so that's what they call All-American.

Now, if you finish ninth through sixteenth, then that's Honorable Mention All-American. So I guess you could say I was Honorable Mention All-American or something, I probably ended up there more than the All-American.

Warren: Were you the only girl swimmer from W&L who was at that level or were there a bunch of you?

Mitzlaff: No, my freshmen and sophomore year I was the only one. Then my junior year we had a swimmer, Sharon Coleman, who was my roommate, and she also qualified for Nationals. So the two of us went with our swim coach and that was really fun. It was fun to have a buddy there, because my freshmen and sophomore year, it was kind of lonely. Everybody else was doing their warm-up and their cheers together, and here I was from W&L, the only one, not doing any cheers.

I think there was another swimmer from Sweet Briar who we kind of, I guess you'd say, bonded my freshmen and sophomore year. We stuck together and our coaches would stick together and we would all go out to dinner afterwards and stuff, but it's not quite the same when it's not someone from your own school. So that was a little bit more fun, having someone else.

Warren: You were there during the period of Sigma Aqua, right?

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: I have the male point of view on Sigma Aqua.

Mitzlaff: Oh, you do?

Warren: Tell me about your point of view of Sigma Aqua.

Mitzlaff: It was great. It was fun. A lot of the swimmers didn't pledge to a fraternity; it just took up too many hours. So what they ended up doing was a bunch of them that were just good buddies decided to live together in this house and it would always be the place where everybody congregated. Whenever we could relax and have a beer or get together and rent movies or whatever, that's where we would go. I think at one point in time there might have been seven or eight male swimmers that all lived in that house, so they decided to call it Sigma Aqua.

It was really fun because it ended up that a lot of guys from the fraternities, there would be a lot of Sigma Chis and Phi Delts and PiKAs that would come by. With the Honor System, our coach decided to make a drinking rule, that you could not drink or consume alcohol within twenty-four hours of a workout or a swim meet, and that if you did, you were on your honor to confess and to withdraw from the swim meet or not show up at practice the next day. So if we did consume alcohol and then showed up at the practice or at the meet, then I think the consequences would be much more grave. But nobody did, and we all stuck to the Honor System. So nights where we would get back early enough from a swim meet and everybody would rally together, the word would spread kind of across campus, "Sigma Aqua's having a party tonight," so there might a hundred or two hundred people that would show up. So it was really fun. It kind of did become a fraternity that had no boundaries and no limits and anybody could come and everybody did. So it was fun, it was a lot of fun.

They ended up even having their own Christmas parties, when all the other fraternities would have their Christmas parties and have dates and decorate the house and get a Christmas tree and what have you, Sigma Aqua did the same thing. It was

fun. I mean, I think it was a way that the guys on the swim team could feel like they were a part of a pseudo fraternity, maybe. So I hear it's been disbanded. I don't know.

Warren: Have you heard what it's evolved into?

Mitzlaff: No.

Warren: The house is now called Aqua Velva.

Mitzlaff: Oh, no.

Warren: I was curious about where Aqua Velva came from, and then I heard about Sigma Aqua and it all started to come together in my mind.

Mitzlaff: Oh, my gosh.

Warren: Yeah, it's now Aqua Velva. The house is still a student house.

Mitzlaff: It's still the same house?

Warren: Yeah, that's my understanding, it's still the same house.

Mitzlaff: I can't believe it's still standing.

Warren: This is evolution in Lexington. This is our form of evolution.

Now, you mentioned the Honor System. Tell me about how you learned about the Honor System and what it meant to you while you were there.

Mitzlaff: Well, basically I learned a lot about it through my dad, and my high school had the Honor System. I had gone to Collegiate second grade through twelfth grade, so I was very familiar with the Honor System and knew how special it was. Not very many college campuses have an Honor System. So it's one thing for a college campus to have an Honor System, but it's another for a college campus to have an Honor System that works, and that it works because the students make it work, and that's exactly what W&L had.

I mean, you could go to the library and study in a carrel for a couple hours, leave your jacket there, and come back a week or two later and it's still there. Several times you could see a carrel that would have a watch or a wallet on it, and come back a couple days later and probably it would still be there. So I think it was very unique to W&L.

I think of all the things that I think of of W&L, the one thing that stands out in my mind, that makes it so unique, is the Honor System. It was interesting.

Unfortunately, I got to see it work. You hate to see it, but things come up and there would be a violation of honor or, I think at one point in time it might have been even theft, but plagiarism was the one that stood out in my mind.

One of the girls in my class had been accused of plagiarism, and, of course, as you probably know, with the Honor System everybody goes to Lee Chapel and it's an open trial and you can watch it and learn and see, and to have the law students involved was fantastic. It ended up that she was found innocent, and I think that was interesting, because some people, I think, had in the back of their mind, "This is the first female that has been brought up before the Honor System and what's going to happen? Are we going to walk away from this and feel like it's a fair trial, or are they going to nail her to the wall and try to make an example of her, or just what's going to come about of this." You hate to think of discrimination.

I think that she was found innocent, and having watched the trial, I agreed with it. But I think that it was a very fair trial and opened a lot of people's eyes that, in fact, women are treated equally at W&L. And I think that was something that people needed to see, parents, alumni, faculty and students needed to see that and all were involved in that trial. There was a faculty member that was involved in it, and her parents were there and present and accounted for, and students were there to support her, or tell what they knew. I think it was important.

I don't even remember if a female came up again on the Honor System or not, but you could see that it was working because there were cases where somebody was asked to leave the school campus, and knowing the history of the trial and what had happened, you know, it was fair. That's something that's really important, is that if you're going to have an Honor System it's got to be fair or else it's not going to work.

Warren: Day to day did you have an awareness of it? I mean, was it a constant presence in your life knowing about the Honor System, or was it just dramatic times like that that you were reminded of it?

Mitzlaff: Honestly, I think it was probably just dramatic times that I was aware of it, because it was what I had grown up with and it was what I knew, and just also how I was brought up with my parents. I mean, lying is not acceptable, absolutely not acceptable, and your honor is something that you will have forever, and if you tarnish it, chances are it's going to be tarnished forever. So it was something that my parents taught me how to respect at an early age. Then having had it in my high school and seeing it work there as well, it was an everyday thing. I wasn't that aware of it.

Warren: Let's talk about being the daughter of an alumnus. Were there a lot of you in that first class who had relatives who had gone to Washington and Lee?

Mitzlaff: Not knowing any numbers, if I were to guess, I would probably say 60 percent, maybe.

Warren: Really?

Mitzlaff: I think there were more than half.

Warren: Really?

Mitzlaff: I could be wrong and this is just guessing, but I had the feeling that there were quite a few of us. Then you would hear remarks every once in awhile like, well, the only reason why they got in is because their father went here. I thought, well, you know, that only takes you so far. I'm going to be the only one that keeps me here. So it doesn't matter to me how I got in or why I got in, I'm just glad I did and now I'm keeping myself here. I kind of like the fact that W&L does give consideration to legacy, I think it makes it special.

Warren: Tell me more about that.

Mitzlaff: Well, I think that when, let's say, a grandfather goes to W&L and has his personal experience at W&L, he can pass that on to his son and tell him about how

special W&L was. Then the son is then able to take in the respect for W&L that his father had and then pass that on to his son or daughter, now. So I think it should not become something that's automatic, and I don't think it will become something that's automatic, but I definitely think that it's important, especially now that I'm out of the school and can appreciate what endowment means. I do believe that when you have legacies, long family lines that go to W&L, you can rest assured that there will be hope for endowment there. I think that's important.

Now, if you had said that to me as a student at W&L, I don't know that I would have appreciated what the endowment is. But I definitely think that's important, and I think it's fine because Dad and I have a special bond now. I think Mom almost regrets that she didn't go to W&L. She probably feels like she did having kind of lived through it with me, and now that Dad's on the board and she travels there quite a bit with him, I think she has quite a respect for it. But I think the family lineage is important if it is respected. It should not, like I said, be automatic.

Warren: Was your father on the board when you were a student?

Mitzlaff: I think he got on the board in '89, and I graduated in '89, so I don't know. I think he got on the board —

Warren: I think that's right, too.

Mitzlaff: —early in '89. Maybe like a couple months before graduation. I kept thinking at the time, gosh, why didn't he do this sooner so they could come back and visit and I'd be here and you'd have more weekends than just family weekends and swim meets and stuff. But I think that's been fun for him. He's going to miss being off the board. He's only got two more meetings and then he's off.

Warren: Oh, really.

Mitzlaff: Yeah.

Warren: Well, maybe your mother will go on.

Mitzlaff: Scary.

Warren: I don't want to jump completely out, but you just mentioned your last couple of months. One thing that I learned about you is that you're one of the people who joined a sorority at the very end. First of all, I think that's just real interesting, to join a sorority for a very short period of time.

Mitzlaff: Three months.

Warren: The whole issue of sororities, I mean, that must have been a big topic of conversation. Tell me about that.

Mitzlaff: I think the girls needed something, and I think it's too bad it didn't happen sooner, but I think that a lot of girls were thinking, "Alumni Weekend's going to roll around and we don't have a place to go, we don't have a place to meet." I don't know what finally made it all come together, if it was just timing or what that made it all come together, but I think all the girls were excited about it, to have sororities on campus, something that they could bond to, pledge alliance to, and have a place to come back to on Alumni Weekend. I think all the guys were in favor of it, because this opened up new opportunities for them to have a sister sorority and parties together with sororities. So it was fun to watch it all develop.

I think it was interesting to watch the tide change. As my freshman year came around and the guys were pledging to fraternities, we were all standing back and we were on the outside looking in. Then by my senior year we were on the inside, and I think they were kind of on the outside looking in, watching it all happen and were excited for us.

It was funny, because I thought, "I just don't think I'm going to join the sorority. It's so late in the year." And I didn't fully know what they were all about and how much time that they would take. I thought, "Well, I'm just going to go to this first meeting that they're having just to hear what it's all about and to see who shows up and see what sororities are going to be represented." So I went to it thinking that I would

probably only stay a half an hour, and I ended up staying probably two hours, had a blast, met new girls on campus that I hadn't known yet, and stuck with it.

So then decided that I wanted to Rush Theta – I guess you'd say Rush Theta – and so everything worked out really well that I became a Theta. The other controversy was that the day that they were having initiation was on Derby Day, so from me, being from Kentucky, I thought, "Oh, no, what am I going to do? Go to the Kentucky Derby like I have every year before that, or I am going to stay here and go through initiation?" So they were very nice and let me work it out so that I could home for the Derby and then watch the Derby. Then probably about four o'clock in the morning, Sunday morning, jumped in the car and drove back to W&L, got there by 1:00 and was initiated with a couple of other girls that had conflicts that weekend. But it was fun. I'm glad I did it.

Now it's been fun because I keep in touch with some of the Thetas in Louisville that didn't go to W&L, but went to other colleges. So it's fun. It's kind of another little outlet for me now.

Warren: So when was it that sororities really became a serious issue? Was that not until your senior year?

Mitzlaff: I think there were probably mumblings about it my sophomore year, rumors about it my junior year, and then beginning of senior year, I think there was serious discussion. Now, I could be wrong. That was kind of how I saw it unfolding.

Warren: That's very nicely put.

Mitzlaff: It was fun. It was another way that – girls needed something to get involved in, and politics on W&L's campus was very tough to get involved in as a female, especially my freshmen year. When elections rolled around for class president and one of the girls ran for class president, I think everybody laughed at her until they met her. I think they thought, "Who is she? There is no way some chick is going to become class president already." To tell you the truth, I think at the time I was even thinking, "Whoa,

this might get a little bit much," you know. "We're new on campus, we don't want to step on any toes. Maybe we should see how the whole system flows and then kind of work into it." But she wasn't elected that year, but I think the following year she was maybe vice president. She was involved and very respected. I think that even all four years I think it was very tough for girls to get involved in any politics on campus, whether it was student government or class officers or what it was. So this sorority offered something that the girls could get involved in, and they did. It was fun. Everybody had a chance or an opportunity to take part in some sort of leadership, even if it was just small projects within the sorority.

I think everybody needs that, males and females. Everybody needs to be able to spread their wings and stand on their own two feet and kind of realize who they are and what they're all about. I love to see people reaching out for any kind of leadership position.

Warren: How about in things like Mock Convention or Fancy Dress? Were girls given any leadership positions there?

Mitzlaff: Well, they were involved, very much so. They were very much involved with the decorations and the planning and what have you with that. Well, with "that," when I say "that," I'm referring first to Fancy Dress, but I believe also Mock Convention, that they were quite involved on committees and decorating the floats. I personally wasn't involved with it, so I don't know what all goes into it.

Warren: Did you go to Mock Convention, were you involved at all?

Mitzlaff: I went to it, that's about as involved as I was.

Warren: Were you a delegate?

Mitzlaff: No. Just a spectator.

Warren: You were there at a real interesting time. I've got to ask you, were you at Zollman's when Bill Clinton played the saxophone?

Mitzlaff: I was not.

Warren: A real opportunity missed, then.

Mitzlaff: I was not. I was not. But getting back to Fancy Dress, as you probably know, they have a theme poster every year and theme bumper stickers. So I guess, I can't remember if it was my sophomore year, I'm pretty sure it was my sophomore year, a bumper sticker came out that said, "There's nothing I'd rather see less than a W&L woman at Fancy Dress," or a coed or a W&L woman at Fancy Dress. So every once in a while you'd still see the bumper stickers and the shirts that kind of were down on women, and you had to say, "Tough luck, Bud. You know, sorry. We're here to stay."

I hope, and I personally look back and think, that the W&L women made a positive impact on the campus, even though it took a while for it to be realized maybe, a year or two at least. But I think it did make a positive impact and that applications are up, SAT scores are up. Now, I can't say that's all because of the women, but I think probably the whole applicant group, their SAT scores are up, and helps to make for a more attractive enrollment, I think.

Warren: Yes, I think so, too. Did you go to Fancy Dress?

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: Tell me about Fancy Dress. Fancy Dress is so uniquely Washington and Lee. I always ask everybody, tell me about Fancy Dress.

Mitzlaff: It was great. It was great. It was probably quite different than when my father went there. When he went there, it really was Fancy Dress. I mean, everybody got their hoop skirts and the long gloves and some probably wore hats and the gentlemen were in fancy-type garb, I guess you would say, something other than just a plain old tux. But when I was there, everybody was in tux and nice dresses, didn't see any hoop skirts, but it was fun.

It was definitely a great time that always, to me, signaled the beginning of spring and spring term, which was a fun change of pace. You got to spend more hours out of the classroom than you did in, and more hours out of the library, as well. So you kind of

got to sow your oats a little bit in spring term. Fancy Dress was fun. It was fun to watch the whole campus come together and pool their energies for making it all happen.

Warren: I'm going to flip the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: Was getting a date for Fancy Dress an issue?

Mitzlaff: Well, I think for some people it was. I think if you were dating somebody at the time, then it wasn't an issue. But it was interesting, as Fancy Dress neared, girls from other schools would pile into W&L. I guess Fancy Dress is around March something, March 10th, maybe, and mid-February on, all the fraternity houses would be packed, more so than any other time, as all the girls from neighboring schools were piling in and looking for dates and very hopeful.

I can't say that a W&L girl would have preference among the men, but I think that probably the majority of females at Fancy Dress were W&L females. You know, times change. Nowadays women ask men out, too, so I don't know how much that happened. But I would say most of the W&L girls were there, present and accounted for. How tough it was, I don't know. I don't know.

Warren: So it wasn't the big discussion in the dorms or among the women's housing about getting dates?

Mitzlaff: About hoping to get a date?

Warren: I've heard there was some resistance among Washington and Lee men to date Washington and Lee women. Did you experience that?

Mitzlaff: Well, I think I did more so my freshmen year than any other year. But it was also interesting, as the W&L women started branching out a little bit and meeting the guys from VMI and meeting the guys from Hampden-Sydney, then tides kind of turned a little bit. All of a sudden the guys started realizing, "Hey, wait a minute." At first they thought, "We don't want to date them, but we certainly don't want them to date VMIs

or Hampden-Sydney guys either." So it was kind of interesting. Especially I guess I'm referring to the swim team, too.

There was one weekend that I went down to Homecoming at Hampden-Sydney and, oh, my gosh, they wouldn't let up about that. I can't believe, that was a disgrace to them. They couldn't believe I was going down to Hampden-Sydney for Homecoming. So it was kind of funny. That's when I was realizing, well, you know, they don't want any of us to date any of them, W&L guys, but yet they didn't want us to date anyone else either. Kind of a little brotherly love, maybe. [Laughter]

Warren: That's what it sounds like.

Mitzlaff: Little bit.

Warren: That's what it sounds like. Well, I guess one thing we ought to bring up here is, you do go to school for academics, right? We ought to talk a little bit about academics. Were there any particular faculty members who made a big difference for you?

Mitzlaff: Well, I think there were, definitely. My freshmen year, I kind of felt like I was floundering a little bit, trying to find my way. Before I got to W&L, we have a big Louisville picnic with guys that are currently going to W&L, as well as alumni and all incoming freshmen. So I had met some of the people that were going to be there at W&L, some upperclassman, and they said, "Now, these are the classes that you want to take, and stay away from this professor," or, "Stay away from this class." So they kind of helped me out a little bit, and I think I just got in over my head. The classes were tougher than I thought, and I think freshmen classes at W&L are really tough. They're kind of weeder courses. I really didn't know which direction I wanted to go.

At one point in time I was thinking pre-med, and then another point in time I thought "Well, no, not pre-med, but where, I don't know." So my first semester my grades were really struggling. So somebody had told me about Professor Novak, who was in the sociology department, and he taught sociology and anthropology. I wasn't

that thrilled with my advisor that I had at the time, so I started talking to Professor Novak and switched over to him, to have him as my advisor. So he was great at helping me pick my brain to find out exactly what my interests were, and really my interest had become psychology. I loved psychology, the anatomy physiology of it, as well as the social interpersonal study of it. So he kind of helped me realize that. I felt like when I finally got my act together and figured out where I wanted to go with it, that my grades all came together, and I think from sophomore year and thereafter I was Dean's List. Thank goodness, because my parents were probably chewing their fingernails off.

But Professor Novak was fantastic, because he was very approachable, always there, always had an ear for you and a shoulder to cry on if need be. But he really helped me figure out what direction I wanted to go into. I majored in psychology and minored in sociology. Then it was kind of interesting, because probably toward the end of my junior year I realized I loved studying psychology, but I don't know what I want to do with it, I don't think I want to become a psychologist, where do I want to go.

So about that time my dad was going through cardiac rehab, because he had had bypass surgery, and so when I came home, I guess it was summer between junior and senior year, I would go to cardiac rehab with him and I would talk to the nurses and the exercise physiologist there. They finally were the ones that said psychology is an excellent degree to have, get your degree and stay on the same track and then you can add to it. So that's when I came home, after graduating from W&L, and knew I wanted to go into physical therapy. So I think things work out in mysterious ways, but I think having had that psychology degree helped me to get into physical therapy school and I use it all the time.

Warren: I bet you do.

Mitzlaff: I use it all the time. Yeah. I hope that W&L will get a physical therapy program maybe some day. I don't know.

Warren: I'll volunteer, they can practice on me. They could start with me. That would be great.

Anybody else, any other teachers that meant a lot?

Mitzlaff: Well, Dr. Elms, Elms in the psychology department, I think he was a great role model for me because he, I guess, he was sort of like an advisor to me, as well. When I decided that psychology was going to be my major, he's the one that I kind of transitioned to from Professor Novak to Dr. Elms. But he was kind of funny, he was somebody that was very strict and stern on the outside, but had a real soft heart, and once you got to his heart, he would do anything for you. I wouldn't say that we had an extra specially close relationship, but he was always someone that I respected and admired. I think he was a great role model for me.

Then I guess you'd also have to say my swim coach, as many hours as we spent together.

Warren: Tell me about him. You haven't named him.

Mitzlaff: Coach Remillard. Coach Remillard was trying to figure women out, I think, and I hope that I was able to help him figure them out, as far as women athletes. I think that we shared an admiration for each other, because I think he saw that it was tough and not that the women — there were only three girls in the team freshmen year. I don't think any of the women ever went crying to him saying, "You just won't believe what the guys have done." But we tried to hold our own and he would let us hold our own and then at the same time would kind of say, "Look, guys, back off. You all aren't the studs that you think you are either." It was fun.

We had a close relationship, because I felt like at times I was kind of the mediator or go-between between the coach and the swim team. I was team captain all four years there and I think that sometimes he wouldn't know exactly how to approach the women, so he would pull me aside and say, "Okay, look, this is what we need to do and this is how we want to approach this topic. Can you help me out here?" I think there

was kind of that kind of a relationship. At times the girls on the swim team would have a beef to pick and they would come and say, "Look, we're upset about this," or frustrated about this, or, "We see a conflict coming. What do we do about it?" I felt that I could go and talk to him about it and say, "We've got to work something out here," or, "This isn't going to work as it is right now, but how can we help it and change it to make it so it's going to work?"

Warren: What kinds of things?

Mitzlaff: I see your face kind of turning. The drinking rule became a big stress point. My freshmen year we didn't have a drinking rule, and it's sad that you would even need one, really. But sophomore year we had a drinking rule and it was on the Honor System that you're not to drink within twenty-four hours of a workout or a swim meet. We felt that that was kind of using the Honor System in a way it wasn't meant to be used and that we were in college now and that we need to learn to drink responsibly. If we have our priorities in line, we're not going to go out and get rambunctious the night before a swim meet.

Now, the conflict came when some of the people were involved in activities, predominantly fraternity activities, with Rush and pledging, sometimes they would have to get involved in a Rush party or whatever the night before a swim meet, and as pledges they would probably use alcohol to excess, like if they'd have been thinking straight and prioritizing the swim meet, then they wouldn't have. So that became an issue.

Then one of our swimmers one year was in a really bad car accident. There had been a party at Sigma Aqua and he had left the party and he was in a really bad accident. I think that was one of the crowning blows that coach finally said, "Look, this is silly. We don't want to lose any of our swimmers because of alcohol. We don't want to lose any of our swim meets because of alcohol," and I think he just wanted to tighten

the grip on us and say, "Look, it's not that important. You'll have your play time afterwards."

But as I look back on college, college is as much a learning experience in the classroom as it is out of the classroom, and W&L had always had a reputation of studying and working hard, as well as playing hard. I think that coach finally just said, "Enough of that, we're just going to take that factor out of the game." So there was some resentment, because as we would be required to stay on campus through most of Thanksgiving break, we would be exhausted from having two workouts a day, and we had all planned to a meeting at Sigma Aqua and making a big batch of spaghetti and would love to have a beer and watch a football game, and because we had a workout the next day we couldn't do that. So that would get a little stressful sometimes. I guess you've got to have something to stress over or else things would be too rosy, I guess.

But sometimes things like that would crop up and it would be stressful, and we would call coach and we'd say, "Look, we're all here together, we're exhausted, we're tired, we're not going to get rambunctious, but we would like to have a beer," and sometimes he would bend his rules and say, "Keep everybody responsible and I'll see you in the morning," something like that. But I think that was probably one of the main sources of controversy. Probably that.

If I can think of anything else it, might have been the fact that two workouts a day were optional on the swim team and the first workout was more on land than it was in the pool. So it was up to you if you were going to show up at morning workout, which would be held probably like, I'm trying to remember, 5:30, something like that, and you'd show up in the weight room. I think the girls started slacking off a little bit. A lot of the girls on the swim team had never swam before and they didn't care about bulking up with free weights or anything like that. But they would show up in the afternoon and were very eager and energetic to contribute in the pool, and I think sometimes the guys were kind of like, "Look, we're here. We don't want to be here, but

we're here and we think they should be here, too." So I think that was kind of an issue that just finally worked itself out through some conversations.

Warren: Now, help me to understand. Was there one swim team or two teams?

Mitzlaff: There was one when I was there.

Warren: You were captain?

Mitzlaff: Well, I was captain of the women's swim team, I guess you could say. Really it was one swim team. I mean, we all practiced together, we all trained as a team and most of our swim meets were coed swim meets.

Warren: Really.

Mitzlaff: Now, I say it like that because now it has changed. I think there's a women's coach and a men's coach and women's captains and men's captains and different swim meets sometimes. So it was really a sense of one team, but two captains, a male captain and a female captain, is kind of how it developed. So I guess I was technically captain of the women's team.

Warren: That was going to be very impressive as a freshmen female you were captain of the senior men.

Mitzlaff: No. No, no, no. Then they really wouldn't have talked to me.

Warren: Wow, that's intriguing. Do you know whether that was true in other sports, were all teams coed at first?

Mitzlaff: One of the only women's teams that were offered my freshmen year were soccer, I think, volleyball, swimming, and I believe field hockey didn't come until my sophomore year. Tennis did come my freshmen year as well. But I feel sure that those teams trained separately, on a separate field from the men. So I think that swimming was unique in that it was men and women training at the same time in the same pool and in some cases in the same lane and would even have meets together.

Warren: How did the other schools respond having women show up on the W&L team? Was that a surprise?

Mitzlaff: Well, I think that some of them probably thought, oh, it'll be a cakewalk. I think they just – you know, I probably just haven't thought about it from their perspective and what they thought about it. I don't know.

Warren: You swam competitively, but Washington and Lee has a big Phys Ed program, too. Did you do other things besides swimming?

Mitzlaff: I think, at least with me, when you swim for two years, or two seasons, you can get exempt from two physical education requirements. So even though I swam all four years, I could only get exempt from two credits. So I think I did racquetball one year and horseback riding another year, and I can't even remember what I did the third year.

But I kind of felt at the time that if you were going to dedicate yourself to a sport, especially four years, that you should get exempt from it, because the last thing you want to do is go from working out with the swim team in the morning to racquetball and then to biology and then to English, through all your classes, and then back to the pool again. I felt like it was a little bit much. But I would get involved as required.

Warren: Those were coed –

Mitzlaff: Coed classes?

Warren: – classes, right?

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: Were they competitive at all? I guess horseback riding wouldn't be too competitive.

Mitzlaff: Horseback riding wasn't competitive. Now, racquetball, I felt like it was almost a joke. I think there was only maybe two girls in my racquetball class and the guys would absolutely kill us. I think the coach knew that, so he would try to put the two girls together a lot. Maybe once or twice did I even play with one of the guys, but they would, they would absolutely demolish us. They were much stronger and faster,

and I didn't know anything about racquetball, really, when I started doing it in P.E., so they had the advantage, definitely.

Warren: Well said. Well, let's get back to academics. Outside of your major, were there any classes that really stood out for you?

Mitzlaff: Well, I thought it was kind of interesting one year, I think this was my junior year, in the sociology department they offered a class called "Male and Female Relations," and that was interesting. We got into some heated discussions and —

Warren: Tell me more about that.

Mitzlaff: Well, it was kind of interesting, because you would talk about should females be given the same opportunities as males, regardless of their qualifications, regardless of their age or financial background, should they be given equal opportunity, which quickly lead to the discussion of equal pay for the same job. It was interesting. Some of the upperclassmen definitely said that the women shouldn't be paid the same pay for doing the same job as a man. I mean, the conversation probably wouldn't last more than a minute these days, but that was kind of interesting, still hearing that kind of talk.

You know, should men stay home with the baby when the mother brings home the baby? Should men have time off, hospital leave? Should the man stay home with the child and raise the child when the mother has a job that might pay more? Discussions like that that would come up. That was kind of an interesting class. I remember that one stands out.

Now, I'd have to say that one of the rumors, I'm just going to say it's a rumor or was a rumor, was that the professors in the commerce school were not thrilled about coeducation and were not thrilled about women in the class. Some girls even told that the professors had made a comment of dislike of having a female in their class and that they didn't vote for coeducation themselves and the resentment was felt there. So a lot of times you would hear somebody, "Well, I'm just not even going to bother taking any classes in the C School."

So that wasn't really where I wanted to go with my academics, so it didn't require that I had to pass through those halls very often. I think I took a couple classes, econ classes and what have you there, but as I look back on it, my econ professor was very open to females. But that was something that kind of made you sad a little bit when you arrive to campus, and you expect that there's going to be some resentment from the students, but to see or hear about some resentment from the faculty is kind of disheartening.

Warren: Was it only in the commerce school that you were aware of that?

Mitzlaff: Well, I'm trying to remember, there might have even been some in the history building, as well. I don't know if there were some common professors that taught some history classes and some commerce classes or not, so I just hate to even be quoted at that. But it was much more known that the commerce school was really where women didn't belong.

Warren: That's really interesting. Now, there were female C-School majors.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: So they had a tougher row to hoe than most.

Mitzlaff: Yeah. I think it was probably tough on them. They probably felt like salmon swimming upstream. [Laughter] I think it was kind of tough. But I don't know, I imagine that they, too, probably felt like they had to prove themselves at first, and once they did, then they probably got some respect that they deserved.

Warren: Yeah, I'll bet, if that's the attitude. Okay. So anything more about your school years, anything you'd like to talk about, anything I haven't asked you?

Mitzlaff: I think that while I look back on it and think if I could do anything differently, would I? I think that if I could do anything differently, I would like to have been involved in more. I would have liked to have been involved in the Mock Convention more. I would have liked to have been maybe not so tight. I can't say not so tight, but I wish that I had branched out a little bit more and spread my wings outside

of the Sigma Aqua arena, really. I don't know about involvement in the school politics or anything, I don't think that really interests me. But you look back and you think there's only so much you can do in four years, I almost wish it had been eight.

It's kind of fun now because I'm an alumni admissions organizer in Louisville, and so I go to some of the college fairs and represent W&L, and it's fun. I went this past Tuesday and they said, "Well, what were you involved in on campus, and what sports are good there, and are fraternities big there?" I look back on it and I think, gosh, W&L had a little bit of everything. I mean, you could get involved in so many things, so many opportunities there. Watching all these young juniors and seniors in high school come up and ask so many questions about it, I think, I'm so proud to stand here and tell them about W&L. I came home the other day wishing that I was where they were, that I could go back and do it all over again.

Some of them even knew, they even said, "Well, you must have been in one of the first classes of girls," and I thought, "Wow, what does that mean? Does that mean I'm old? What are you trying to say?" So some of them want to ask about that and are girls accepted now and are they well integrated into the class system there now.

It's fun. I feel like I've kind of come full circle now, or at least maybe halfway. Who knows what lies ahead. I think having looked back and thought I wish I had become more involved, I had to stop and tell myself, it's not too late, I can still get involved. That's kind of when I decided I want to help out from Louisville and get involved and maybe help out to get some energetic, bright-eyed freshmen from Louisville on campus.

Warren: Well, you keep staying one step ahead of me, because my question was, what has W&L meant to you out of school? Do you get together in chapter meetings with your fellow alums?

Mitzlaff: We get together. I can't say I have been to a chapter meeting, I've been to a chapter organization, more like parties.

Warren: Well, that's what I understand they are.

Mitzlaff: Yeah. Yeah. To get together and welcome the incoming freshmen the summer before they go in. Say, like when somebody from W&L, whether they're in admissions or a dean, comes to Louisville for whatever reason, whether it's fund-raising or what have you, we get together, cocktail party-type thing.

I tell you what was fun, also, in physical therapy school, you have to do an internship. Well, you have to do several internships. I did all of mine down in Nashville, Tennessee. It was amazing seeing the W&L network come into action down there. I think I had called one person, Elizabeth Cummins, and she said, "This is great. I'm going to get everybody together and we're all going to go out to dinner," and she just—I mean, it was fantastic. We got together with probably four other W&L girls and it was just fun, because they were girls that I didn't really spend a whole lot of time with on campus, maybe lived one hall above them or lived in the dorm next door to them or what have you. But it was fun.

Then I went to the alumni meeting down in Nashville for incoming freshmen, and that was a good time. It was just fun knowing that no matter where you go, you will probably have some kind of a connection with W&L, small as the school that it is, you will probably still have some kind of connection. I mean, the W&L network definitely reaches out to you lots.

Warren: It's pretty impressive. I'm sure there are other schools who figured this out, but Washington and Lee has it to an art.

Mitzlaff: Tight network. Yeah, they do. They do. Which I think that's neat, you can't beat it. You really can't. I think in a large school you can't really have that. All my friends that have gone to larger schools, I never hear them talking about, "I got together with a bunch of IU grads last night," or wherever else they went to, Duke or UNC or Princeton or wherever. You just don't hear about that very often.

Warren: I presume at these gatherings there are people of all different ages.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: Do you find that everybody has a lot in common because you all went to the same school?

Mitzlaff: I think so. I think so. We have a lot in common in that I would say it's almost like a common thread, but everybody is different in their own unique way and gets involved in different professions and what have you, so that when we all get together they almost complement each other as far as – you know, you go to a W&L function and it's almost like everybody picks up right where they left off. You never get the feeling like, "Oh, gosh, I was meaning to call you. I'm so sorry I haven't been in touch in so long." It's not really any of that, it's just like, "Great to see you. So glad you're here. How's everything going with you?" That's what's really neat about W&L, is that everybody picks right up where you left off. I think that's what friendship is all about, no matter what age, no matter what age.

But it was interesting my first year out of W&L going to one of those alumni meetings, because there were some elderly men there, and I know that they weren't thrilled about W&L going coed. I think some of them had even made a comment to my dad that, something to the effect that, "We're proud of Elizabeth and her accomplishments and we really admire her." Now, they didn't say that they changed their mind, but they were kind of saying that, you know, I think they were recognizing the fact that coeducation at W&L is not all bad, that if they had to come out and say, I guess they can now come out and say that they're proud of the graduates, the female graduates that have come through. At least I hope.

Warren: That's quite an accomplishment. So now you have a little different perspective probably from most people, having your father on the board.

Mitzlaff: Uh-huh.

Warren: What angle does that bring? What does that bring to the mix?

Mitzlaff: It's fun because I feel like Dad has the experience and the wisdom, but at the same time I have the experience and the wisdom from a slightly different angle, as you said, and a newer angle, too. I mean, there have been times where something has come up, an issue has come up, and Dad has called me and said, "What do you think about this? What, as you remember, is going on on campus, and what would the students say to this?"

I remember one of the issues that came up was date rape, and that was probably an issue that people didn't think about a whole lot before women got there. Now that women are on campus, they've got to think about date rape. I think that there was a serious case of date rape that came up, and Dad asked my input on it, and I just remember saying, "Dad, you've got to be careful with this one because it's going to set precedent and you need to set an example, a fair example, and a just example." But I think that was an issue that they didn't know exactly how to reprimand, so to speak.

Other than that, there have been the issues of drinking on campus and drinking in the fraternities and drugs on campus. Of course, drinking was on campus when Dad was there, but drugs, you know, that's just kind of foreign to him. So he would say, "What did you know about all this going on? Kind of enlighten me." So it's been fun that I have been able to shed a little light on it for him and to share ideas with him and to hear what's still going on on campus from the inside.

Warren: It must be fun to educate your old man, too.

Mitzlaff: Yeah. It's not fun when you're talking about drugs and stuff, because it happens and it's on every college campus, and date rape is on every college campus. But some of the other things are much more fun to talk about with anyone, though. I'll put it this way, it's flattering that Dad would ask my opinion and how it was when I was there. I feel ancient saying it like that, because it was so long ago.

Warren: Well, I think he's lucky to have you —

Mitzlaff: Well, I feel the same about him.

Warren: — to tap into.

Well, is there anything more you'd like to say? I think this has been a wonderful interview.

Mitzlaff: Well, thank you. Anything else? I don't know. Except that I hope my children go there. It's going to be a tough call, because my husband was University of Richmond, which is just in Richmond, Virginia, right down the road from us. It's funny when we compare stories, because he was very good friends with a guy at W&L that I knew very well, too. So he would come to W&L, he even applied to W&L, and I believe he was accepted, but was accepted early at Richmond, so he committed early. It's fun to compare stories, because University of Richmond and W&L are similar in many ways, in many ways.

I think when it comes time for our children to decide where to go, it's going to be—I'd be proud for them to go either way, but I sure would be pulling for W&L. [Laughter] I'll probably have to do what my dad did and leave the room singing the alma mater.

Warren: You'll be singing *The Swing*.

Mitzlaff: Get my W&L sweater out and start wearing it more.

Warren: You could do *The Swing* as a lullaby as you're rocking them to sleep, and you could just get it subliminally from the start.

Mitzlaff: That's right.

Warren: Well, thank you, Elizabeth.

Mitzlaff: Well, thank you.

Warren: This has been really good.

Mitzlaff: Thank you. It's been fun.

Warren: Worth the trip.

Mitzlaff: Well, good. Good.

[End of interview]

